

10 Signs You Are a Charismaniac

As a believer with a Pentecostal experience since 1978 I have seen many genuine moves of God as well as many counterfeit works of the flesh. Unfortunately, many believers lack the discernment to tell the difference between what is of God and what originates with man.

My grandmother was the pastor of a classical Pentecostal Hispanic church for over 50 years. Through that experience I was able to understand some Pentecostal roots and practices. Generally speaking, the ethnic classical Pentecostals (in every ethnic group I have come across: Italian, Spanish, African-American, Russian to name a few) were known to be very strict when it came to outward holiness, to the point that many of us called them legalistic (For example: women could not wear pants or make-up or cut their hair; no movies; no dancing; no entertainment; and even the men had a strict dress code of wearing a suit and a tie).

Out of the Pentecostal movement arose the Charismatic movement of the 1960s and 1970s in which the historic denominational churches received the second blessing (baptism of the Holy Spirit) with the evidence of speaking in other tongues.

Because of the legalism associated with the word Pentecostal, many evangelicals across denominational lines have since felt more comfortable using the term “charismatic” to describe their Pentecostal experience that includes speaking in tongues, believing in divine healing, and deliverance from demonic oppression.

However, in the past decade I have witnessed so much excess in some charismatic circles that I have also felt uncomfortable at times using that term to describe my Pentecostal leanings.

Consequently, I use the term “evangelical” to describe my expression of Christianity because both “Pentecostal” and “charismatic” have a certain kind of baggage associated with them.

A classical charismatic and/or Pentecostal, in the way I am defining them, is a person who has received Christ as Lord and Savior, who stands on the word of God as the final authority, and who also believes in the manifestations of the Spirit as found in 1 Corinthians 12:4-8, as well as the gift of speaking in tongues as found in 1 Corinthians 14:2,4.

Charismatics and Pentecostals should also regularly listen to the voice of God inside of their spirit to give them wisdom (as opposed to some fundamentalist evangelicals who believe God only speaks through the written pages of the Bible).

There are other distinctions I could mention to describe a classical charismatic or Pentecostal if I had the time.

Through the years, some with the charismatic experience have become so subjective they have embraced wild fire and given charismatics a bad reputation. I understand that prominent evangelical John MacArthur is having some kind of conference dealing with “strange fire” related to the charismatic movement. But I am skeptical of a critique coming from a person historically biased against Pentecostals. (Also, I would much rather have “strange fire” than no fire at all!) I would rather hear from a practicing charismatic or Pentecostal. Hence, today’s subject for this article is related to 10 erroneous beliefs or practices from among some in the charismatic camp.

The following are 10 signs you are involved in charismania or are a charismaniac:

(The vast majority of charismatics I know do not believe or practice any of the following.)

1. You put prophecies and extra-biblical leadings on the same level as the written Word of God. Isaiah 8:20 says if we speak not according to the Scripture then we have no light. Second Timothy 3:16 teaches that all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness. The Scriptures are our rule for life and the highest standard for judging truth.

Unfortunately, some in the charismatic camp seem to be led more by personal prophecies and supernatural visions and dreams than by the Scriptures. I have known some people who would record personal prophecies by well-known “prophets” and—without praying about it or comparing it to Scripture or getting discerning counsel from more seasoned leaders in the kingdom—would just obey the prophecy as if it were as inspired as the Bible.

There are some others who seem to be getting daily visions and dreams from God that guide them. While I do believe God can speak through visions and dreams, we have to be careful because Satan also comes as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) and can deceive naïve believers who think that just because they have a supernatural encounter that it must be the Lord. Paul said that even if an angel from heaven appears and preaches another gospel let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8).

The more sure word of prophecy comes from the inspired writings of the canonical books of both the Old and New Testaments, which should be our guiding light for life (2 Peter 1:19-21) and by which all prophetic utterances should be judged. If the prophetic word or supernatural vision doesn’t go against the Scriptures, then we still need to pray and get a witness from the Lord in our spirit as well as get counsel from mature leaders as to whether this specific prophetic word or vision is really specific guidance from Him (The Scriptures cannot always give us specific guidance but provide general principles and precepts).

