

# The Error Of Pentecostalism

Reformed Problems With Pentecostalism Or Areas the Reformed Have a Biblical Problem With the Pentecostal /Charismatic Movement and See it as Inclined to Errors. INTRODUCTION

It seems to me that if we speak of "the error" of Pentecostalism, we may convey the notion that it is intrinsically a sect outside of saving and orthodox Christianity, or that it holds to no orthodox and sound doctrines. I am unable in good conscience to say these things in an unqualified way. And, lest we be misunderstood, and so detract from the real issue at stake, I wish to labor a point.

It is true that some expressions of Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement have so far departed from the tenets of true biblical Christianity that we no longer are able to affirm that those who believe such things may be assured of salvation. They have become like the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, or like classic Roman Catholicism, etc. They have so far departed from the biblical doctrines of Justification by Faith in Christ alone, etc., that we can no longer view them as holding to even the rudiments of saving faith. The marks of the true church cannot be seen in them at all.

Other expressions of Pentecostalism however have not so far departed from the essentials of saving Christianity that we can certainly say they are per se "error." Various of their congregations may even retain marks of the true church. What we understand concerning certain of their practices and doctrines is that to varying degrees we find they are inclined to error, if not in actual error, though still retaining sufficient truth for the marks of Christ's church to be discerned in them. For example, I personally have known of men and congregations which are really quite orthodox and Reformed in doctrine, yet who hold to charismatic tenets. Having discussed at length with them the great doctrines of the Word and saving Christianity, and having been able to observe their life, I can only conclude they are true believers. Some of them put me to shame with their love of the Word and their godly walk. Therefore I must own that in various instances Pentecostalism is a work owned of God, though flawed theologically, and suffering in various ways because of this. In these groups, and even in those we judge on the authority of God's Word to be most certainly the false church, we may yet find orthodox doctrines, such as the Infallibility and Inerrancy of Scripture, the Trinity, etc[1]. .

I have found Jonathan Edwards' criteria for judging whether a work is of God or not, very helpful in judging the Pentecostal movement. Edwards, who wrote at the time of the "Great Awakening" in the United States of America, where there was much error as well as works of God's grace, reasoned that a work may biblically be known to be of God if certain marks could be discerned, even if there was also a mixture of error that should be condemned and opposed. In his *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, Edwards reasoned that any movement which: 1. exalts Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior, and called on people to acknowledge and embrace Him as such; 2. opposes Satan's kingdom by weaning people from sin and worldliness, and points them to the moral law; 3. teaches people to revere and trust the Bible as the Word of God; 4. makes people feel the urgency of eternal issues and the depth of their own lostness without Christ; and 5. stirs up in people a love of the Lord and of others... must be a divine work at its heart, whatever other disfigurements they may have.[2]

Though having given the above qualifications, in the light of God's Word, our absolute rule of faith and life, I sincerely believe that Pentecostalism has tendencies in various areas of their faith and life that lead to the most serious error, and that detract from the glory of God and the good of His church. They become seeds of further error, and develop into more serious species of error. This is simply a matter of historical record, and so we must dissent from them in these matters, and contend earnestly with them over these issues.

I understand that whilst there is much said of the rapid spread of these movements, and great claims made, such as this spread being a sign from God that the movement is the most consistent expression of Christianity, yet. this lofty rhetoric often disguises doctrines and consequences which are deeply and seriously at odds with sound Biblical doctrine, and the true Christian life. A romanticized view of Pentecostalism being a return to early Christianity, needs to be judged not only by a sober evaluation of what was the faith and practice of early biblical Christianity, but also by the whole counsel of God.

I have also taken the liberty of including the Charismatics in the title, and dealing with them in this paper, for they are distinct from Pentecostals by their own definition, though we would see them as involved in the same errors as Pentecostals, and may ordinarily identify them as the same. I will deal with this difference in the historical notes.

We thus seek to deal with areas where we have a biblical problem with the Pentecostal /Charismatic movement and see it as inclined to errors.

Concerning the distinction between "Pentecostalism" and "Charismatic," we would do well to note the points made in the Introduction to the *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*[ 3]. There the editors write: The term "Pentecostal" and "charismatic" are often used interchangeably. Indeed, they do have many features in common, and even for the expert it is frequently difficult to draw a dividing line!

There are two approaches to differentiating between "Pentecostal" and "charismatic." One is theological, the other ecclesiastical. A theological differentiation might be along doctrinal lines, in particular "Spirit baptism" (also called the baptism in or of the Holy Spirit). It is oversimplified, but perhaps useful, to say that "Pentecostals" subscribe to a work of grace subsequent to conversion in which Spirit baptism is evidenced by glossolalia (i.e., speaking in tongues); for some, this baptism must also follow another act of grace, sanctification. "Charismatics," however, do not always advocate either the necessity of a second work of grace or the evidence of glossolalia as an affirmation of Spirit baptism. Yet both emphasize the present work of the Spirit through gifts in the life of the individual and the church.

