

SLAIN IN THE SPIRIT

Because God is real and wants to have a real-time relationship with us, it is to be expected that there are manifestations of the Holy Spirit (charismata). In the early days of Acts, it was primarily great boldness, physical healings, casting out of evil spirits and the speaking in other tongues. Today there are still many miraculous things happening. I have personally witnessed great wonders, which cannot be explained by anything other than God's mighty hand at work.

Because we worship an invisible God, by faith, it is always exciting to witness evidence that it hasn't all been our imagination. Unfortunately, it is this very tendency to want to step past the faith stage and *see*, that causes us to look to the phenomenon rather than the Author of that phenomenon. It is related to man's tendency to worship idols and so we really have a huge responsibility to be alert for it.

When the Pentecostal movement started through a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit, many people spoke in tongues. So taken were we with the phenomenon that, before we knew it, tongues were considered the sole evidence of God's presence and power. No tongues, no power and no effective outcome. Slowly but surely we turned from keeping our eyes on Jesus, to looking for tongues. No tongues, no real conversion. Suddenly there was an extra condition to salvation (see 1 Cor.12:30). Then we all wanted to do it (tongues) simultaneously, to praise God in mass worship. To get around Paul's warning not all to speak in tongues at the same time (1 Cor.14:23), we decided there must be two *types* of tongues, one for worship, which was exempt from Paul's instruction; the other for interpretation. You can see how such a degeneration from true Holy Spirit power can occur in a slow and subtle progression. And it is the Devil's doing. For he hates true Holy Spirit power. He wants to destroy any move from God, and the sooner the better!

In today's charismatic church and in the shows put on by some tele-evangelists, we have another phenomenon - being 'slain in the Spirit'. Already there is a tendency to identify the phenomenon exclusively with God's power. No slaying, no effective prayer. Already there is an unspoken accusation toward the one prayed for, but still standing: you are *resisting* the Holy Spirit! Sometimes the one praying tries to assist the Holy Spirit by pushing the prayee on the forehead! The expectation to go down has people falling like flies at the flick of the tele-evangelist's coat!

Unlike tongues, there actually is *no* scriptural precedent for this one. Nowhere in the Bible is the particular experience described. Sure, Paul fell down on the road to Damascus, heard Jesus' voice and was struck blind; but this is hardly a comparison for today's phenomenon. Throughout the Bible, whenever people were confronted by God, they fell forward onto their knees, not backwards. So even the symbolism is dubious. I don't want to put God in a box and tell Him what He can and can't do. However, any alleged manifestation of the Holy Spirit that has no Biblical basis requires us to be even more discerning, to make sure we are not being deceived. So let's look closely at the phenomenon without fear of offending Him or the charismatics.

The first question we must ask is: "Why is this phenomenon *exclusive* to the charismatic movement? Has God deserted the other churches? Or is the

manifestation just so much more powerful in the charismatic circles? Does the phenomenon only exhibit where people believe in it?" I can't answer that one, other than to say it makes me question and write this essay.

I believe with all my heart that the first manifestations of this phenomenon were genuine and that a significant percentage of today's are genuine. I believe the Holy Spirit can do anything and certainly has the power to knock someone for six. A genuine encounter with God is a truly awesome experience. The question is not 'can He?' but 'does He?' If the Holy Spirit is going to knock someone over, I cannot believe He is then going to allow them to be hurt in the process. He wouldn't initiate a process where He has control of the punch but not of the fall. So why do we have burly men standing behind those going down, to catch them and make sure they don't get hurt? Surely God doesn't demonstrate His power by hurting His own people? Surely no act of God would need human intervention to make sure God doesn't lose control?

LOOKING FOR SIGNS

For those of us who believe, there is something awfully enticing in seeing physical evidence of God at work. We go out of our way to look for manifestations. It allows us to step past the faith stage. It makes some rush out see a statue of the Virgin Mary weep. Or lay wreaths at a fence which, from a distance, looks like the Virgin in certain light conditions. We are fascinated by evidence of the existence of the Ark of the Covenant, or chips of wood purported to be from Noah's Ark. It makes us visit pools of water where miraculous healings have been reported. We get comfort from prophecy, even if it doesn't come true. It makes us rush out to see and pay homage to visiting preachers who are reported to have the gift of healing. No matter how much we claim to believe, we still look for a sign. And that weakness makes us terribly vulnerable to deceit.

WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING?

So what is the answer? Firstly, I believe that if God truly 'slays', He will also control the fall. They *don't* need a catcher! I also believe that a percentage of those going down are faking it, for whatever personal reasons. They *do* need a catcher! Another great many have been standing with their eyes closed for so long, waiting for prayer, that they have become unsteady on their feet and lost their sense of surroundings. They need a catcher! Another bunch are so intent on receiving a touch from God, that they subconsciously induce a faint. They need a catcher! It is even possible that some of these 'slayings' are a demonic phenomenon. They need deliverance *and* a catcher!

ALLOWING SATAN A FOOT IN THE DOOR

The real worry, and the reason for writing this essay, is *not* the phenomenon itself.

If any manifestations in the church are fake and not discerned and exposed as such, it means that Satan has a foothold. If we are so gullible, lacking in discernment, loathe to critically evaluate, feeling we have to go along with the rest just so we won't be

accused of questioning God, then we have left the door wide open for Satan to destroy every other genuine move of the Spirit. What is at stake here is an answer to the question: *'How can genuine moves from the Holy Spirit, taken up by genuine Christians full of love for the Lord, be distorted and destroyed by Satan, often in a very short time?'*

I believe the answer lies in an over-eagerness on the part of the congregation to see 'evidence' and in a tendency by the leadership to take advantage of the 'faith' condition that witnessing such 'evidence' generates in their congregation.

SUMMARY

Especially in the charismatic churches, there is a tendency to have a leadership of pastors and elders who are 'like-minded'. Those who question have no chance of inclusion, and are encouraged to 'move on' to other pastures. Having for your church leadership a bunch of 'yes' men can best be likened to incest. Too much in-breeding leads to birth defects. Too much like-mindedness, (unless truly inspired by the Holy Spirit), can only lead to the church turning into a cult. So unless we all have truly and totally nailed ourselves to the cross, prevention of free thought and free speech within church leadership is actually a very dangerous thing. The same way prevention of in-breeding protects the gene pool, *the democratic process, differences of opinion and healthy debate protect the church from false doctrine.*

One of those is the Prosperity Doctrine, the subject of the next essay.

Being 'slain in the Spirit' is only seen in those Churches that encourage the phenomenon. And *there* it has almost become an expectation. For this very reason we should all be wary. Practising types of worship which do not come from God leaves the door wide open for entry of demons.

CONCLUSION

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1)

If you believe, as I do, that God would not hurt His own people, *test* the spirit that knocks you down. Make an announcement from the pulpit that there will be no more catchers, and each person going down will be responsible for his own injuries if they happen. See how many still go down when they *know* there will be no catcher. And for those that do, check whether the Holy Spirit controls their descent, and if He doesn't, banish the practice from your church.