Lest my non-charismatic friends gloat over this point, let me say that a totally objective human being does not and cannot exist. All humans are subjective, even the non-charismatics who believe God only speaks to us through the Bible. The only truly objective being in the universe is God because He is the only one who is never influenced by time, space or environment! Even fundamentalist cessationists (those who believe the gifts of the Spirit and speaking in tongues ceased after the first century of the church) are subjective because they believe they are saved because they have “a witness in their spirit” that they are children of God (Romans 8:16).

Since we can't avoid subjectivity then how do we determine biblical truth? The only way to know the truth is to trust that the Holy Spirit will guide us and our leaders into all truth when we study the Scriptures, as well as the fact we have a responsibility to read how the believing church down through the centuries has interpreted the word historically. Hence, when there is a consensus from the evangelical church regarding the interpretation of a passage or truth of the Bible then we can have general assurance that the Holy Spirit has illuminated this truth to His people.

2. You are blindly led by charismatic leaders. Although this can be the case for the non-charismatic world as much as the charismatic world, as a charismatic I am going to pick on my own camp. I have seen far too many believers get caught up in following the teachings of charismatic leaders, even if their leaders are not living moral lives. There have been leaders who endorse political candidates who push anti-biblical laws; charismatics not only follow them but vote like them! There have been charismatics who are getting divorced unbiblically and remarrying, or living lavish opulent lifestyles with no accountability.

But, because they have “charisma,” move in the gifts of the Spirit and have a great preaching anointing, people follow them without question! Many churches have devolved into

nothing more than personality cults and are led by charismatic leaders who could preach heresy with much of the church still shouting amen and hallelujah.

On the Day of judgment God will hold each of us accountable for our lives, our families and our callings. We will not be able to give an excuse for being led astray by a leader if we have not taken the time to study the Scriptures and seek God for ourselves.

3. You come to church looking for experiences more than Jesus. Many in charismatic churches come to church to “feel” God’s presence because it makes them feel good. That is all good and fine for new believers but we must get to where we want to know the person of God and not just feel the presence of God. (For example, I want to know my wife’s heart, not just smell her perfume or feel her physical embrace.) Only when we know God (John 17:3) can we make Him known.

4. You think weird physical gyrations or manifestations are necessary to experience when “in the Spirit.” There have been some so-called revivals or renewal movements in Pentecostal and charismatic churches (even in classical Pentecostal churches) in which people think the Holy Spirit is moving upon a person because they start jerking, going into weird gyrations, barking like a dog, clucking like a chicken, dancing in the Spirit, running, spinning, etc. When I first preached in a classical Pentecostal church I thought someone was having an epileptic attack but then someone told me it was the Holy Ghost upon them.

While I am sure the Holy Spirit does at times move upon us in such a way that we have a strong physical, emotional and psychological reaction to the raw power and presence of God (which has happened to me on several occasions), I am convinced that many people try to manufacture a move of God upon themselves that is nothing more than Pentecostal hype and a work of the flesh.

God does not have to operate in such a manner in order to speak to us or move upon us. Some of my most powerful experiences in Christ have been hearing His gentle, still small voice (1 Kings 19:11-13) during times of intimate worship or just fellowshiping with Him as I went about my daily routine.

In my opinion, sometimes unstable people, in their zeal for God, give in to their emotions and manifest weirdness in the name of the Lord, which is nothing but a work of the flesh (and in some cases can be demonic). Furthermore, I have seen whole churches celebrate these weird manifestations as moves of God resulting in only attracting charismatic kooks from other churches with very few unbelievers getting converted.

5. You focus on soaking in the Spirit rather than being empowered by the Spirit to be a witness. According to Acts 1:8 the primary purpose of Spirit baptism is to be empowered to be a witness of the resurrection of Christ. Thus, the power of the Spirit has a missional focus, not a self-centered focus. Many charismatics think the Spirit has come upon them to make them feel good and all they want to do is come to church to “soak in the presence of God.” But my Bible teaches me that every single time a human being encountered the presence of God it resulted in God sending out that person to do work for His kingdom. (For example: Moses and the burning bush experience of Exodus 3; Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 2:1-3; Paul in Acts 22:14-15).

The book of Acts could also be called the book of the Holy Spirit because the Spirit is active in every aspect of the work of the church; the focus of the book of Acts is action, not feelings and not even teachings! It is not called the book of theories but the book of Acts for a reason! Even when the Antiochian church was corporately worshipping God, the Holy Spirit sent out two of their best leaders to preach the gospel (Acts 13:1-2).

