

A Doctrinal Perspective of the Charismatic Movement

I. The Goal of This Study

A. What It Is Not

1. It is not an exercise in bashing other Christians
2. It is not because we have an “axe to grind”
3. It is not to be construed as an attempt to attack individual persons
4. It is not an attempt to go on an ego trip at the expense of others

B. What It Is

1. It is an attempt to examine the Charismatic phenomenon in light of the Scriptures
2. It is an attempt to call believers back to a rational theology

II. Definitions

A. Charismatic

A person who believes in the continuing character of all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, most notably the sign gifts of tongues, miracles, and prophecy from God.

B. Charismatic Movement

The branch of Christianity which emphasizes the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the use of the miraculous sign gifts.

C. Pentecostalism

The “first wave” of the Charismatic movement. Emphasis is on sign gifts, most importantly tongues. Prior to 1960 the Charismatic movement was known as Pentecostalism.

D. “Second Wave”

The second phase of the Charismatic movement which began in the early 60's when Pentecostalism started in the main line denominations.

E. "Third Wave"

This is the movement started by John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard Movement. This movement strongly emphasizes the sign gifts almost to the exclusion of other gifts of the Holy Spirit.

III. The Charismatic View of Scripture

It is impossible to examine every error that is taught in the Charismatic movement. Therefore, it is necessary that we look at the foundational issues that, when accepted and followed, result in a belief system consistent with that taught in the Charismatic movement. The first of these is the Charismatic view of Scripture.

A. The Charismatic View

- The Charismatic movement, as a whole, denies the completion of the canon of Scripture. They believe that God still gives revelation in the form of words of knowledge, prophecies, visions, dreams, and tongues.
- Most Charismatics place more importance in the extra-biblical revelations than in the Scripture. As such they fall into the same error as many other cults.
- Emphasis in the Charismatic movement is placed in revelations, not the Scripture.
- With a charismatic, the experience validates Scripture, not Scripture the experience.
- A close examination of the Charismatic movement will show that there is not a single Bible scholar in the movement. The reason for this is that a knowledge of the Scripture is not important, getting in contact with Jesus is.
- Of course, the whole problem with this type of understanding of Scripture is that it is no longer possible to determine who is speaking the truth and who is not. David Wilkerson, some time ago, had a vision at a conference that was contradicted by someone else's vision, at the same conference. Which one is right??

Some examples of this are:

- Kenneth Copeland had Jesus appear to him and reveal that He (Jesus) never claimed to be God, only that He and God were one in the sense of purpose.
- Kenneth Hagin describes many visions of God, including one in which he and God had a three hour discussion on the state of the world.
- Jack Hayford describes Jesus appearing to him while he is shaving in the morning and talking to him.
- Oral Roberts had a discussion with Jesus in which he was told to close his City of Faith Medical Center due to lack of funds.

- Another charismatic leader said that doctrine is not important, only Jesus is! Unfortunately, without a proper understanding of the Scripture, one will wind up with the wrong Jesus.

B. A Doctrinal Perspective

- God is not still giving revelations, especially those that contradict the written Word of God.
- At the end of the book of Revelation, a curse is place on anyone adding to the book. Since Revelation is the last book written, anyone adding to Revelation is adding to the Scripture.
- The Scripture is sufficient for all our spiritual needs. We do not need to add mystical experiences, visions, and dreams.
- Scripture is not to be interpreted subjectively, but interpreted according to the rigid rules of hermeneutics.

IV. The Charismatic View of Theology

The Charismatic movement is an anthropocentric theology, that is, man is the center of their theology. This is in distinction to a Biblical theology which is theocentric, that is, God is the center. When one accepts an anthropocentric theology, many problems result. Specifically, an anthropocentric theology will:

A. Result in an errant view of God

- God is no longer of central importance, man is. As such, God loses His sovereignty and becomes a puppet of man's desires.
- God does not exist to carry out His will, but ours. It is no longer "Thy will be done", but "My will be done."
- In distinction, the Bible teaches that all things were created for God's pleasure (Revelation 4:11), and that He is working all things after the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:11). God is not subject to our whims and our prayers must be in accordance with His will, not ours (1 John 5:14-15).