An ecclesiastical differentiation especially concerns denominational affiliation. Thus "Pentecostal" describes those participating in classical Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), the Church of God in Christ, and the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. "Charismatics" would characterize persons outside these classical Pentecostal denominations, whether they are within mainline denominations or are part of an independent group.

Practically every mainline denomination, including the Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, and various Presbyterian/Reformed Churches now has a charismatic element.[4]

Throughout the remainder of this paper, we will use the term "Pentecostal" to refer to both those who come from the Pentecostal denominations, as well as to charismatics who are within mainline denominations.

To understand Pentecostalism, we need to appreciate the doctrinal background that has led to the rise of these movements. To understand the "tree and fruits" of Pentecostalism, we must be aware of the "roots" that gave rise to, and nurtured that "tree." Pentecostal Churches, and most holding to their tenets, are baptistic, and almost always pre-millennial and dispensational. In many ways they are similar to Arminian Baptists, but differ from such churches primarily on the subject of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals hold to a belief in a distinct "baptism of the Holy Spirit," which gives access to various miraculous gifts. Most hold that the initial evidence of this baptism is speaking in other tongues. "Tongues" are normally not understood without "interpretation," nor does the user usually understand what he is saying.[5]

The biblical criticisms we then would have with Arminian, semiArminian, and Dispensational theology, we generally would have with Pentecostalism. Additionally and more specifically, the theological background of Pentecostalism that we would have problems with as Reformed believers, can be identified in five areas. Two Pentecostal academics have identified them in the following ways.

First, there is the Wesleyan notion of sanctification, in which "the strangle-hold of sin" is seen as "decisively broken," and a form of Christian perfection can be realized.

Second, there is the doctrine of Charles G. Finney, and other "higher life" teachers, who emphasized a second experience of grace subsequent to conversion, which enables believers to be endued with "power" for witnessing and service. This has often been called, "Baptism in the Holy Spirit."

Thirdly, Pentecostalism has been formed by the influence of pre-millennialists, particularly the dispensational type that came from the Plymouth Brethren and the teachings of John Nelson Darby. Fourth, the rise of the "faith healing" movement, added another influence. The final and probably the most significant development was the "restorationist" doctrine that arose out of the interaction of all the above factors. This doctrine arose out of the hermeneutic of the "early rain" upon the early church, and the "latter rain" of the end of history, a concept taken from Joel 2:23. A return to what was perceived as the character of the early church was sought in this prophecy.[6]

Time will not permit us to give an exhaustive analysis of Pentecostal doctrine, nor a complete rebuttal of it. Our purpose now will be to spell out several areas where, as believers who are persuaded that the Reformed faith most consistently summarizes and expresses biblical Christianity, we believe Pentecostalism is in error, or inclined to and leading to error. We presuppose that the doctrines of our Reformed faith are true, and therefore we will not be seeking to establish at any great length our presuppositional doctrines. We simply seek to identify areas of Pentecostalism with which we have grave problems in the light of those things most surely believed among us. Of course, if we were to address ourselves to Pentecostals, we would need to substantiate our doctrines more fully from the Word of God, and from there seek to show how they are at variance with revealed truth.

A TENDENCY TO MAN-CENTERED FAITH RATHER THAN  
A GOD-CENTERED FAITH

We believe Pentecostalism can be criticized on the basis that it is inclined to be centered in man, the creature, rather than God the Creator. This is seen not only in its Armini an-type theology, but also its emphasis on being so experience" centered. An over-emphasis on feelings and the subjective elements of the Christian life makes its followers very inward looking.

So much revolves around themselves in their faith and life. Pentecostals speak and write, for example, of what "God will do for you," and of what "God wants to do if you will let Him"; "the Holy Spirit needs people," and such like[7].

In worship we observe that the emphasis is on that which stimulates the senses and stirs the feelings, more than on the objective truth of God preached, and the soul stirred as we give the Lord, our Redeemer, the glory that is due to His name.

