

The Consequences of Pentecostalism

Dub McClish

Introduction

"Even though I don't believe in 'speaking in tongues' or in other claimed miraculous gifts identified with Pentecostalism, I don't see what it hurts if someone does, as long as he doesn't try to influence others." It is not uncommon to hear members of the Lord's body making such a statement. Does it really do any harm either to the individual or the church to hold such views?

Many seem to have an attitude similar to Gamaliel's: "Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will be overthrown: but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them..." (Acts 5:38-39). Such an attitude may be appropriate in certain matters of judgment where human wisdom alone must be employed to determine the expediency of an act. However, the question before us does not relate to matters of human expedients. This question can be answered conclusively from Scripture, ruling out any "if it is of God" approach. Moreover, it **must** be answered conclusively, lest irreparable damage be done to the faith of a large number of the Lord's people. This question is worthy of our study because of the many destructive consequences inherent in embracing the Pentecostal philosophy, a few of which are discussed below.

Some Consequences Considered

1. To believe that any of the miraculous spiritual gifts are available for men past the era of the apostles and those on whom they laid their hands is an erroneous concept. These gifts were for the infancy of the church (1 Cor. 13:11); they were for a period when access to complete spiritual revelation was not available to every saint (vv. 8-9); they were to cease when that perfect knowledge became available through the Lord's completed revelation in the New Testament. (vv. 10, 12). The same general truths concerning the purpose and duration of the miraculous gifts are recorded in Ephesians 4:11-16. Only the apostles were empowered to transmit these miraculous endowments (Acts 8:14-19; 19:6), and they all died by the end of the first century. The primary distinction of Pentecostalism, namely belief in modern miraculous phenomena, is an erroneous view. An erroneous viewpoint is bad and undesirable in its very nature, even as the Truth is good and desirable on its own account. If there were no other harm in believing such things, this would be reason enough to refuse it and oppose it.
2. To accept the Pentecostal position, one is not only forced to embrace error, but he must also ignore or reject numerous Scripture Truths, such as those indicated above. Therefore, such a person becomes one of those who "...received not the love of the truth..." and who "...believed not the truth..." (2 The. 2:10, 12). Such is a terribly dangerous stance. It prepares the heart for

belief of even more lies and for taking pleasure in additional unrighteousness. (vv. 11–12). The end of such behavior is to be condemned and to perish (vv. 10, 13).

3. Brethren who believe themselves to be in possession of miraculous abilities tend to become bloated with an attitude of spiritual superiority and pride. They reason that, if God has so endowed them (as they mistakenly believe) and he has not endowed others, then God must be expressing His approval of them in this special way. They further reason that those lacking the gifts thereby demonstrate their spiritual inferiority. Hence, an artificial, ungodly ranking is created in the Lord's body, reminiscent of the ancient Gnosticism which held that only a select few could really partake of true knowledge and spirituality. Paul reminds us that there are no "ranks" in Christ, "...for ye are all one man in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Anything that tears down this equality before Christ is harmful. Moreover, actual possession of miraculous gifts by the first century brethren but signified their spiritual immaturity (1 Cor. 13:11). Therefore, granting momentarily that these gifts are currently available, by what authority can they be assumed to imply special spiritual acumen?
4. An acceptance of Pentecostalism is a commitment to subjective religious "authority" and a rejection of objective religious authority. The Word of God ever proclaims itself as the only qualified judge of man's behavior. Because it proceeds from God and not from man, it is qualified to control us without the personal prejudices that human-produced documents inevitably contain. This is the very basis suggested by Paul for allowing God's Word to be our authority (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Man may be "furnished completely unto every good work" only by keeping God's perfect law, not by keeping even the best of men's laws. The Pentecostal advocate cuts himself loose from God's revealed-for-all-time body of faith—the New Testament, accepting in its stead the ever-fickle, ever-fallacious "rule" of experiential testimony. By this "rule" God's acceptance of the worshiper is "proved" by the feelings or experiences of the worshiper. Accordingly, one may claim he has been baptized with the Holy Spirit, simply because he feels as if he has been. Another may believe that he (or she) must preach because of a certain sensation in one's chest, a certain noise in one's ear, or because of something that has deeply moved one emotionally. Still others may believe they have received an ability from God to "speak in tongues" (a serious misnomer for an unintelligible gibberish, completely untranslatable, usually resembling the most elemental baby talk) from which they infer that God has smiled upon them. By this principle, each individual becomes his own authority and the authority of God's Word falls victim to any clash between the two rationales. Any belief that substitutes feelings for faith and romanticism for revelation is utterly destructive, separating us from God.
5. Because of its subjective approach to spiritual authority, the Pentecostal view obfuscates the New Testament plan of salvation. The principle works as follows:

