

## **How Do Spiritual Gifts Operate?**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-58

As a preface to our study tonight, I want to just mention to you that we are going through this study on the Charismatic movement, its contemporary form, and I'm unable in this particular study to cover every relevant passage of Scripture. And so, I would just encourage you that you will find a series of tapes on all of the relevant passages that I've already preached on in years past out of the book of Acts, out of 1 Corinthians which are the primary ones. You will also find in the bookstore and the tape room a study guide of about 300 pages on the issue of spiritual gifts. In some great detail, I cover that. Also, I have written a book on tongues and speaking in tongues and all that is involved in that, and then we have the commentary on 1 Corinthians which is a verse by verse discussion of those passages and particularly focusing on chapters 12-14, the deal with spiritual gifts. So, there are some supplemental materials that would be very helpful for you in filling out your understanding of the subject. What I'm endeavoring to do in this series is not go through every single passage in great detail, but to take a kind of overall look at the contemporary Charismatic movement and compare it with what we know to be true out of the Word of God. We're looking at it more from the doctrinal side than we are from the expositional side.

Now, I want you to turn in your Bible tonight to a passage of Scripture that I think such a good context for what I want to say. Matthew 7, and I want to begin reading in verse 15 and just read down a little ways, and I think you'll catch the flow of what we find here. Jesus here is bringing the Sermon on the Mount to its conclusion, and so doing, this is what He says beginning in Matthew 7:15, "Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." By the way, sheep's clothing is wool and it was the garment of a prophet. The prophet wore wool and so they're coming not as false sheep, but as false shepherds. "You will know them by their fruits," verse 16. "Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn't bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire, so then you will know them by their fruits." What Jesus is saying is don't listen just to what they say. Look at the character of their life, the product. And then He says in verse 21, "Not everyone," and still in the context of false teachers, "who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my father who is in Heaven, many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name and in Your Name cast out demons, and in Your Name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

An amazing passage warning us about false teachers. These particular false teachers appear to say the right thing. They speak about the Lord. "Lord, Lord," they say. They even seem to do the right things. They prophesy or preach in the name of the Lord. In the name of the Lord, they cast out demons. In the name of the Lord they perform many miracles, but they don't know the Lord and the Lord does not know them. They're false, and we are to be aware of that reality.

So, as we come to any examination of the Charismatic movement that takes us into looking at the phenomena of the movement, we have to be very aware of the fact that Jesus warned us already that even though they speak in the Lord's Name and even though they cast out demons in the Lord's Name and even though they do miracles they claim to do those in the Lord's Name. They may be false, they may say all the right things, but you have to look at the fruit of their life, you have to compare them with the divine standard of good fruit.

This examination and this test must be held up in the issues of spiritual gifts. As we look at these people who say they are prophesying in Jesus' Name and casting out demons and doing miracles, we want to be sure of two things. One, that their life backs it up, and two, that what they do is consistent with the Word of God.

So, I want to help you evaluate that if I can tonight. And I want to refer to some of the well known of these Charismatic leaders today because they're so very public and they represent the kind of thing that's going on that has to be tested. In Orlando there is a preacher in the Orlando Christian Center named Benny Hinn. Benny Hinn slays people in the Spirit. When Hinn feels the anointing come upon his hand, he touches his followers on the forehead or simply waves an arm at them and they fall down in a faint, if you've ever seen him on television, you've witnessed that. He has a nationally aired television broadcast in which people are slain in the Spirit nearly every week. In fact, the other night I was watching him and he slew everybody in the entire auditorium, one section at a time. He waved his hand over this section and they all fell down. Then he waved his hand over this section and they all fell down, and he waved his hand over that section and they all fell down, and then he waved his hand over the balcony and they all fell down. And the question comes to mind, of course, is Benny Hinn's ability a unique spiritual gift? Is this God? Is God knocking all these people down? Or is he simply using the techniques of mesmerism and the power of suggestion? In fact, isn't it fair to say that he may even be using demonic power? Surely, in the light of the warnings of Scripture Matthew 24:24, Mark 13:22, 2 Thessalonians 2:7-9, demon inspired people are going to do lying wonders. So, that possibility must not be ruled out. One thing is certain, Benny Hinn or anyone else who knocks people over is doing something that is never described, never discussed in the Bible. Nothing like is listed in any list of spiritual gifts and no apostle and no early church leader ever did anything like that. A Charismatic practice of slaying people in the Spirit yet has become so commonplace that many Charismatic may be surprised to learn that Scripture is utterly silent about such a gift. There's no record that anybody ever did that. The only time anybody ever fell over was when Jesus spoke in the

garden to the soldiers that came to arrest Him. Yet the practice typifies the Charismatic movement's obsession with some kind of strange and bizarre phenomena. There is no indication that in the early church anybody had the power to knock people into some kind of Spirit filled catalepsy. But there is a preoccupation today with a paranormal, same fascination, I think, that leads people to reading abberitiously as they do, the books of Stephen King and others like him.