God's Word teaches us that we are to be God-centered, not man-centered. This is clear from Scripture. God does not stand in need of any creatures, and has made man for His glory. Thus, in Acts 17:24, 25 we are told, "God, that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." In Romans 11:36 we read, "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." In Revelation 4:11 we are taught, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created"

Pentecostalism with its generally held belief in man's free will, and the ability of man's will to accept or reject God's salvation, and to do spiritual good in one's own strength, is at variance with giving all the glory to God. In coming to salvation, a Pentecostal tends to see the decision to do so to be dependent upon the will of man and our ability. This is certainly not the construction of Scripture as we read and study it. For example, Romans 9:16, "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy," and Ephesians 2:8, 9, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

This tendency is also seen in the common Pentecostal view of prayer. It is commonly believed by them that man has the power in prayer to change the will of God, or the ability to influence the will of God, and to bring His will subject to our will. There is little appreciation of the absolute sovereignty of God.

There is a real tendency to humanism and a man-centered faith in the concepts and practices of many Pentecostals. I recall speaking to a Pentecostalist about abortion, and she was saying it is because of the error of humanism that we have such things. In the main I agreed. This sincere person then told me that no matter what I could try to show her from the Bible why I did not accept the doctrines of Pentecostalism, she had had such an experience and felt so deeply about it, it had to be true. When I suggested that this was centering our authority and guidance in the creature, and making man and our feelings our ultimate authority, and that this was "humanism" too, she was not impressed. But sadly, it seems to me, this was the case. **A TENDENCY IN THE AREA OF AUTHORITY AND THE BELIEVER'S RULE OF FAITH AND LIFE TO BASE IT UPON THINGS OTHER THAN THE SCRIPTURES**

Pentecostals, whilst accepting the need of having an authority for our beliefs and conduct, and for the guidance in what we are to believe and how we are to live, nevertheless tend to compromise the great truth of Scripture alone as our rule of faith and life.[8]

We cannot overlook the fact that Pentecostals often put "orthodox" Reformed believers to shame at times in their level of commitment and desire to serve the Lord, and to know and do His will. We cannot criticize them for this desire. We do however have a problem with their rule and methodology of service and of knowing the Lord's will.

All too often the rule of faith and life and for guidance is a subjective thing. That is, it is drawn out of self. The various promptings of feelings, impressions, and random thoughts are often perceived of as the "Spirit" moving and guiding believers. Whilst God is sincerely said to be our authority and guide, it is in this very subjective way. Thus, guidance is all too often based on self(the feelings), and not the objective revelation of God and the principles of the Word. In a sense some Pentecostals are at least practically committed to and accept a form of belief in immediate revelation! Butler documents how there is a real tendency to practice, if not believe, that the present canon of Scripture is incomplete, and that the Lord is still giving revelations on a par with Scripture.[9]

Circumstances of life (we would say "Providence") are also frequently seen and used as rules and authorities for conduct. It can become a very subjective, even mystical thing. (We understand that providence is to be a guide in decision-making, but not a rule. Scripture alone is to have that role, as we shall soon seek to show). Thus, many Pentecostals, when seeking guidance in a matter, often speak of the need for prayer, and at times fasting, to know God's will. It is thought that this will often produce a sense of God's will in our spirit or mind. Now we are certainly to pray, and at times to fast too, when it comes to knowing God's will. It is the leaving out of a close study of Scripture and its teachings and principles in the formula that is the problem.

Guidance and decision-making should not be mystical. Some Pentecostals show a mystical use of the Bible for guidance. For example, I know an instance of a keen young man from an Arminian-type college in Australia, who wanted to know God's will as to how he should travel on a journey; should it be by land, sea, or air? He let the Bible fall open and came upon a verse where the word "fly" (as in flee), occurred, and took from that that it was God's will that he should go by airplane on his journey. In the face of such things, one is not sure whether to laugh or cry.[10]

Scripture teaches us that it alone is to be our rule of faith and life. Its objective teachings are to be our absolute authority in all things. That is where we can be sure we hear the voice of God, not in man whose heart is so deceitful. For example, in Isaiah 8:20, we "hear" the Lord instructing us. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." The Lord teaches us in Psalm 119 of the Scriptures' being our absolute guide. For example, verse 105, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Thus Paul teaches us in II Corinthians 10:5, "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

Our understanding of God's Word on this matter is summarized in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter I, Article VI, where we read: "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequences may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men."

Because of this tendency of Pentecostalism to a subjective rule, rather than the objective rule of God's Word, and to bring all thoughts and feelings captive to it, we find that many Pentecostals are anti-doctrinal, and tend to play down the importance of doctrine. Experience is made the central thing, and the basis for our rule of faith and life as well as guidance. As Brunner writes: "It is important to notice that it is not the doctrine, it is the experience of the Holy Spirit which Pentecostals repeatedly assert that they wish to stress. Indeed, the central attraction of the Pentecostal movement, according to one of its major leaders, consists "purely of a powerful, individual, spiritual experience." The final words of this remark - "powerful; individual; spiritual; experience" - contain the dominant experiential notae of Pentecostalism."<sup>[11]</sup>

This explains why there can be such diversity of doctrinal understanding and persuasion among Pentecostals, and why it does not generally worry them. One can observe some Pentecostals ranging in doctrinal beliefs from the "five points of Calvinism" to Roman Catholicism and Mariology almost to eastern mysticism. Yet all are seen as "brothers" if there is the common denominator of "spirit baptism" or "tongues," etc. Experiences all too often become the basis of fellowship rather than the "faith once delivered to the saints," and the faith, hope, and love that is taught in the objective Word of God.