One who is convinced he can "speak in tongues" accounts this as evidence of his acceptability before God. To be consistent, he must accept similar subjective "proof" offered by any others as evidence of God's grace upon them. Thus, the Gospel plan of salvation declared in the New Testament requiring a confessed faith in Christ, repentance, and baptism for remission of sins is ignored. Especially is this observable in regard to the Scriptural role of baptism. To such individuals, it matters not whether one has obeyed God's revealed will concerning when one enters into God's grace. If one has received a certain "sign," or had an unusual "feeling" or

"experience," he is accounted "saved" and embraced as a brother, never mind the Lord's plan of salvation.

Any philosophy which causes such blatant disregard for the Spirit's Word cannot possibly be the Spirit's philosophy.

6. The subjective rationale of Pentecostalism likewise destroys the identity of the New Testament church. It requires acceptance – as brethren worthy of full fellowship – any who can testify convincingly about their "experience" or their "miraculous gift," regardless of church affiliation. What one teaches or fails to teach that conflicts with revealed Truth is beside the point to such individuals. The "Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship, Inc.," is a case in point. This religious organization that flourished in the late 1960s and early 1970s extends fellowship to people from every spectrum of thought who claim to believe in Christ and in modern-day miracles, Catholic and Protestant alike. It is therefore composed of those who differ diametrically on a great variety of obligatory doctrinal issues. Yet they utterly ignore all the teaching of the New Testament on the one faith, one church, one mind, unity in sound doctrine, and so forth. The only thing that matters to the group is one's spiritual "experience." It may well be argued that not all of those in the Lord's church who have become infected with Pentecostalism to some degree have adopted the "fellowship-without-doctrine" position. However, we reply that if they persist in "leaning" towards Pentecostalism, they must sooner or later adopt this position or else deny the very fundamental premise of it, namely subjectivism. Such individuals as Ben Franklin and Pat Boone and a host of others proved in the late 1960s and early 1970s that this is hypothesis far more than a personal bias.
7. When a member of the Lord's church embraces Pentecostal concepts, he invariably causes confusion among the saints. Such confusion may take many forms. The infected person must either be dealt with or ignored. If he is ignored (contrary to New Testament teaching: Rom 16:17; 2 The. 3:6; Tit. 3:10, et al.), he will make disciples among the babes in Christ who are doctrinally insecure. Thus, the lump will be leavened (1 Cor. 5:6-7). But even if he is dealt with according to Truth, chances are good that there will still be some negative effects from his influence, although far less than if the problem is ignored. When one must be withdrawn from, there are the inevitable few who respond with their emotions rather than with their minds and lend sympathy to the malefactor. In either case, the point is established that when a brother or sister succumbs to Pentecostalism, such behavior causes confusion among brethren. (It follows that the best medicine for this illness is certainly preventive: There must be more solid, plain teaching and preaching on this subject in the churches.)
Further, Pat Boone's defection illustrates the fact that the greater one's influence, the more confusion he causes. Many a troubled church and not a few persons who have been caused to stumble in this false way stand as strong testimony to the harmful confusion caused by adherents of this religious philosophy. We should all carefully heed the warning of our Lord in this regard: "It must needs be that the occasions [of stumbling, DM] come; but woe to that man through whom the occasion cometh!" (Mat. 18:7). Anything that causes such confusion among brethren stands self-condemned.