From the earliest days of Pentecostalism, the quest for more unusual and more spectacular manifestations of spiritual gifts has in effect, sabotaged rational thinking, so that you have people who are turning away from what is reasonable and rational. And as I've noted throughout the series, reports of inexplicable things, even unbelievable things, mystical phenomena are just rampant in the Charismatic and Pentecostal tradition, and it doesn't matter what it is, no tale seems too bizarre, too fantastic, too far out to get a following.

Peter Masters and John Whitcomb have written a book called *A Charismatic Phenomena* and in it there's a quote that might be worth you listening to. "There is no doubt the Charismatic teaching results in a considerable lowering of the credulity threshold of all its adherents. The practice of tongues, the relegation of the understanding to a minor place, the diet of miracles and the extreme subjectivity of Charismatic thinking all combine to product this effect quickly and inevitably. Once people have been mentally conditioned by a Charismatic environment, there're able to take seriously such amazing ideas as Oral claimed, 'You have seen a vision of Jesus 900 feet tall.' Charismatic practices loosen up the mind in such an unhealthy way that people will believe almost anything." You see, once you disconnect people from rational thinking, they're fair game. In fact, many appear to believe that God's power can be displayed only in ways that are irrational, unearthly, eerie and somewhat preposterous.

Some Charismatic disdain logic, as we have noted, disdain reason, disdain common sense in an eagerness to embrace these kinds of things. Worse, the entire Charismatic movement has absorbed the erroneous notion that whatever is truly spiritual, whatever is truly of the Spirit must somehow transcend or bypass a person's rational senses. They would for the most part want us to believe that anything that is rational, sensible, reasonable is not supernatural.

Spiritual gifts supposedly operate by somehow suspending the faculties of human reason, and you would think that the strongest evidence of the Holy Spirit's working is when everybody goes into a stupor, and then you're really seeing the power. When everybody falls over in some kind of stupor, you're really seeing God at work. And so, the lore of the Charismatic movement is filled with outrageous accounts of behavior that resembles trances, seizures, subliminal messaging, hypnosis, suspended animation, frenzy, hysteria and even dementia. And these are often cited as evidences of the power of God. Churches where people think reasonably and rationally, sensibly, discern with their minds the things of God do not know, they say, the power of God.

Kenneth Hagan, another very popular leader in the movement, for example, claims that one night while he was preaching, a cloud of glory enveloped him and he lost track of where he was and what he was saying. "I didn't know one word I said for 15 minutes. I had been in the glory cloud. When I found myself walking around the altar, I got so embarrassed, my face got red and I ran back on the platform, got behind the pulpit and said, 'Amen, let's pray,' and gave the invitation. Sometimes when I'm preaching," Hagan writes, "the Spirit of God comes on me, arrests my attention and I can't say a word in English."

He goes on to tell an incident when he was ministering with Fred Price who's down here in the Crenshaw area, and he said he was struck with what he believes was an anointing during the church service. Hagan said he was unable to communicate in English for hours. Now the point is if this is supposed to evidence the real power of God when you are completely out of touch with reality. And similar vein, Hagan relates this story, and I'm quoting from him, from his writing. "Sister Maria Woodworth Etter was an Evangelist during the early days of the Pentecostal movement in this country. I read the newspaper account concerning what happened in St. Louis sometime before 1920. She was in her 70's preaching in a tent which was full when right in the middle of her sermon with her hand uplifted to illustrate a point, and her mouth opened, the power of God came upon her. She froze in that position and stood like a statue for three days and three nights. Think about that. All her body had to be under the control of the Spirit of God. She had no bodily functions for three days and nights. She stood there. According to the newspaper account, it was estimated that more than 150,000 people came by to see her in the three day period. The third night, the Spirit of God released her. She thought it was the same night and the same sermon and she went on preaching at the same place in her sermon."

