

Falling for the Lie

Questions & Answers about the "Toronto Blessing"

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(Copied in entirety from <http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/leaflets.htm>)

The Greek word for 'discernment' in the New Testament is 'diakrisis' (e.g. 'the discernment of spirits', 1 Cor.12:10). It is our heartfelt concern to promote such discernment amidst the confusion of the present religious scene. This leaflet is designed to address some of the issues raised by those who are involved with the so-called 'Toronto Blessing' — a religious craze which has been imported from a church in Canada involving falling down, laughing, gibbering, trembling and other phenomena. It is intended to complement the leaflet, *We All Fall Down: An Investigation into the Experience Known as 'Slain in the Spirit'*, which compares this Pentecostal-Charismatic ritual with the evidence of the Scriptures and exposes its true origins. The following questions are representative of those being put forward by many perplexed people today.

"We have been praying for revival for years; so when we heard about the church in Toronto, we paid for our Pastor to go there so that he could bring the Holy Spirit back to our church"

It is very laudable that you should be praying for revival, but why is it necessary to go across the Atlantic to bring the Holy Spirit to your church? This is the Spirit of Almighty God of whom you are speaking — the One who 'blows where [He] wishes' (Jn.3:8) and who already abides in every true believer. What kind of a 'god' is it that can be harnessed in such a way that we can infallibly bring revival to our churches by hopping on a plane? This 'Aladdin's Lamp' idea of the Holy Spirit as a 'genie' that one can transport across the world is a most profane concept. If the Lord wills to fan the flames of genuine revival in your church, He will do so in His own way and in His own time.

"But doesn't the Bible promise that there will be 'times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord'?"

This quotation is derived from the Bible text in Acts 3:19. We must be careful to ensure that phrases and passages from Scripture are not lifted from their context and used to support things with which they have no connection, for that is how cultists and heretics have always approached the Word of God. So let us discover what this text actually means.

Within the context of Peter's sermon, how one interprets the promise of 'times of refreshing' depends on whether the phrase refers to the first part of v.19, 'Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...', or what follows in verses 20-21 about the 'restoration of all things' after the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The 'times of refreshing' could therefore refer to either of these two concepts, that is, 1) The lifelong consolation which comes to all believers as a result of their consciousness of pardon and reconciliation to God, or 2) The blessed state of believers in their eternal rest in heaven after the Lord's return. Whichever it is, there is a vast gulf between what the Bible means here by 'times of refreshing' and the self-indulgent phenomena that are being hyped-up in so many churches today.

"Some people in our church have been making lots of animal noises. Isn't there something about that in the Bible?"

The fact that animal noises are mentioned in the Bible does not mean that we are to set about imitating them. However, roaring, howling, and wailing are among the sounds that are becoming

common in some Charismatic churches. It has even been reported that a man crowed like a cockerel in a service, and the word of interpretation given was 'The Lord says "A new day is dawning"' (The Observer, 4/9/94, News, p.3)! The justification for these weird interjections has been found in Bible texts such as, 'Therefore I will wail and howl... I will make a wailing like the jackals and a mourning like the ostriches' (Mic.1:8). Here the prophet Micah is lamenting in a typical Middle Eastern fashion the awfulness of God's judgement on Judah. The biblical imagery is that of a grief-stricken mourner and bears no relation to the frivolity associated with the 'Toronto Blessing'. It is a sheer travesty to equate the animal noises made in Charismatic churches today with the unique, Divinely-appointed ministry of certain Old Testament prophets.

Similarly, the lion-like roaring noises we find in Charismatic worship services are justified on the basis that God is said to 'roar like a lion' (e.g. Jer.25:30; Hos.11:10). But it is ludicrous to imagine that people can randomly mimic this figurative portrayal of God in His role as the Divine judge. Let us not forget that the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ are also said to roar like a lion (Psa. 22:12-13). And the devil himself is spoken of as 'a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour' (1 Pet.5:8). This shows the extreme folly of plucking Bible passages from their context in order to justify deviant behaviour in churches.