A further result of this tendency to be anti-doctrinal, and to be subjective in the area of authority and our rule of faith and life, is to be anti-Confessional. **A TENDENCY TO HAVE A DEFECTIVE VIEW AND PRACTICE OF HERMENEUTICS**

Pentecostals tend to err in not applying the Scriptural rule of "The analogy of Faith," and to interpret Scripture by the Historical-grammatical-spiritual method.<sup>[12]</sup>

This means, when they come to proofs for their position, they err, we believe, because of misunderstanding Scripture, and of mis-interpreting it. Many are dispensationalist, and have little or no sense of the historical development of revelation. We cannot under-emphasize the problems that occur when we impose a dispensational framework on the Scriptures, and try to squash it into that mould. Vanderwaal gives a succinct description and rebuttal of this matter in his book, Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy.<sup>[13]</sup>

Graffin, illustrating how a lack of a historical, grammatical, spiritual hermeneutic greatly influences our view and use of the book of Acts, for example, writes: "Of first importance, hardly capable of being overemphasized, is a general hermeneutical consideration concerning the way Acts is to be read. If, as is too often the case, Acts is read primarily as more or less random samplings of earliest Christian piety and practice, as a compilation of illustrations taken from the early history and experience of the church - a more or less loose collection of edifying and inspiring episodes, usually with the nuance that they are from the "good old days, when Christians were really Christian" - then we will tend to become preoccupied with the experience of particular individuals and groups recorded there, to idealize that experience, and to try to recapture it for ourselves. But if, as ought to be the case, Acts is read with an eye for its careful overall composition and what we will presently see is one of Luke's central purposes in writing, then these passages and the experiences they record come into proper focus."<sup>[14]</sup>

One of the sad consequences of this faulty hermeneutic is to destroy or deform the doctrine of God's covenant. Because we believe that this doctrine is so basic to understanding God's relationship to man, and man's understanding of the Bible, to err here is to err most seriously. We believe that a right appreciation of the doctrine of God's covenant is essential to the health and welfare of the church. Dispensationalism must stand or fall with its view of God's covenant. Many of the teachings and practices of Pentecostalism are rooted in dispensationalism, and the collapse of this hermeneutic would be a mortal wound to the movement.

Crenshaw and Grover, referring to Dabney, draw out various tendencies that either accompany or are inherent to dispensationalism. Among those mentioned are: defining saving faith as being mental assent; assurance of salvation as mental assent and having nothing to do with fruit in one's life; justification not based on the active obedience of Christ to God's law but only on His Cross-work; sanctification an optional work of grace that begins if the saints obey some

command, sometimes called the victorious life; regeneration is the adding of something new but not the changing of the person himself, resulting in two natures; "literal" hermeneutic; no Christian Sabbath and rejection or weakening of the moral law; discovering God's will very often by prayer or by some mystical feeling of the heart; and pre-millennial and pietistic retreat from involvement in the world.

Whilst we agree that there are differences of administration in the history of God's dealings with man, they are essentially one Covenant. Our view of the church is profoundly affected by dispensationalism. Our view of eschatology is affected. How we live, and our world-and-life view, are also seriously affected. A faulty hermeneutics has far-reaching practical consequences.[15]

These same writers deal with several areas where Pentecostals leave themselves open for criticism in the area of hermeneutics. For example, their "literal" hermeneutic.[16] A TENDENCY TO COMPROMISE THE GREAT PILLARS OF BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY AND PROTESTANTISM, THE "SOLAS"

We believe that the great foundational truths taught in the Bible, and thus the pillars of true biblical faith, are the principles of SOLA SCRIPTURA, SOLA DEO GLORIA, SOLO CHRISTO, SOLA FIDE, and SOLA GRATIA. (For example, Isa. 8:20 ; II Tim. 3:16 , 17 ; Rom. 11:36 ; I Cor. 10:31 ; John 14:6 ; Eph. 1:19-22 ; I Tim. 2:5 ; Rom. 5:1 ; Eph. 2:8, 9 ; etc.)