It completely escapes me why anyone would assume that such behavior manifests God's power. Nothing remotely like it can be found in Scripture except Lot's wife. Still, whatever sermon she was preaching, she never completed. Still, Hagan tries to eclipse that tale with even more bizarre ones. He says, and I quote, "One night a 16 year old girl was filled with the Spirit, spoke with other tongues, went into a spirit of intercession and then with her hands raised, stood in one spot for eight hours and 40 minutes. She never batted an eye, never shifted her weight from foot to foot. It was January and she was standing away from the stove. Her mother, concerned about her getting cold, asked if it would be alright to move her nearer to the stove which was in the center of the room. 'I don't know,' I said, 'I never seen anything like it.' The pastor who weighed 250 pounds said, 'Brother Hagan, you get under one of her elbows and I'll get under the other and we'll scoot her closer to the heat.' But she couldn't be moved. It was as if she was nailed to the floor.

On another night when we gave the altar call, I sensed the power of God was upon one of the women. She began exhorting people to be saved. I said, 'Sister, go ahead and obey God.' With her eyes closed, she stepped upon the wide altar and began walking from one end to the other exhorting

sinner to be saved. She would walk right up to end of the altar and you would think she was going to step off, but each time she would turn. Folks started coming to the altar. Her eyes were shut, but every time one would come, her spirit would know it and she'd dance a little jig for joy. Then she would go right back to exhorting. When the 20<sup>th</sup> person had come, every single sinner was saved that night, God as my witness, my wife as my witness and each person in that building as my witness, she began to dance right off the end of the altar. She stood in midair dancing. Her feet were not touching the floor. Everyone saw it. I could have reached out and touched her. Then she turned and danced back onto the altar, down the altar to the other end, stopped, opened her eyes and stepped off." Frankly, that seems like a scene from a bad horror movie more than a true miracle. Levitation, altered states, feet nailed to the floor? That is the apparatus of the occult, not genuine spiritual gifts. You say, "Well, you've chosen some isolated and atypical examples." Not so, not so, and it's not just sort of provincial and old fashioned Charismatic who report such spectacles. Virtually every major segment of the Charismatic movement features stories like those.

Even the newest, the Third Wave movement, which we discussed some last Sunday night, despite strong ties to the academic community, exhibits a definite bias towards signs and wonders in which human intellect is disengaged. Ferrell Wimber describes the watershed experience that launched her husband's church into power evangelism, her husband being John Wimber. It was Sunday evening, Mother's Day, 1981, and a young man whom John had invited to preach, gave his testimony. At the end of his message, the guest speaker invited all those under the age of 25 to come forward. Now I quote, "None of us had a clue as to what was gonna happen next. When we got to the front, the speaker said, 'For years now, the Holy Spirit has been grieved by the church, but He's getting over it. Come, Holy Spirit,' and He came. Most of these young people had grown up around our home and we knew them well. We had four children between the ages of 18 and 24. One fellow, Tim, started bouncing, his arms flung out and he fell over, but one of his hands accidentally hit a mic stand and he took it down with him. He was tangled up in the cord with the mic next to his mouth. Then he began speaking in tongues so the sound went throughout the gymnasium. We had never considered ourselves Charismatic and certainly had never placed any emphasis on the gift of tongues. We'd seen a few people tremble and fall over before and we had seen many healings, but this was different. The majority of the young people were shaking and falling over. At one point, it looked like a battle field, bodies everywhere, people weeping, wailing, speaking in tongues, much shouting and loud behavior, and there was Tim in the middle of it all, babbling into the microphone." Can you tell me that that kind of chaos is to be accepted as proof that God is at work?

Even John Wimber at first seemed uncertain. Quote, "He spent all night reading Scripture and historical accounts of revival," Mrs. Wimber reports. "He was afraid of doing anything that wasn't explicitly outlined in the Bible." That's a healthy fear. But apparently, that all night study didn't yield him any conclusive answers, and so Mrs. Wimber goes on, quote, "By 5 a.m. John was desperate. He cried out to God, 'Lord, if this is You, please tell me.' A moment later, the phone rang and a pastor friend of ours from Denver, Colorado was on the line. 'John,' he said, 'I'm sorry I'm calling so

early, but I have really something strange to tell you. I don't know what it means, but God wants me to say, 'It's me, John.'" That was all John needed. He didn't have to understand the trembling or why everything happened as it did. All he needed to know was the Holy Spirit did it." And how did he know the Holy Spirit did it? He got a phone call from Denver. That's how he knew.

