

So Many Charismatic Casualties

Have you been burned by a false prophecy? Did you lose your faith when a promised healing never came? Have you had it with flaky teaching in the name of “new revelation”? If so, you are not alone. There are more charismatic casualties than many of us would care to admit.

But let me start here with an honest confession. My own experience in Pentecostal-Charismatic circles has been far more positive than negative. I have worked with the same leadership team for more than 20 years. I have had the privilege of serving with men and women of integrity all around the world –I’m talking about Pentecostal-Charismatic leaders around the globe.

I was saved in a Pentecostal church in 1971 and transformed by an outpouring of the Spirit in 1982. I was on the front lines of the Brownsville Revival from 1996-2000, and grads from our ministry school are bearing amazing fruit around the world. And while I have seen my share of scandals and false prophecies and leadership abuses and weirdness, it has been the exception far more than the rule.

Sadly, for many others, the opposite has proved true. For them, there is little or nothing good in the Pentecostal-charismatic movement. They have been hurt or confused or abused, causing some to reject the move of the Spirit today and causing others to lose their faith entirely. My heart breaks over all these charismatic casualties, and it is high time that we set our house in order.

I recently read a book critiquing our movement, and in my opinion, it was totally over the top in its criticisms.

Putting aside the scriptural errors I found in the book, it

painted a terribly caricatured picture, one that was so exaggerated it was hardly recognizable to me. Yet as I read reviews to the book posted by readers, I saw that many of them were adding their hearty amen. The picture it painted was all too familiar to them.

I'm aware, of course, that every church (or ministry or denomination or leader) has its critics. You can find horror stories everywhere, and if a church or ministry is big enough, you can find lots of negative reports from those who were allegedly burned by that church or ministry. But when you hear the same story over and over again from people from varied backgrounds, you know that something, somewhere is wrong.

When it comes to the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, there is no shortage of amazing stories of what the Lord is doing in virtually every nation on the planet. This is truly a stunning, Jesus-exalting, multi-generational work of the Holy Spirit. I see no way to deny that for a split second.

Even more importantly, based on Scripture, I find it indisputable that the gifts and power of the Spirit are to continue in operation until Jesus returns.

But that doesn't minimize the damage that has been done in the name of the Spirit, and there are all too many casualties because of unchecked abuses. Out of love for the Lord and love for His people, we need to step higher.

Although my new book, *Playing with Holy Fire*, just came out a few days ago, I'm already seeing a pattern in the reviews being posted by readers.

One reader wrote, "Dr. Michael Brown's very timely and balanced work really addressed where I am right now: disillusioned and heartbroken over the abuses of the contemporary church (this goes beyond the charismatic/Pentecostal movement, though it is centered there). Furthermore, he encouraged my heart, showing me that I

am not alone, and providing a biblical way forward.”

Another commented on Facebook that reading the book was bringing them healing from the negative experiences they had in our circles. Still another wrote, “As a former cessationist who was a cessationist BECAUSE of the abuse I saw happening in exercising the Holy Spirit’s gifts, it concerns me too. Both because these abuses keep a very large section of the church away from desiring and pursuing something God wants them to have, but also because it harms our testimonies among unbelievers. This book will definitely be going to the top of my reading list!”

Other pastors and leaders are saying, “At last! These abuses needed to be addressed.”

So, while I rejoice in what the Spirit is doing around the world, I grieve over the many who have been hurt and disillusioned because of human error and human sin and human carelessness. Truly, we have been given much by the Lord. And that means that much will be required of us.

May we walk worthy of the Holy Spirit’s high calling. And may the name of Jesus be exalted, not tarnished, by our lives and ministries as Pentecostal and charismatic believers.

The stakes are way too high to play games.