

9 Bad Charismatic Habits We Need to Break

I love the Holy Spirit's gifts. But some of our "Spirit-filled" practices are questionable.

Anybody who has read this column before knows I'm unapologetically charismatic in my theology. I love the Holy Spirit, and I believe the New Testament calls us to make room for manifestations of the Spirit. The apostle Paul gave guidelines for the gift of prophecy; he saw dramatic healings; he experienced supernatural visions; and he told church leaders not to forbid speaking in tongues (see 1 Cor. 14:39). Paul was the epitome of charismatic spirituality.

But not everything we do today in the name of the Holy Spirit is a valid expression of His power. Over the past four decades, we charismatics have invented some lame practices that not only make us look silly but actually turn people off to our message. I figure we started these behaviors because of immaturity—and I can laugh about them because I've done some of them myself. But it's 2013, and I think God expects more of us.

I realize this can be sensitive if you have one or more of these bad habits. But please pray over this list before you blast me for being critical.

1. The body slam. There are times when people feel woozy or weak-kneed when the Holy Spirit touches them. I leave room for that. But can we please stop pushing people to the floor? Any minister who hits, shoves or slaps people at a church altar is being extremely rude. He is also relying on his own swagger to demonstrate he has the power to "slay" people in the Spirit. If you pushed someone to the floor, God had nothing to do with it.

2. The courtesy drop. We've all done it. Many people fall while receiving prayer because they figure it's the spiritual thing to do. But there is nothing in Scripture that says you have to fall to receive healing or an anointing. You receive by faith. It's perfectly fine to stay standing. And you may actually protect yourself from getting stepped on!

3. The song that never ends. I used to love the chorus "Let It Rain" until some churches drove this tune into the ground by playing it 159 times in a row. After the first 30 go-rounds, I want to scream, "Change the channel!" God doesn't listen to us more intently if we are repetitive, as if we were doing a rain dance to make Him hear us. It's OK to end the song and start a new one!

4. The amateur flag corp. Banners and flags became a hot worship trend in the 1980s, and pageantry can still be effective when practiced and performed for an audience. But where did we get the idea that waving flags, sticks or other sharp objects within two feet of people's faces was a smart idea?

5. The wannabe telethon offering. I have been in meetings where the preacher gave a 25-minute offering sermon (before the main message) and then asked everyone in the audience to parade to the front for the next 15 minutes. Yes, giving money to God is worship. But when the offering takes longer than any other part of the service, I start to wonder if we are being taken for a ride.

6. The sermon with seven endings. Speaking of money, I wish I had a dollar for every time a preacher has said, "I'm starting to close." I don't mind a long sermon, and I've been guilty of going over my time limit. But you are flat-out lying if you tell an audience you're finishing when you actually still have half an hour to go.

7. The praise-a-go-go dancers. I love to dance in church—and

it's normal in many of the ethnic congregations I visit. But I fear we unleashed a monster when we encouraged amateur dance teams to hop around on stage in unitards—in front of visitors! It's not unspiritual to ask: "Will this look goofy?"

8. The ear-shattering amp. When the early church prayed, the buildings shook. Today we shake our buildings by turning up the volume of our sound systems. You know they are too loud when church members pop in earplugs during worship. "Charismatic" does not mean "loud," and our spirituality is not measured in decibels.

9. The "jump-start" glossalalia. I will never apologize for the gift of tongues, and I believe it is a wonderful gift every Christian can have. But someone got the idea they could "prime the pump" by asking people to repeat certain phrases in order to uncork a prayer language. Asking someone to say, "I tie my bow tie, I tie my bow tie," is not going to prompt a miracle. Quit manipulating the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul, in laying down guidelines for charismatic gifts, told the Corinthians, "When I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11). As we embrace the Spirit's work, let's allow Him to guide us into maturity so we don't foolishly squander His power.

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