B. Result in an errant view of Man

- In an anthropocentric theology man becomes the center of focus. We are exalted beyond measure. Our needs, wants, and desires are of primary importance, not God's.
- Since man becomes the center, there is a strong tendency to reduce the sinfulness of man to that of "a few mistakes." This is because a depraved man is contradictory in an anthropocentric belief system.
- The Scripture teaches that we are fallen (Romans 3:23), under condemnation (John 3:36), and completely lost (Isaiah 53:6). What we desire means nothing compared to what God desires.

C. Result in the Prosperity Gospel

- In this gospel, God is a celestial bank teller or genie who can be called upon to cater to the greed and covetousness of men.
- This view teaches that God is primarily interested in our material prosperity. As such, we can claim our riches by “faith” which binds God to act on our behalf.
- According to Matthew 6:19f. we are to lay up treasure in heaven, not on the earth. In Colossians 3:5 covetousness is called idolatry, in 1 Timothy 6:10 we are told that the love of money is the root of all evil, and in 2 Peter 2:1f. we find a description of false teachers which fits perfectly with the prosperity gospel crowd of today. A good question to ask is why was Paul, one of the most godly men that ever lived, in a state of deprivation and need most of the time. Didn’t he have enough faith to claim his riches?

Some examples are:

Bob Tilton and Success•N•Life

Kenneth Hagin, and the “Name-It-And-Claim-It” crew

Paul Yonggi Cho and visualization

D. Result in the Happiness Gospel

- Closely coupled with the prosperity gospel is the happiness gospel. This message tells us that above all else it is God’s desire that we be happy. If we are not, we have a right to pray for whatever will make us happy and God is obligated to meet that need.
- Those that buy into this theology think nothing of divorcing their spouse and marrying another, if that will make them happy.
- The Bible, on the other hand, teaches that we are to have joy, not happiness. In Galatians 5:22-23 we find that joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and in Philippians 4:4 Paul commands us to rejoice always in the Lord. The difference between joy and happiness is that joy is a product of the Spirit in the life of the believer in spite of the circumstances, happiness is a product of the flesh because of the circumstances.

E. Result in an improper view of trials

- Suffering and trials are inconsistent with an anthropocentric theology. God does not desire that we suffer, but that we enjoy prosperity and happiness. This results in several errors.
1. Suffering and trials are not normal for believers
 - The first error is that suffering and trials are abnormal for believers. If we are suffering, we are outside of the will of God.

- This runs counter to Christ's claim in John 16:33 where Christ tells us that we will have trials in this world, and in John 15:18f. where we are told that the world will hate us and persecute us. It seems that the Bible teaches the exact opposite, Christians should suffer as a normal part of being a Christian.

2. Trials are the result of Satanic oppression

- Since in the anthropocentric view God can never be the source of trials, then the only other culprit is Satan. As a result we see an explosion in the church today of the Spiritual Warfare movement, in which all trials are seen as the product of Satan and his demons.
- Closely coupled with this is the idea that all sin is the result of Satan. It is no longer I, but Satan and his demons that cause me to sin. Therefore, the way I deal with sin is to bind the devil. A primary example of this is Swaggart and Oral Roberts. Additionally we find Morris Cerullo.
- The Bible never tells us to bind Satan, it tells us to resist him (James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:8f.). Our real enemy is not Satan, but the flesh activated by Satan (Romans 6-7). If we learn to deal with the flesh, then our warfare with Satan is not nearly as great as it would be. Satan is a real enemy, but he can only work through the flesh and through the world to cause us to sin. Ultimately, however, we are the ones responsible for sin, not Satan.

