

Lecture 22

The Charismatic Movement

INTRODUCTION: The bane of Biblical Christianity in the 21st century is the Charismatic movement. There have been several similar movements in the past: the Montanists (2nd to 4th centuries), the Shakers (18th to 19th centuries), the Irvingites (19th century), etc. These groups were mostly isolated, and their teachings ended with their demise. The modern Charismatic movement surpasses these historical groups in some of their false doctrines, and has spread throughout the world.

I. The Pentecostal Movement

- A. In 1901 in Topeka, Kansas, a preacher named Charles Parham led an effort to duplicate the revival at Pentecost in Acts 2. A young lady who had been teaching a doctrine of full sanctification received the gift of “ecstatic” tongues through the laying on of hands.
- B. This was followed in 1906 to 1909 with a “revival” at a building on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, led by William Seymour. This is referred to by historians of the movement as the “First Wave” nowadays.
- C. The main characteristic of Pentecostalism was speaking in unknown tongues. There are many things wrong with the so-called doctrine and practice of “tongues.” Here are just a few.
 1. The Greek word translated “tongue” (γλῶσσα) can mean the physical tongue or a language. “Language” is the meaning it had in 1611 England in our King James Version. It obviously means real languages in the book of Acts. The only other passages it occurs in, 1 Cor. 12-14, can also be interpreted as speaking of known tongues.
 2. William Samarin researched modern tongues extensively, finding that they had no syntax or semantics, that they were “characterized by strings of usually simple syllables that are not matched systematically with any semantic system.”¹
 3. Often speaking in tongues becomes a barometer of spirituality. This engenders spiritual pride. “Worn as a badge of identification, tongues results in walls of division, mistrust, and resentment. Much of the strong negative feeling that many church people hold against tongues speaking can be traced to this misuse.”²
- D. Eventually, many Pentecostals began to require tongues as a sign of salvation, perhaps largely through the Full Gospel movement. This carried over into the Charismatic Movement.
- E. Many Pentecostals believed that healing was included in the atonement, and therefore anyone could be healed of anything. This led to special meetings for healing rather than evangelism, a practice not in the Bible.

¹ Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1976), 202.

² Wayne A. Robinson, *I Once Spoke in Tongues* (New York: Pillar Books, 1973), 123.

- F. It should be remembered here that the original Pentecostal movement was Fundamentalist. They had strong standards of personal separation, believed in soul-winning, and cooperated with other Fundamentalists such as John R. Rice in revival campaigns.

II. The Original Charismatic Movement

- A. Sometimes called the Neo-Pentecostal movement, this is traced to 1960. At that time the Pentecostal experience began to enter the denominational churches. In particular, Episcopalian priest Dennis Bennett was a leader in the effort to get the movement into mainline churches. It was called “Charismatic” due to its emphasis on spiritual gifts, *charisma* (χάρισμα) in Greek. It is referred to as the Second Wave of the movement.
- B. Thus, an early characteristic of the movement was its ecumenicalism. To Charismatics, unity as a movement became much more important than doctrinal purity.
- C. The Charismatic movement became heresy based on the fact that it tended to split churches. “Perhaps the most serious damage done to the church by the charismatic movement has been precisely in this matter of unity. Who knows how many thousands of churches have split over charismatic teaching? The number would surely be staggering.”³
- D. Some of the doctrine of the movement is based on the doctrine of what is called the “Latter Rain Movement.” This group was so doctrinally bad that it was officially opposed by the Assemblies of God in 1949.
- E. The Charismatic movement embraces numerous heresies. We can only begin to list them briefly here. (Some are not across the board.)
1. All Charismatics are ecumenical.
 2. Virtually all Charismatics believe in ecstatic tongues, but there are those who limit this to a private “prayer tongue.”
 3. “Word of faith” (WOF). This is the belief that words have intrinsic power, and can heal and work miracles. Its teachers include: Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Paul Crouch, Robert Tilton, Joel Osteen, and Benny Hinn.
 4. The “health and wealth” gospel. This is the teaching that God wants you completely healthy and wealthy, and only your lack of faith keeps you from healing and material wealth.
 5. “Power Evangelism.” “Here, then, is the key idea of ‘power evangelism’: miracles prompt saving faith. Not only that, miracles are more effective than preaching in that regard.”⁴ This explains why most Charismatic presentations of the Gospel are flawed (1 Cor. 15:1-8).
 6. “Manifest sons of God,” or “Joel’s Army.” This is a Latter Rain teaching, sometimes called the “little gods” teaching, that in the last days, people will arise with special powers, and these people are said to be equal to Christ.