8. To attempt to resurrect the New Testament miraculous phenomena after the completion of God's revelation in the New Testament is to urge an anti-climax in God's scheme of development for His church. It constitutes a reversal of God's process of maturity by urging a return to spiritual "pacifiers" designed only for the church's infancy and immaturity. Notice Paul's arguments in 1 Corinthians 13:
- a. Miraculous prophecies, tongues, and knowledge belong to a period of incomplete revelation, but when the revelation is completed, these spiritual gifts will be "done away" (vv. 8-10).
 - b. Paul illustrates the appropriateness of those gifts for the church of that time by likening them to the traits of a child. But, when a child grows into manhood, he ceases to act and think like a child, which behavior would be completely inappropriate (v. 11). Just so, miraculous gifts would not be appropriate for Christians now, since God has long since provided us with the all-sufficient means of spiritual maturity in His finished revelation (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
 - c. At the time Paul wrote (during that period of incomplete revelation) they were like men who looked into a dull mirror, perceiving only a vague concept of what God wanted them to be; when God had revealed His will fully (which describes our times), the image would be clear. Again, Paul stated that the time in which he was writing (when the gifts were active) was a time of **partial** knowledge, but when God **completed** His revelation (our means of spiritual maturity), we would "know fully" His will (1 Cor. 13:12).

In attempting to reach back to this infantile state of the church, Pentecostalism mocks the very means provided by the God of Heaven for man's spiritual maturity. In effect, it says, "We are smarter than God. We know better what It takes to be spiritually complete than He does. To simply learn, believe, and obey His Word is not enough for us." Is there danger in such a course? Read Matthew 7:21-27 and decide for yourself.

9. The statement with which we began contains an important conditional phrase: "as long as he doesn't try to influence others." My observation is that those who defect to Pentecostalism become notoriously evangelistic, whether they have ever been so in the past or not. Even those who claim not to be convinced of Pentecostalism, but who are "fellow-travelers" with its converts, are usually evangelistic in their attempts to elicit tolerance in others. There is a natural evangelistic motivation in the phenomenon. When one is on an emotional "high" himself, he wants others to attain it, too. If "speaking in tongues" is a sign of special acceptability before God, and if I can exercise this gift, I will automatically desire to see the gift in others if I am concerned for their spiritual welfare.

There is hardly any way one can accept the Pentecostal frame of reference and be quiet about it. Pat Boone serves to illustrate this point, also. He hid his real convictions for a time, but he reached the point where he could no longer stand to be secretive about them. He eventually appeared on Oral Roberts' prime-time television program and blurted them out. He then proceeded to be feverishly evangelistic with these views, by means of books, magazines,

personal appearances, and movies, as well as television, to spread his views as widely as possible. Such a person believes he has “something extra,” and he is not about to let it go unnoticed. Hence, another danger is revealed.

Conclusion

The inroads of this destructive teaching among brethren have been significant. This statement is not an attempt to spread undue alarm, but merely to call attention to an observable fact. If it is argued that relatively few have openly defected, it may also be argued that many likely hold these convictions who have not yet openly expressed them. Of the two, I suggest that the former is not nearly so great a threat as the latter. The former is out in the open, his views are known, and he can be clearly marked for what he is (Rom. 16:17). The latter works in secrecy and with deceptive tactics, careful not to reveal his dark intentions and erroneous convictions until he has craftily gained a following. Then he is ready to reveal his beliefs with the greatest possible effect. Peter warned of just such brethren and carefully described their tactics as those who “privily bring in destructive heresies” (2 Pet. 2:1-3, cf. 18-20). Such were the very tactics decided upon by Pat and Shirley Boone (*Pat Boone and the Gift of Tongues*, James D. Bales, pp. 174, 178).

Many have assumed a super-tolerant attitude toward these troubled and troublesome brethren, as indicated by the increasingly common statement with which we began this study. To tolerate and encourage heresy is to partake in the same (2 John 10-11). Any one of the above nine points is sufficient to show the grave consequences of Pentecostalism, but when one considers all of them, the cumulative effect is almost staggering.

[**Note:** This MSS was written for and published in *The Spiritual Sword*, April 1974, ed. Thomas B. Warren.)

Attribution: From *thescripturecache.com*; Dub McClish, owner and administrator.