

Discerning Charismatic Movement

1. Introduction

Charismatic movement is a general term. It refers to some believers who enthusiastically pursue strange phenomena or inner feelings, and accept them as from the Holy Spirit. Consequently, they equate these phenomena with some of the gifts mentioned in the Bible, and treat personal thoughts as revelations from God.

Many believers with seeking hearts are among those who are attracted to the charismatic movement. Unfortunately they have strayed from the path of spiritual growth, either because they lacked in-depth understanding of the Bible, or were misled by misinterpretation of the Bible,.

The basic problem of the charismatic movement is **interpreting the Bible with experiences, rather than interpreting and discerning experiences with the Bible**. The purpose of this article is to briefly point out some misunderstandings which are common among the charismatic movement, so that believers may be able to discern and avoid incorrect teaching. This article basically summarizes the book “Charismatic Movement — From New Testament Perspective” (in Chinese) by Professor Joseph Wang. Those who are interested in further study may refer to that book.

2. Concerning Being Filled with the Holy Spirit

- A. Being filled with the Holy Spirit means that the Holy Spirit has a decisive influence on a person. (Concerning the meaning of “being filled with”, please refer to Ephesians 5:18; Acts 5:3, 5:17, 13:45.) The results of being filled with the Holy Spirit are: 1) Our hearts are purified (Acts 15:8-9), 2) We bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and 3) We receive power from the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).
- B. A person filled with the Holy Spirit does not always receive special feelings or strange phenomena. In fact, not all special feelings or strange phenomena are from God. Believers need to be vigilant!

3. Concerning Speaking in Tongues

- A. Tongues in the New Testament refer to human languages, **not** indistinguishable babbling or sounds.
- B. Therefore being able to produce indistinguishable babbling is **not** the gift of tongues mentioned in the New Testament.

4. Concerning Prophesying

- A. The Bible clearly says that predictions made by prophets have to be **100%** accurate, otherwise the person is a false prophet (Deuteronomy 13:1-5, 18:20-22). Therefore we can judge based on the prophet’s past record.
- B. Any person making predictions in God’s name can be judged as a false prophet if there is **a single** inaccurate prediction. We should not have anything to do with that person.

5. Concerning Healing

- A. God has the power to heal and he does heal according to his own will. There are principles in the Bible about maintaining physical and mental health, but there is no promise that all physical or mental illness shall be completely healed before the Lord’s second coming. (If sin is the reason for illness, then after confession of sin the illness may possibly be healed, see 1 Corinthians 11:29-30 and James 5:14-16).
- B. In the Bible, those who had the gift of healing are **100%** successful (Acts 5:16, 8:7), just as Jesus himself healed (Luke 4:40, Matthew 9:35, 10:1, 12:15).

6. Concerning Proclaiming

- A. Believers can only proclaim God’s clear promises from the Bible (such as justification by faith), or God’s completed work (such as salvation on the cross). Believers cannot proclaim matters which God has not completed, much less commanding God to do what He has not promised.
- B. Proclaiming that a particular person’s illness shall be healed or that Satan’s authority and influence shall be removed from certain geographical areas are without Biblical basis and useless.

7. Summary

Strange phenomena can also be found among pagan religions. Therefore strange phenomena are not necessarily from God since they can also be from evil spirits. We need to carefully discern! We should remember the teaching: “Let nobody deceive you with empty words, for because of these things God’s wrath comes on the sons of disobedience.” (Ephesians 5:6)

Note: Revised 1/29/2008. The original article (in Chinese) can be found at <http://www.sbecc.org/charismatic.pdf>. This translation can be found at <http://www.sbecc.org/charismatics.pdf>. Both may be freely used, quoted, redistributed, or linked to. Please send comments to author’s e-mail address at lsli@alumni.upenn.edu