

Stick With the Word

There is deep passion in the hearts of the people who traveled to Florida this past summer to experience the Lakeland Outpouring. Since these meetings began in a 700-seat church in early April, the crowd has moved four times to bigger venues, the fervor has intensified and the news has spread worldwide—thanks to God TV and the Internet.

The bandwagon continued for months as thousands of people flew to Florida from overseas to receive spiritual impartation. Yet Todd Bentley, the unconventional evangelist leading these meetings, has had his share of criticism—from secular news reporters who say the healings in Lakeland can't be verified and from Christians who don't like Bentley's tattoos or his theology.

I'm a cheerleader for charismatic renewal, and I believe in healing, prophecy, visions, angels and every other supernatural manifestation in the Bible. But I don't embrace everything happening in Lakeland. When I questioned a few things in two recent online columns, I was accused of being a revival policeman.

The prevailing attitude in our movement today is, "Don't ask questions." In fact, some have manipulatively suggested that people who don't fully endorse this new movement are resisting God and will become "old wineskins." Cults use similar tactics.

The Bible instructs us to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1), yet discernment is discouraged in today's charismatic culture. If we analyze, we are accused of having an "intellectual spirit." We are urged to check our brains at the door and swallow the Kool-Aid.

I'm not drinking it. There are several strange doctrines and practices influencing our movement today:

1. Angel encounters. At one church in Canada in April, a young preacher brought a white feather in a jar and told the audience it belonged to an angel who had visited him. The people sat mesmerized as this man told them the heavenly messenger was coming to heal people and bless them with riches.

Is there any place in the Bible where a disciple of Jesus used an angel's feather to heal someone? Isn't it Jesus alone who heals?

2. Violent prayer. Bentley has popularized the concept of "bammering" people on the stage in Lakeland. Some who have been to the revival now think it's OK to butt a person in the stomach with their knee when they pray for healing. How did we ever reach the conclusion that hitting or slapping people is acceptable? Whether or not British revivalist Smith Wigglesworth used similar tactics, the real question remains: Did Jesus do it?

3. Talking to the dead. Bentley has been criticized for claiming that he interviewed the apostle Paul during a visit to heaven. But it gets much stranger than that. Some leaders in

the prophetic movement say they have seen evangelist William Branham and that he's excited about the Lakeland revival.

Branham, who died in 1965, fell into horrible deception before his death. So it's more than creepy that anyone would want him endorsing anything. If the ghost of William Branham ever shows up in a church I'm visiting, I'm out of there.

4. Uncontrollable manifestations. The Bible tells us that God's presence can cause people to laugh, cry, fall, shake or tremble. We shouldn't judge a revival harshly just because

human flesh reacts when God reveals His power.

At the same time, we shouldn't showcase a person's experience or make a doctrine out of it. In the Corinthian church, people were acting like raving lunatics and turning the church into a free-for-all of unbridled ecstatic behavior. Paul called for order and reminded early Christians that no one under the influence of the Holy Spirit is out of control (see 1 Cor. 14:32).

The most important manifestations we should expect in a revival are repentance, conversions and true holiness. People can get a religious high from jerking, vibrating, screaming or acting drunk. But emotional euphoria doesn't guarantee a heart change—and sometimes it conveniently hides the need for one.

In this deceitful day when the devil is more than eager to send angels of light to trick us, let's remember that the Word of God is the only solid foundation for spiritual experience. If it's not in the Word, we shouldn't want it.

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