Whilst it is true that Pentecostalism professes belief in Scripture, God's glory, Christ, faith, and grace, few are able to say "sola." For many Pentecostals, it is God's Word plus experience, or new revelations, etc., and not Scripture alone.[17]

For many it is grace and faith, but also the addition of our works of experience and the charismata, and not faith and grace alone that saves us. Salvation or justification is made, by some, more than faith alone. They add the gifts! In fact, some teach that one cannot be a true believer, unless he has had the "baptism of the Holy Spirit," and manifests this in speaking in tongues.

For many it is Christ, but also the addition of self and a resting on experience or simply a "decision" for salvation, and not Christ alone for salvation. There is also the tendency to neglect the atonement of Christ; and soteriology is not so much concerned with the atonement and work of Christ, as with the gifts and work of the Spirit.

The glory of God is often spoken of, yet the man-centered theology inherent in Pentecostalism denies all the glory of God. A TENDENCY TO ERR IN THE AREA OF JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

Pentecostals tend to confuse justification and sanctification. We understand justification, to use the words of our Larger Catechism, biblically to be: "a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and His righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation."

We understand sanctification to be: "a work of God's grace, whereby they whom God hath, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, are in time, through the powerful operation of His Spirit applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin, and rise unto newness of life."

Larger Catechism number 77 teaches us that these two great doctrines of God's grace differ. "Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification His Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth to the exercise thereof; in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other it is subdued: the one doth equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection."

Pentecostals are prone not to recognize the differences, and to see sanctification as justification, and to base our acceptance by God upon that which is worked in us, or perceived as God's work in us, as distinct from an act of God once and for all. Or, on the other hand, to see sanctification as an act, rather than a work, and think we are made perfectly holy by the act of faith in Christ. Righteousness is seen by some as a grace "infused" in us, rather than a judicial act of God based on Christ's work alone.

For many Pentecostals, sanctification is defined in terms of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (healings, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, etc. - cf. I Cor. 12:4ff. ). The things most often longed for, esteemed, and sought after are the extra-ordinary manifestations of the apostolic era, the "power" of the apostles, and the Holy Spirit, etc.

The work often looked for in believers subsequent to conversion is not increase of biblical knowledge, wisdom, grace, and the fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, etc. - cf. Gal. 5:22ff. ). Holiness and a godly walk as historically understood as the subsequent work of the Holy Spirit are neglected or ignored.[18]

Sanctification is all too often seen as an emotional state, and "power" rather than a conformity to the objective standards of God's holy law and revelation. Sanctification is tested by a very subjective standard. This is not to say sanctification is not a profound internal and spiritual work, but it is to have objective fruits, and to be judged by an objective standard. Charles Rodman points this out when he writes: "The fact that the extra-ordinary gifts had no connection with the power of godliness is seen in the church at Corinth. Although the members of the church possessed a variety of extra-ordinary gifts, yet we read of them being beset with contention and division, etc., of whom the Apostle says they were yet carnal (I Cor. 3:3 )."[19]

The blessed peace of justification can be destroyed by the bondage of a "performance syndrome." That is, "If you do this, God will do that," "If you pray and ask for something, and you do not get it, it is because you do not have enough faith," if you do not "save" so many souls, there is something wrong with you. A TENDENCY TO IMBALANCE IN PROCLAIMING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

The Apostle himself declares how important the whole counsel of God is for the church both to believe and to declare. "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God (Acts 20:26, 27) ."

In Pentecostalism, there is a movement away from the central doctrines of the Word of God, such as the nature and attributes of God, of Christ the Mediator, God's covenant, sin, atonement, salvation, the law, service, etc., to an excessive pre-occupation with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, such as extra-ordinary gifts, the extra-ordinary devils, "higher experiences," etc. It is not that these matters are not in the Word of God, it is that they are taken out of context all too often, and dealt with out of proportion and emphasis to how Scripture itself deals with them, and the weightier matters of the Word are all too often overlooked.

There is a selective use of Scripture, not a full-orbed and comprehensive use. This also leads to inconsistencies between biblical doctrine and practice. For example, many Pentecostalists make much ado about prophets and their prophecies, yet the tests Scripture gives about true and false prophets (Deut. 13:1-5 ; 18:22 ) is all too often overlooked, and many so-called prophets have made predictions that have proved false, yet they have not been rejected. In many circles, women are allowed to minister publicly in the church, and there are also women ministers, in spite of the fact that Scripture forbids women to hold such office (1Tim. 2:11, 12 ). Another example of an all too common inconsistency is the insistence of many that speaking in tongues is the proof of having received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, though Paul clearly teaches in I Corinthians 12:29, 30 , that there are diversities of manifestations of the Spirit in the church, and not all have the gift of tongues.[20] A TENDENCY TO ANTI-NOMIANISM

Most Pentecostalists are dispensationalists. They are thus prone to have a low view of the law of God. The old cliché of "not under the law but grace" and "love, not the law," is heard. God's law as summarized in the ten commandments, is belittled, or ignored. Our understanding of the moral law is summarized in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter XIX, Article V, which reads: "The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ in the Gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation."

