

Sour Grapes

Vineyardism and the Toronto Blessing.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Galatians 5:22-24, NASB, Emphasis Added

Mother's Day, 1994. When standing to be recognized in the church gathering, many mothers "fell and remained on the floor for about 20 minutes, laughing." At a previous January service, the "participants were swept up in a fervor of what they said was the power of the Holy Spirit. They laughed or shook uncontrollably and fell to the floor." [1]

The pastor of the church tells congregants:

Do we want you to shake and fall down? Are we disappointed when you don't? Well, a little bit. We want you to focus so much that you are overwhelmed. . . . When the living God overwhelms you, it shows. It's a big deal. Call it the baptism in the Spirit. Call it being nuked. [2]

About what happened at one Vineyard gathering, a pastor reported of a fellow who, "described [his] . . . experience as equivalent to six months of therapy." [3]

What am I to believe about these manifestations? Do they come from the Holy Spirit? Or, in failing to appreciate and apply the "Toronto Blessing," am I missing something that could bless my personal Christian walk and the congregation I pastor?

Assurance for me regarding this issue can only come through the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Archibald Alexander wrote:

There is nothing more necessary than to distinguish between true and false experiences in religion And in making this discrimination, there is no other test but the infallible Word of God; let every thought, motive, impulse, and emotion be brought to this touchstone. [4]

To this pastor's mind it stands axiomatic and logically consistent that the spiritual work of God will in nowise contradict the Scriptures inspired by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:21). Through Scripture, the Spirit controls my heart--that is, my intellect (2 Corinthians 10:5), my emotion (2 Peter 1:4), and my will (Psalm 40:8).

Charismatic chaos was consuming the church at Corinth. To regulate the excesses in that

assembly during public worship, the Apostle Paul set forth guidelines for both the discernment and control of spiritual gifts, regulations which in principle are also appropriate for the phenomena occurring in some churches today--laughing, shaking, falling down, writhing on the floor, and in some extreme instances, barking.

Self-control, a genuine spiritual fruit, should characterize all who "**walk in the Spirit**" (Galatians 5:23). Some symptoms evidenced by the Toronto Blessing, a spiritual phenomena that first arose at a Toronto airport in the mid-1990s and remains influential today, impress me to be exactly the opposite--*people being out of control!* Applying the principle of self-control to the charismata, Paul wrote, "**the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets; for God is not a God of confusion**" (I Corinthians 14:32-33, NASB). As Leon Morris comments, prophets could never claim that they spoke by "irresistible divine compulsion." [5]

In addition, at the end of the chapter Paul concluded, "**But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner**" (I Corinthians 14:40). The effects of uncontrolled physical and emotional phenomena do not impress me as being orderly. I must therefore, question the appropriateness of such emotionalism for the nurture of my soul and those to whom I minister.

Among some congregations, inbred and eccentric phenomena, even made public in some instances on television, not only give unbelievers a wrong impression about the essence of the gospel, but also fail to impress many observant believers like myself. As the Apostle Paul questioned, "**If . . . ungifted men or unbelievers enter [or tune in?], will they not say that you are mad?**" (I Corinthians 14:23).

As derived from this Corinthian context, these apostolic principles suggest that authentic spiritual experience does not derive from "being nuked." In fact, apostolic endorsement for the public display of charismania is nonexistent.

In contrast to such razzle-dazzle, the intent of the Holy Spirit's ministry is to draw attention to Jesus, not to Himself (John 15:26). Then after the regeneration of a person's heart and over a period of time, the Spirit quietly personalizes His supernatural and extraordinary work in our lives by producing Christ likeness characterized by among other things, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, *self-control*, forgiveness, and submission (Galatians 5:22-24; Ephesians 4:29-32; 5:18-6:40).

ENDNOTES

[1] Leigh Ann Eagleston, "The Rapture, Evangelicals say uncontrolled emotions a sign of God's 'Toronto Blessing' has arrived," *The Grand Rapids Press*, September 17, 1994, B1, B3.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1978): xviii.

[5] Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970): 200.