If John Wimber had continued reading Scripture, he might have come to 1 Corinthians 12:13-14, and he might have seen the apostle Paul reprove the Corinthian church for just such a scene. In verses 23 and of 1 Corinthians 14, it says, "If therefore, the whole church should assemble together and all speak in tongues and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say you are mad? But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner." And of course, you don't determine God's will by a phone call from anywhere. God's Word is the only reliable test of such things and it seems clear that an honest reading of Scripture would have given the plain answer. How can you take counsel from an unexpected telephone call? But that's the mystical again. It must be God because it seems so extraordinary. I guess John Wimber decided he didn't need to make sense of what was happening in the church. He didn't need to reconcile it with Scripture. He didn't need to understand it; he only needed a phone call. He had a mystical sign and that was enough, so he put aside his fear about extra Biblical phenomena, deciding and opting out for the proof of a phone call.

Now, these are simply illustrations of what goes on in the movement, the Charismatic tendency to suspend the intellect and let mysticism run amuck is the essence of what Paul wrote against in 1 Corinthians 14. There Paul condemns primarily the misuse of the gift of tongues, but he also has other things in mind as well. And he was bringing order to the very chaos which has come back to the church.

And yet, it is so true that in the modern Charismatic movement, chaos and confusion are typical, very typical. Several of our elders from Grace Church attended a Vineyard a few weeks ago to see this very kind of chaos. People lying on the floor prostrate for a prolonged period of time with all their limbs sticking out as if they were in a catatonic state, people babbling in tongues and being incited to do that by the leader, people pushing chairs off the floor and dancing all over the floor and jumping up and down on the chairs. The same kind of hysteria.

Grovel Hayes describes an incident when he supposedly healed a man of deathmus. "The man fell straight forward, face down on the floor. You would have thought all his teeth would have been knocked out, but they weren't. Then he bounced and fell back down again, the impact could have broken his nose, but it didn't. Again, he bounced up off the floor and fell back again. This time he laid there real quiet for 60 seconds. Then his mouth and a little squeaky sound like a mouse began to come out. It got louder sounding like a big rat and finally sounded like a screaming hyena. In a little while, the man shook his head and pushed himself up off the floor. He acted as if he'd been hit in the head with a stick, but both ears had popped open and the knot in his stomach was gone. People jumped out of their seats and started running toward me saying, 'Pray for me.' As I reached out and

began to pray, it was as though the wind of God had come into my hands. People were lying all around on the floor including denominational pastors. God baptized them in the Holy Ghost and the moment they hit the floor, they started to speak in tongues."

Kenneth Hagan tells us of incredible tales about unusual healings that he has done, when peculiar anointings have been manifested in his ministry, and I'm quoting, "Several times the anointing has come on me to do unusual things while praying for the sick. Sometimes I go along five or six years between times. The first time it happened to me was in 1950. I was preaching in Oklahoma, a woman came forward for prayer. She said she was 72, but she looked like she was about to give birth to a baby. Of course, she had a tumor. I started to lay hands on her to pray when the Word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Hit her in the stomach with your fist.' On the inside of me I said, 'Lord, you're gonna get me in trouble goin' around hittin' women in the stomach with my fist. I don't believe I much wanna do that.' 'Well, if you wanna argue about it, the anointing will leave you. It will lift from you like a bird flying away after sitting on your shoulder.' It left me. When it left me, I thought, 'Well, I'll go ahead and minister with laying on of hands.' I laid hands on her again and the anointing came again, and the Word of the Lord came and said, 'Hit her in the stomach with your fist.' I decided I'd better stop and explain that to the crowd before I started doing it. So, I told them the Lord said, and I punched her in the stomach with my fist. And God and hundreds of people are my witnesses that that stomach went down like you'd stuck a pin in a balloon."

Hagan tells of another man he was told to hit in the head, and the young female college student he was to hit in the kidney. Now, all I'm doing is reading you the testimony of these people; the words are their words. And such tactics apart from being dangerous, especially with 72 year old people, and other people who are under physical duress, leave me dumbfounded to say nothing of their foolishness. And recently, you might interested to know that an 85 year old woman came forward for a healing touch from Benny Hinn, and while she was in line, he slew someone in the Spirit who fell over and crushed the woman's hip and she died. And there is now a \$5 million lawsuit against Benny Hinn. That kind of ridiculous chaos that ends in the death of an elderly woman is not the power of God. Charismatic chaos is usually not so physically fatal, but it is spiritually fatal for many.