Thus there is a tendency for libertinism, that is, every man does what is right in his own eyes. They would say we are not to be too judgmental. Worldliness, such as sabbath desecration, is common.[21] The guilt over sin that the law brings is not really evident in such professors. There is little sense of sin and remaining corruption. There is little appreciation of the law as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, or as a rule of thankfulness for salvation given in Christ.

Many Pentecostalists teach that the law is perfectly kept by Christians (perfectionism)[22], and this has a tendency to make such people indifferent to the law, and its role in the life of the believer. A TENDENCY TO AN UN-BIBLICAL WORLD AND LIFE VIEW

It appears from the writings and observable practices of Pentecostalists that they are inclined to view life and the world around us as an extraordinary world, and that life exists in a state of perpetual extra-ordinary happenings, and not ordinary. They "look for miracles" every day in daily life, as it were. Thus there is a problem with the use of means and second causes (cf. Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter V, Articles II & III).

Shaw expresses our understanding of God's Word when he writes: "In His ordinary providence God works by means, and according to the general laws established by His own wisdom: we are therefore, bound to use the means which He has appointed, and if we neglect these, we cannot expect to obtain the end." [23]

Practically this means several things. In the area of health, for example, there is a reliance on treatment by prayer and faith-healings and fastings, and to see this as the proper way to deal with such matters.[24] It is not that we believe we ought not to pray for healing when sick. It is just that we understand, in opposition to Pentecostalism, that we are called of God at the same time to use whatever practical means are within our reach. In the area of guidance, there is a tendency to be led by "signs" or, as some speak of it, as "putting out a fleece." Some extra-ordinary happening will be used to guide in a matter, or an extra-ordinary meaning is read into some quite ordinary happening, and used for decision-making. In the areas of mission work and the support of the ministry, as another example, there is the concept of "faith missions." That is, men believe that if they go out to serve God, He will "just provide." Of course, God can do that, and has at various times done so. But the ordinary way we are to expect help is to use the means of support from the church of God. It is only in extra-ordinary circumstances, such as in times of persecution, etc., that we can expect assistance from God without the use of means.

In this area of sickness, there is also the tendency to see sickness as a result of a specific sin we have committed, and not simply as part of the general curse. It is similar to the view that some Jews had in Bible times.

This world is often viewed as the devil's world. It is not so much the sovereignty of God in the world, but Satan. It is not so much the imminence of God, but the devil. Many are in fear and dread of the devil. They are seeing spirits good and evil around them, and are in bondage to fear of evil spirits and the power of the devil. There is seemingly a preoccupation in some quarters with devil-possession and having evil spirits. Often personal responsibility is denied or weakened by blaming un-Christian habits and actions on the devil or some evil spirit. There is not much appreciation for the natural corruption of the heart.

Whilst the lord and spiritual things are seen as related to all of life (and this essentially is correct, we believe), there is a tendency to see life only in terms of invisible and subjective concepts.

Pentecostals tend to neglect or play down, in various ways, the use of means and of second causes.  
AN INCLINATION TO ERROR IN THE AREA OF APOLOGETICS

When it comes to the matter of giving a reason for the hope that lies within us (1 Pet. 3:15), many Pentecostals resort to, and rely upon, a "feeling" or "experience" as the basis for their reason. They are essentially subjective or existential in their apologetics. The objective revelation of God in creation and Scripture is often not appreciated. It is not that there is not a place, a necessary place, for feelings and experience; it is just that we believe our apology ought to be based upon objective data. This is surely the Scriptural pattern. For example, Jephthah's argument (Jud. 11:12-28); the way this matter is dealt with in the Psalms (e.g., Ps. 105); Luke's approach (Luke 1:1-4); Stephen's apology (Acts 7); Paul's argued basis of the gospel (Rom. 1:1-4); the basis John uses to argue the trust-worthiness of the gospel (I John 1:1-4); etc.[25] A TENDENCY TO AN IMPROPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRINITY AND THE WORKS AND PROPERTIES OF THE PERSONS OF THE GODHEAD

The doctrine of the Trinity is a commonly held belief among Pentecostals, though there are exceptions.[26] There is a tendency, however, not to deny, but to distort the biblical work of the "persons" of the Godhead. There is an unbiblical emphasis on the Holy Spirit in many quarters, at the cost of the Father and the Son, and their respective works. The "procession" of the Holy Spirit from the Father and Son is not appreciated. One thus can find Pentecostal writers arguing for "the supremacy of the Holy Spirit," and "to make Him our lord and Ruler." [27]