F. Result in an improper view of sickness

- This is closely coupled with the above idea, but will be considered separately due to its importance.
- In an anthropocentric theology, sickness is an aberration, and hence something that should not occur. As a result we are seeing an explosion in the faith healing movements in which we are told that it is never God's will that anyone be sick, but that all be healed.
- In distinction to the notion that God desires all Christians to be healed we find the examples of Trophimus (2 Timothy 4:20), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2), and Paul himself (2 Corinthians 8-9).
- The following chart compares the healing ministry of Christ and the Apostles with that of the modern faith healers. Note the discrepancies on every point.

Christ and the Apostles	Modern Faith Healers
Healed with a word or a touch	Looks like a stage show
Healing was instantaneous and complete	Healing is partial and progressive
Healing was for organic diseases	Healing is for functional diseases
Healing was for everyone without exception	Healing is for only a few
Healing was no dependent on the faith of the one being healed	Healing is totally dependent on the faith of the one being healed
Healing was done for unbelievers with rare exceptions for believers	Healing is done for believers
Raising the dead was part of the gift of healing	Raising the dead is not part of the modern healing movement

G. Result in an improper view of the Gospel

- In an anthropocentric system man is saved for what man gets out of it, i.e. deliverance from hell, heaven, joy, peace, etc. However, the Bible teaches that we are not redeemed for our own benefit, but for God's (Ephesians 2:6-7, Revelations 4:11, Ephesians 1, Romans 3:24f.).
- As a result, there is a strong tendency to make the gospel a sales pitch, rather than a call to repentance. Whatever is done in the gospel presentation is meant to persuade someone to believe, all negative elements are usually omitted.
- Unfortunately, the gospel is a very negative message to many (see Romans 2:16). The starting point of the gospel is the sinfulness and condemnation of men, a very negative issue. And finally, the end of men apart from Christ is the lake of fire, a very negative message.
- It is interesting to note the pattern of Christ, in that whenever someone enthusiastically wanted to join his band of followers He pointed out the costs (Luke 14:25-35, Matthew 19). Christ would rather turn away the enthusiastic than sign on a person who would later fall away when the cost became too high.

H. Result in a relational hermeneutic

- Because man is the center of focus in this theology, a man's relationship to another man is more important than a man's relationship to God. As such, truth and doctrine are swept out the back door in order to preserve peace and unity.
- It is important that we as believers not be obnoxious to others, but peace at all costs is no peace at all. A relationship based on something other than truth is tenuous indeed.
- Because of this, the Charismatic movement relegates doctrine to such a low level that it is possible to believe almost anything, just don't be dogmatic.

This is why the New Age movement is leaking into the church through the Charismatic movement. Both emphasize experience and unity at all costs.

- The Bible, on the other hand, calls us to be believers who have discernment (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22, Colossians 1:9-10). We are to reject error and expose error, not ignore it and coexist with it.

V. The Charismatic View of Spirituality

- The Charismatic movement selects leaders based on personal charisma, supposed manifestations of the spirit, and their ability to have visions and dreams. Personal holiness and godliness are irrelevant. In fact, it is not uncommon to find a man excommunicated from a Bible-believing church due to immorality move into the Charismatic movement and be totally accepted. Look at Swaggart and the Bakkers.
- Paul warns Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:6 to not lift a man up too soon in spiritual leadership but rather examine carefully those candidates lest they fall into pride. Those that are spiritually strong are not necessarily the ones with the most visions and dreams, but the ones who have cultivated a close walk with the Lord.
- A good question to ask is why are the men who are supposedly the most spiritual because of their dreams the same men that live lives of lust, immorality, and greed. There seems to be a contradiction here.

VI. Our Response to the Charismatic Movement

- A. We are to love those in the movement
- B. We must, however, hold to the truth at all cost and not bend to the relational hermeneutic of the Charismatic movement
- C. We need to be diligent students of the Word so that we are in a position to see error and point it out to those who may be enmeshed in it
- D. We cannot allow ourselves to become “mudslingers”, but we need to call those in the movement back to a Bible-based doctrine
- E. We need to be aware of, and avoid, false teachers