³ John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 356. Note: This is the only book by MacArthur this professor recommends.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

7. Extra-Biblical prophecies by “apostles” and “prophets” are common. These virtually never lead to anyone trusting Christ.
- F. Unfortunately, many evangelical ministries fail to oppose the heresies of the Charismatic movement.

III. The Third Wave

- A. Beginning around 1985, the Charismatic movement began to flourish within wider evangelicalism. This is called by John Wimber the Third Wave of the movement, or the Signs and Wonders Movement. It is really simply a more radical continuation of the original Charismatic movement.
- B. “Like Pentecostals and charismatics, Third Wave adherents aggressively pursue ecstatic experiences, mystical phenomena, miraculous powers, and supernatural wonders—while tending to underemphasize the traditional means of spiritual growth: prayer, Bible study, the teaching of the Word, persevering in obedience, and the fellowship of other believers.”⁵
- C. The doctrine of “little gods” that some prominent Charismatic teachers hold to is based on WOF. It has some similarities to the Mormons’ doctrine, and is a kind of idolatry. Walter Martin, the famed apologetics expert, has a whole chapter on this in *The Agony of Deceit* (a book of essays by evangelical scholars on the errors of the Charismatic TV preachers). He wrote, “Man is not now, nor can he ever be, in ‘God’s class.’ The fact is that man was created ‘a little lower than the angels’ (Hebrews 2:7) and is subject to death as a mortal. If he were a ‘little god,’ he would outrank the angels (which faith teachers believe).”⁶
- D. Many excesses may be attributed to the Third Wave Charismatics, including the so-called “Toronto Blessing” with its “laughing revival” beginning in 1994. Even *Christianity Today* has been positive about the “Toronto Blessing,” having this subtitle: “The ‘Toronto Blessing’ in 1994 was odd and controversial—but its benefits have lasted.”⁷
- E. “Signs and wonders.” John Wimber, who replaced Donald McGavran (founder of the “Church Growth” movement) at Fuller Theological Seminary, is a leader of this movement. “Wimber claims that various physical phenomena take place when the Holy Spirit’s power comes on a person. They include shaking and trembling, falling down..., a euphoric state resembling drunkenness, jumping up and down, contraction of the hands making them clawlike, facial contortions, stiffening of the body trembling, fluttering of the eyelids, heavy breathing, sensations of heat, perspiring, and a feeling of weight on the chest.”⁸
- F. The Third Wave has embraced many heretical doctrines in addition to those of the original Charismatic movement. When experience is put first, doctrine falls by the wayside and heresy abounds. “Our unity is not based on doctrinal agreement. Our

⁵ Ibid., 157.

⁶ Walter Martin, “Ye Shall Be As Gods,” in Michael Horton, ed., *The Agony of Deceit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 95.

⁷ Lorna Dueck, “The Enduring Revival” (*Christianity Today*, March 7, 2014). Accessed on 10/19/17 at: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/march-web-only/enduring-revival.html>

⁸ MacArthur, 173.

unity is based on the experienced presence of God and how it renewed us and our commitment to a gospel of the kingdom.”⁹

- G. One manifestation of the Third Wave is called the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), endorsed by no less than C. Peter Wagner. It is a worldwide movement teaching health and wealth, modern revelation through individuals, etc.
- (1) Rather than a unified movement, it is a theological position.
 - (2) It teaches “signs and wonders.”
 - (3) It teaches “health and wealth.”
 - (4) It teaches that individuals can have modern revelations as long as they do not disagree with the Bible.
 - (5) It is Dominionist. Dominion Theology is a form of post-millennialism, or reconstructionism.

CONCLUSION: Clearly, the Charismatic movement abounds with false teaching and false teachers. It began over a century ago, if you count the Pentecostal movement, but continues to this present day in a more virulent form than ever. Church history is thus contemporary. We must deal in the 21st century with Charismatics who wish to destroy our churches just as the 2nd century churches had to deal with the Montanists. To defeat this movement of Satan, let us lean on the Holy Spirit and on His wisdom and power, always exalting Christ.

⁹ Ibid.