It is simply a matter of observation, that nearly all Pentecostals make the doctrine of the person and works of the Holy Spirit to be almost the major Person and work of the Godhead. But this is not the emphasis of Scripture. The Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ (John 16:13, 14); and acts not by Himself, but "proceeds" from the Father and Son (John 15:26), and is called the Spirit of Christ and of the Son (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6). It is soteriology, and the character and person and works of the Father and Son that are preeminently emphasized in Scripture, not the Holy Spirit, though we glorify Him with the Father and Son, the Triune God of our salvation. A TENDENCY TO ERR IN THE AREA OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

There are several areas in their doctrine and attitude towards the church where Pentecostals leave themselves open, we believe, for criticism. We mention several. The Basis of Unity

Pentecostals rightly, on the whole, have a catholic view of the church. They believe in its universality and unity. The problem is that all too often their unity and bond is found, not in the common profession of a body of objective doctrines and practices (that is, "the faith once delivered to the saints"), but rather in a common experience. The Pentecostal movement is generally very ecumenical. For example, one can observe Evangelical and Fundamental Pentecostals quite happily fraternizing with Roman Catholics and Liberals.[28]

Many Pentecostals are attracted to a strong personality, and set up leaders to be followed even when those leaders have shown themselves all too often to be unworthy of respect and as incompetent undershepherds. The secular media, sadly, is often illustrating this point.

There is little parity of the eldership, the biblical pattern, and the commitment of members is all too often to personality and experience rather than to a body of belief and practice, and the living out of those beliefs and practices. Few if any Pentecostal churches are Presbyterian in government. They are more an oligarchy or an autocratic rule. The Continuity of the Church

Many Pentecostals are dispensational, and this affects their view of the church, and presents, in our analysis, various problems with regard to the church. For example, many cannot conceive of the church of Jesus Christ existing before the day of Pentecost. It was as if Abraham never "saw Christ's day and was glad" (John 8:56).

They lose the history of the church in the Old Testament, and see it only as useful, all too often, for illustrating New Testament truths, never as containing data and truths that the New Testament does not contain (for example, Psalm 22 speaking of things that Jesus Christ our Lord thought and felt whilst on the cross that are not recorded in the gospels).

Most Pentecostals are baptistic in their view of the church and the place of children in it. Few are Covenantal and paedobaptist. They view the church only as New Testament, and so children are viewed as not members because Pentecostals fail to see their covenantal relationship to the Lord.

Church membership is very individualized, and the family and children are not seen as integral parts of the structure of the church, though Pentecostals are pro-family and children. All too often children are seen almost as "pagans," and, until they have had a conversion experience, are not seen as within the church of God. They tend to be vague and uncertain about the salvation of children who are not capable of an intelligent faith and profession, and often say they are saved if they die in infancy, because of God's love. The great facts of original sin, the need of atonement, even for a newborn child, seems to be unappreciated. Many of these things, we suggest, are the result of their dispensational thinking, and their neglect of the Old Testament, and the essential unity of the church and the Old and New Testaments.[29] Pentecostals Tend to a Mystical View of the Church

Pentecostals tend to neglect the visible organized aspect of the church. The church is seen as made up chiefly of those who have had "an experience of the Holy Ghost." It makes classes of Christians, so that even in those instances where they might allow that one can be a true believer, and not have had the baptism of the Holy Spirit, such are seen as "inferior" or "weak" believers. They tend to make the church to exist within the church. This is especially true of this movement when it enters more orthodox denominations. One group is seen as more spiritual than the other. Pentecostalism has a sad record of causing schism in the body of Christ, partly because of their lack of appreciation for the visible church, and the importance of it. Pentecostals Neglect Biblically Regulated Worship

Macleod draws out this point. He writes: "The Reformers' approach to worship, for example, was governed by the Puritan principle: Nothing was to be imposed on the worshiping congregation unless it was sanctioned by Scripture... Furthermore, they regarded it as critical! There could be no bishops, no altars, no incense, no vestments, no Prayer Book because there was no authority for such things in the Word of God. Today, however, people ... want to introduce ballet, mime, and drama into the church's worship. People who claim to be calling us back to primitive, apostolic Christianity are creating a new ecclesiastical office: choreographer. It does not occur to such men to ask, Is there divine authority for this? Far less do they think of asking, On what plane does worship operate? Is it on the horizontal (what people like) or on the vertical (what is well-pleasing to God)? Our plays, mimes, and dramas may be very enjoyable and even deeply moving. But have we any reason whatever to think that God wants them and is pleased with them?"[30] THERE IS AN INCLINATION TO ERR IN WHAT THE BASIS OF ASSURANCE OF SALVATION IS

We understand that the basis upon which assurance of salvation rests is the objective promises of God in His Word, though we readily acknowledge that this assurance is also a subjective work of grace in our conscious and emotional being.