Some concerned parents wrote our church and I get letters about this quite regularly. My file is fairly large, but their daughter had become involved with a spiritual gifts workshop in a large, well known Third Wave church. The mother wrote this, "In December of 1989," she began speaking of the daughter, "she began speaking in tongues. Shortly thereafter, she began to see angels. And angel in armor always stands outside the front door of her home and another stands inside her living room. He has large wings. She said she asked God to send her angels for protection while her husband was on business trips. A few months later, she began to see demons also, a monkey like demon sat on her husband's head one night and hissed at her. She sees others riding on tops of cars or standing on rooftops and some in battle with the angels. She sometimes sees darkness around people. She believes seeing this is a God given gift. When I told her to test the Spirit, she got angry.

She said, 'The Lord said, 'Yes, it is I, the Lord.'" I believe they are all demons. I told her to read the Bible and she said she only reads the Scripture numbers the Holy Spirit puts in her mind. We visited her and attended one of her group meetings. A prophet from Kansas City came, one of the Kansas City prophets. He said something about," that's a group that I have mentioned. "He said something about the past, present or future of nearly everyone in the room. Some things were incredibly true and other things haven't happened yet. Our daughter now wants to develop this gift in herself, and can now sometimes see a person's sin written on their forehead. She will then expel a demon. Since I told her to test the Spirit as the Bible tells us, she will not tell me what she's seeing anymore. I feel there's a wall between us."

I listened this week to five tapes of one of these prophets who supposedly can tell you your phone number, your address, and so forth, and by doing those kinds of things, which can be done by chicanery, little different than the amazing Kreskin does them, or could be demonic, thus convinces people that indeed, he's a prophet, and once the convincing is done by the people who are already under the power of suggestion and are already set up to buy into anything that is supernatural, whatever the person then says is taken as truth. Like so many Charismatic, that young woman has come to believe that her experiences obviate Bible study and spiritual discernment. Why should she listen to her mother when God talks to her?

I've seen marriages break up. I went through the breakup of a marriage, of a wife who had no reason to listen to her husband because God talked to her. These people believe they have some kind of superior relationship with the Holy Spirit. They don't need Scripture except an isolated verse or two that supposedly the Holy Spirit brings to mind. You see, the Charismatic movement breathes this kind of catastrophe in marriages, in families, in churches because it discourages people from discerning the truth from Scripture. It discourages people from using the mind. Instead, truth is appraised subjectively through signs and wonders and mystical needs.

Kenneth Hagan again who is really the patriarch of the signs and wonders movement, explains his criteria for judging between true and false spiritual gifts. I quote, "When God moves, everybody will be blessed. If something is of the flesh, everybody will have a sick feeling. If something is of the devil, it seems like the hair will stand up on your neck. That's a simple way everyone can judge whether they've got any spiritual discernment or not." You mean to tell me I can know if I have spiritual discernment by whether I feel sick or whether the hair stands up on the back of my neck? There it is, explicitly as it can be stated, by a leading Charismatic. That's how you determine spiritual discernment, and he is defining there exactly what is wrong with Charismatic mysticism.

Spiritual discernment from the Biblical perspective is unnecessary. It's really a very simple system of bio feedback. Again and again Charismatic hear the same message. Put your mind on hold, ignore your reason, listen to your feelings, that kind of extreme mysticism contradicts everything Scripture teaches about true discernment. Spiritual gifts are not supposed to produce mindless chaos and



mindless pandemonium in the church. Nor are they to be a way that a person can show off his spirituality before the crowd. They're never to be used selfishly, they're never to be used in some kind of performance, they're never to be used to cause you to lapse into a spiritual coma or put other people in a state of unconsciousness.