Charismaniacs are self-focused on soaking, not on being sent by God!

6. You are mystical and are not practical. The Bible is the most practical book in the world about stewarding the earth; it is not a book about heaven or focused on mystical things. When we are heavenly minded we are of earthly good (Colossians 3:1-3).

Charismaniacs are constantly having experiences, interpreting numbers, sequences, dreams, and visions in their lives and spiritualizing everything to the point in which they don't accomplish very much on the earth! Every spiritual or mystical experience that does not directly result in either me knowing God more intimately or being equipped to serve Him better in this world is a waste of time and not worth my attention.

7. You claim to speak to the saints in heaven. I have heard some leaders who have claimed to have conversations with the Old Testament patriarch Abraham and the Apostle Paul and other departed saints of old. This is dangerous and can lead to the saint worship heresy of the Roman Catholic tradition. First Timothy 2:5 says there is only one mediator between God and men: the man Jesus Christ. I don't need to speak to Paul, Mary, Abraham or any of the saints of old. Jesus assigned the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth and to take of His and reveal it unto us (John 14:26; 16:14). Not even a heaven-abiding Paul the Apostle could do better than the Holy Spirit.

8. You always claim angelic appearances. Once I was asked to conduct a television interview with a person called the "Angel Lady." I turned it down because I did not want my name associated with this nonsense, as well as the fact that I would not have been a good host but would have seriously challenged her views and embarrassed her in public.

I don't need anyone teaching me how to connect to my "guardian angel." The only angel I want to know is the Angel of the Lord

who encamps around those who fear the Lord (Psalm 34:7), whom many scholars believe is none other than Jesus Christ.

Although I know I have angels going before me when I do the work of the kingdom, it is not my responsibility to get to know them or give them orders. The Word of God teaches me to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18) and never admonishes me to get to know my guardian angel. This kind of foolishness can lead to angelic worship, which the Apostle Paul said would disqualify us (Colossians 2:18)! Although Hebrews 1:14 says that angels are sent to serve believers, Psalm 91:11 teaches that God is the one who commands them, not me! Giving angels orders bypasses the protocol of prayer that instructs us to approach the Father in the name of Jesus when we have need of something (John 16:23-24). The Bible says nothing regarding believers speaking or commanding angels. God is the Lord of Hosts and He knows best how to dispense His angelic army!

9. You lack biblical depth and doctrinal soundness. Few are the saints in the church that are like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures to see whether or not what Paul the Apostle was preaching was true (Acts 17:11).

Charismaniacs are driven by emotions, subjective feelings and very rarely crack open the Bible for serious study! The less knowledge of the Word you have, the less discernment you will have to know when thoughts and imaginations coming into your brain are from the Lord or from the devil (read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Consequently, charismaniacs are susceptible to false teachings and false prophets who can deceive them with false signs and wonders and unbiblical teachings (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Jesus told the religious leaders of His day they were in error because they knew not the Scriptures nor the power of God (Matthew 22:29). In my opinion, the Scriptures were mentioned first by Jesus because Scripture has to frame our power

encounters so we can have proper discernment! No Scripture equals no discernment, and no discernment equals potential deception.

10. You are independent from the Body of Christ because you are “led by the Spirit.” I have known several charismaniacs who are not connected to any one local church but just float around from church to church because, they told me, they are being led by the Spirit. People like this will never fully mature in the Lord because, like a seed, you have to be planted in the ground in order to reach your potential. (Psalm 92:13 says that being planted in the house of the Lord precedes flourishing!) Even Jesus needs a body to fulfill His present mission (Ephesians 1:22-23). Those not committed to one local church are like a person who dismembers their hands and then expects them to function on their own.

In conclusion, the vast majority of charismatic/Pentecostal believers I know love the Lord. It is these kinds of churches that are expanding global Christianity. Without the charismatic/Pentecostal camp the church would be dead and on the road to extinction by now.

My purpose in writing this article is not to “throw the baby out with the bathwater,” but to encourage the church to embrace the true purpose of Pentecost (Acts 1:8) and discard foolishness that will hinder kingdom advancement.

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