Many Pentecostals, because of the very subjective and emotional nature of their profession, place their assurance upon their feelings, and have a faith based upon that. Of course, feelings fluctuate, and thus their assurance is often shaken and uncertain. They also tend to think that if they have no "sense" of the "presence" of the Lord, they have lost their salvation. Many suffer acute doubts and fears if they cannot maintain an "emotional high" in spiritual matters.

The only sure foundation for our assurance is a faith resting, not upon our feelings, but upon the finished work of God, the Lord of our salvation, in Christ Jesus (cf. Dabney and the example of "will the bridge carry me across?").

Most Pentecostals, because of this tendency to base one's assurance of salvation upon self and an inward sense, believe that one can truly be saved, but then be lost again, and they deny the wonderful doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

This tendency to "emotionalism" has rather sad consequences at times in other areas. For example, those with a really credible profession of faith are often all their life in terrors, and with no peace and happiness in believing. Of course,

Pentecostals are not unique in having this problem. Even some "strains" of professing Reformed believers suffer from it as well. It is just that Pentecostalism is more liable to this than are other professions. It can lead to a real spiritual instability of life. Instability not only "spiritual," but also instability in relationships and family and work and life generally. It can tie people up in a world of doubt and uncertainty. Pentecostals tend to try to make decisions based upon uncertain and changeable promptings, as feelings tend to be. Health, even the state of the weather, etc., thus twist and turn such believers.

Whilst zeal is commended to us in Scripture, it is commended with the qualification of knowledge (Ps.47:7). Much of the zeal in Pentecostal circles, because of its emotional base, becomes so much "hype" at times. To be accepted and seen as "excelling," and to be respected and looked up to, it is expected that one must "perform." Thus, there is a pressure to keep on a "high," and meetings for worship and the life of the church are kept on an artificial level of high emotional tension. This often leads to "burn out" or emotional exhaustion, with resultant personality disturbances and depression.

#### HOW PENTECOSTALISM IS A CHALLENGE TO REFORMED BELIEVERS

J.C. Ryle, when asked on one occasion why the Lord allowed the Quakers to exist, answered along the line that they were not right just because they had success with numbers. Ryle pointed out that we could not deny that God in His providence allowed them to come into existence for a purpose. He saw them as a rebuke in some ways to the "established" churches. So too, it seems to me, there are some aspects of Pentecostalism that we perhaps need rebuking over, and that we should take stock of the state of affairs in our own house.

Bruner also makes a similar point when he writes: "In terms of the church's theology and mission Pentecostalism's significance may be that it incarnates a neglected reality of the New Testament church: the Holy Spirit in the experience of believers. What to some may seem an overemphasis of the Spirit and especially of the Spirit's more noticeable operations may, perhaps, be intended to startle the church into an awareness of its little emphasis of the same Spirit. Perhaps in the divine perspective a church that gives too much attention to the Spirit is no more culpable - perhaps less - than a church that gives him too little. Perhaps the Pentecostal movement is a voice - albeit an ecstatic and at times a harsh voice - calling the people to hear what the Spirit is capable of saying to and doing with a church that listens." [31]

I suggest the following examples may be areas in which we can be challenged by Pentecostalism: First, reality of day-by-day walk with the Lord and in His ways. Second, the zeal and commitment and enthusiasm and incentive that they have to serve the Lord and to get things done. Third, their witness and sharing and speaking Out. They are very open to speak of the Lord. When together, there is prolonged and serious discussion, not simply chit-chat. Fourth, they are well-organized to gather and nurture. And, fifth, their desire to see all of life as spiritual, and the Lord in all things.

#### CONCLUSION

Pentecostalism is a movement that cannot be ignored today. I believe that only the Reformed faith can satisfactorily answer the claims, and refute the teachings of it. I believe it is not compatible with the theology of the Reformation, and thus not compatible with the teachings of God's Word. Whilst there are some things we can appreciate about it, and can recognize there are true believers in it, yet it contains serious errors, and is inclined to errors, that hamper the cause of truth and the health of the church.

Rev. Chris Coleborn

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- FOOTNOTES
1. An example of such a congregation was one formed some years ago by the late Dr. John A Schep, who was Professor of New Testament and Pastoral Theology at the Reformed Theological College, Geelong for a time. Prof. Schep, turned to Pentecostalism, but to the end retained in so many other ways a profession of the doctrines and practices of the Reformed faith.
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