Kenneth Copeland, a rather comedic child of Kenneth Hagan in terms of having the same theology, writes, and this is a quote, "Believers are not supposed to be led by logic. We are not even to be led by good sense. The ministry of Jesus was never governed by logic or reason." That's just not true. Now, there's so much that we could learn and look at in 1 Corinthians. Let me just give you a little bit of a feeling for how Paul dealt with this. I don't want to take much time so listen very carefully, very brief. The Charismatic gift as we know them, were operating in the early church, for God has purpose for them at that time. And in the book will be a chapter on the matter of tongues and I will deal with it a little later in our series, so I won't get into detail now, but simply to say there was a time when all the spiritual gifts were operative. But they had become misused and abused and counterfeited in Corinth. And we would have to say that the Charismatic chaos of today is very much like the Charismatic chaos of Corinth. Some of the factors differ, in that day, all the gifts were operative, today they're not. But there were abuses then and there are abuses now. The situation was so abusive that Paul writes 1 Corinthians to correct it. They had a lot of problems in Corinth, divisions, personality cults, cliques, moral compromise, other desperate ills in the church. Carnality outweighed spirituality, sexual perversion, fornication, incest, adultery were being tolerated, worldliness was there, materialism was in the church. Church members were suing each other. There was rebellion against apostolic authority. There was marital conflict going on. The role of single people was misunderstood and misrepresented. Liberty was being abused. Idolatry was being practiced. Selfishness was rampant, pride was widespread, demon worship had come in. The church was abusing God's intention for the Lord's table and the love feast, and in the middle of all this, spiritual gifts were being perverted, misused and prostituted. This is one corrupt church. The problem wasn't they lacked spiritual gifts. 1 Corinthians 1:7, Paul says, "You're not lacking in any gift." It was how they fouled them up. And so, a major segment of that first letter, 1 Corinthians 12:13-14 directs itself at this terrible, terrible misuse of spiritual gifts. The Corinthians, like the Charismatic today, attended to equate the Holy Spirit's work with ecstatic, involuntary, frenetic and mysterious activity. And if it was inexplicable from the human level, they would say it's the Holy Spirit, even to the point where some people were cursing Jesus and they were saying it was the Holy Spirit because the phenomena seemed so bizarre. The wilder and the more agitated the person was, the more Godly and spiritual he was supposed to be. They got to the point where in order for them to say it's the Spirit, it had to be bizarre. Then there was the desire to be seen and the desire to appear as spiritual, and people were exploiting and perverting the gift of tongues particularly, and counterfeiting it with ecstatic babble that came out of their past paganism. They were confusing the work of the Holy Spirit with mystical practices they had known from their former pagan religion.

You see, for over 1,000 years, that part of the world had been dominated by the mystery religions, the pagan mystery religions. They can be traced all the way back to Babylon. But they cultivated, all of them had this in common, they cultivated a magical, sensual communion with deity. The assumption in the mystery religions in their cultic kind of form of worship was that you get yourself in some kind of state, a mindless kind of state, a transcendent kind of state, an irrational, not logical, not reasonable kind of mystical state, and when you get into that, you will then commune with the deity. You can do it through drunkenness, and so they got drunk in the pagan religions. You can do it the passion of sexual involvement, and so there were priestesses who acted as temple prostitutes and you could come in and throw yourself into an orgy. And then the euphoria of that orgy and in the stupor of being drunk, in the stupor of that whole even, supposedly you were to commune with deity. Paul has that in mind certainly in Ephesians 5 when he says, "Do not be drunk with wine which is excess to be filled with the Spirit." If you really want to connect with God, be filled with the Spirit, don't be drunk.

They would do almost anything to get in a semi-conscious hallucinatory, hypnotic or orgiastic spell because they believed that somehow that got them in touch with deity. This is not very far different than going back into the 60's in the drug culture and the things that Timothy Leary tried to say about how you transcend this world and touch the Divine and what the Eastern mystics were saying as they were advocating the same kind of stuff. Whether from literal intoxication or some kind of emotional hysteria or exhilaration, worshippers falling into some kind of euphoria assumed they were then in union with the deity. According to Wes Angus, once professor of New Testament and historical theology at St. Andrews College, Sydney, the ecstasy experience by the mystery religion worshipper brought into then a quote, "mystic ineffable condition in which the normal functions of personality were in abeyance and the moral strivings which form character virtually ceased or were relaxed while the emotional and the intuitive were accentuated." In other words, the worshipper would get into a state where his mind would go into neutral and his emotions would take over. The intellect and the conscious would give way to passion, sentiment and emotion. This was ecstasia. Angus further said, "Ecstasy might be induced by vigil and fasting, tense religious expectancy, whirling dances, physical stimuli, the contemplation of the sacred objects, the effect of stirring music, inhalation of fumes, revivalistic contagion, hallucination, suggestion and all other means belonging to the apparatus of the mysteries. One ancient writer speaks of men going out of themselves to be holy established in the Divine."

It's exactly what happened in Corinth, and it's still going on today. It's the mystery worshipper experience such ecstasy. He believed he was lifted above the level of his ordinary experience into an abnormal sense of consciousness and therein could he really see God. And according to Angus again, he says, "Ecstasy could range anywhere from non moral delirium to that consciousness of oneness with the invisible and the dissolution of painful individuality which marks the mystics of all ages. A person literally became irrational, unreasonable, out of touch with reality."

I don't think it's too far up field to say that there are testimonies by Pentecostal, Charismatic believers that seem to me to sound very much like this. They explain their various states of euphoria as engaging and communing with the Holy Spirit. But is it that? Certainly not by Biblical definition. Is it only an emotional high? Is it only some kind of psychological, self induced hypnosis? Is it only falling into the spell of the power of suggestion or is it demonic? In any case, it is not Biblical. It certainly is not, "Come now let us reason together," says the Lord. It certainly is not let everything be done decently and in order. The problem Paul dealt with in Corinth is the same problem he still deals with through his letters in the Charismatic movement today.

The problem is this, how do you tell the real from the counterfeit? And the only answer I have to you, beloved, is to take it to the Word of God, and if it isn't there, it isn't real. That's the only place we can go. You certainly can't believe experience, why? Because many will say, "Lord, Lord," and they will prophesy in His Name and they will cast out demons in His Name and they will do miracles, at least what appear to be miracles in His Name, but He will say, "Depart from Me, I never knew you. Who are you, you workers of iniquity?"

We be warned, the true believers in the Charismatic movement that Satan is having a field day, counterfeiting because you're not checking with the Word, and because you're not using the mind God has given you to understand His truth. Christ is being dishonored. You remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:2, he said to the Corinthians, "You are being led astray just like you used to be. You used to be led astray to dumb idols, led astray like a prisoner. You were just led astray to your false gods. Now that you've become a believer, you can't let that happen. You can't just throw yourself open and be carried away by demons in the ecstasies of these events."

The truly spiritual person is not someone who sweeps away into trances, ecstasies, emotional frenzies or falls over in a dead faint. The true spiritual person isn't somebody who goes into a glory cloud for 15 minutes, can't speak English, comes back and doesn't know he's been gone. When a person is out of control, it is never the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is self control, Galatians 5. Nowhere in Scripture do we see the real gifts of the Spirit operating when somebody's out of control or when somebody's under a supernatural seizure. And so, beloved, as we look at this movement, we have to be concerned and literally sad in our hearts because of so many people being led astray in the Name of Christ. But I guess we should expect it. My dad used to say, "Nobody counterfeits brown paper and sticks. Brown paper and sticks are worth counterfeiting. They don't have any value. Wherever you see a counterfeit," he used to say to me, "just be sure there's a real because people only counterfeit what's real, and they only counterfeit what's valuable." Counterfeiters copy what's valuable, and what is priceless in the church, listen to me. What is priceless in the church is the true work of the Spirit and the true gifts of the Spirit and the true ministry of the Spirit and how tragic it is that a whole generation of people are cut off from the reality because they bought the counterfeit. Many of these people have been saved, but they're part of a system that cuts them off from the true working of God's Spirit.

The church will be built up when spiritual gifts are used properly, when the Scripture is understood properly, taught accurately, and when believers are walking in the Spirit with self control obeying the Word of God. Well, let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, even as we have talked about these things tonight, we have been brought back again to the great foundation of Your Word, where we must test everything. Help us to know that it's not enough if someone lifts up Your Name and says, "Lord, Lord," and claims You. It's not enough that they preach and cast out demons and do wondrous things. They could be false prophets, they could be sheep dressed up in prophets' garments. The fruit of their life doesn't support their claim and some day, You'll bring it to light. Lord, give us discernment. There are many that You love, that belong to You who are swept up in this movement. Tragically, exposing themselves to error, demonic activity, confusion, and on the other hand, cutting themselves off from the true path of sanctification, the true work of the Spirit, and the true interpretation and proclamation of Your Word. Lord, how tragic that they would be dispossessed of that and think they've come to a higher level of spirituality when in fact, it's a lower one. And what they think is something more is really something less. Father, I pray that You'll bring clarity and sanity and the true work of the Spirit to bear upon the confusion that Your true church may be delivered out of that confusion into the light of the true work of the blessed Spirit whose task it is to move us from one level of glory to the next, evermore into the image of Christ. In His Name we pray, Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).