"But weren't the disciples 'drunk in the Spirit' at Pentecost in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles?"

No, they most certainly were not. Moreover, to compare the behaviour of those who are 'slain in the spirit' in Pentecostal-Charismatic churches today with the miraculous event which has been recorded in Acts chapter 2 shows a complete misunderstanding of what was taking place.

This was the inauguration of the New Testament Church. Is it at all feasible that the Lord would have His disciples appear like a band of town drunks at a time when establishing the honour and integrity of the Church was all-important? These disciples were 'speaking...the wonderful works of God' (v.11), not exhibiting the kind of religious phenomena which could be found in the many mystery religions abounding in the Mediterranean countries in those days. If the disciples at the Pentecost gathering had been behaving like those smitten with the 'Toronto experience' of today, then this would have made the Church indistinguishable from those fanatical pagan cults and brought it into disrepute.

It is true that some of the bystanders (and it was only some) said that the disciples were 'full of new wine' (v.13). But this was purely by way of mockery and had no substance to it. They were simply trying to ridicule the disciples in a spirit of unbelief. For this reason, it would be most unreliable to base our understanding of the disciples' behaviour on the taunts of such mockers. Their gibes about drunkenness cannot possibly have been because the disciples were falling to the floor, or laughing hysterically, or grinning inanely, or uttering gibberish, or crowing like cockerels, or roaring like lions, or waving their arms in the air, or holding their quaking hands out in front of them, such as happens to those stricken with the so-called 'Toronto Blessing'. Such unruly and disreputable behaviour at that delicate moment of Church history would have undermined everything which was being established.

The speaking of this variety of ethnic languages was a manifest reversal of the confounding judgement which took place at the Tower of Babel (Gen.11:1-9). It was sounding forth that great truth that there is neither 'Jew nor Greek...in Christ Jesus', and was a figurative representation of the 'all nations' composition of the New Jerusalem. To cite the God-honouring events of Acts 2 in support of quasi-drunken behaviour in church services today is not only in defiance of Paul's dictum that all things should 'be done decently and in order' (1 Cor.14:40), but it also makes a mockery of the fact that to be filled with the Spirit is diametrically opposed to the state of drunkenness (Eph. 5:18).

"If the 'Toronto Blessing' is not a Christian experience, how come I had a great sense of peace when it happened to me?"

The fact that you have a general sense of well-being after an experience in no way proves that it is from the Lord, or that it is conducive to Christian growth. The objective validity of an experience can never be measured by the subjective feelings associated with it.

Psycho-religious activities often engender what is known as an 'Alpha-wave' brain-state, in which a person will have an experience of great peace and well-being. But this in no way proves that one is 'resting in the Holy Spirit', as the saying goes, because this same state can be reproduced in Yogic meditation, occult rituals, an opium den, or even a public house!

It is therefore highly unlikely that the pleasant sensations which occur in the wake of the Pentecostal-Charismatic 'slain in the spirit' experience have anything whatsoever to do with the Holy Spirit, because God does not bless disobedience to His Word. Such phenomena not only have no biblical pedigree but they have been entirely absent in orthodox Christian circles throughout this age, having only ever been practised among mystery religions, mystical orders, shamanistic cults and pagan sects. It was not until the revivalist excesses of the so-called 'Holiness Movement' in the latter half of the 19th century that such phenomena began to seduce professing Christians en masse into their powerful wake.

The fact that you feel so high after having indulged in non-Christian psycho-religious experiences merely shows that Satan has performed a consummate work in your life. For his aim with the millions of gullible Christians in the world today is to give them a 'hands-on-feel-good' experience while introducing them to 'Christianised' occult techniques and practices. What so many today fail to understand is that when Satan determines to deceive professing Christians, he comes as an angel of light rather than the prince of darkness (2 Cor.11:14). When you understand how Satan really operates, you will realise that an occult experience need not be one of spine-tingling horror but can fill you with feelings of joy and release. Satan is the master of the 'buzz' -- the religious and psychological high; and he is exercising his craft today on a massive scale.

How easily bewitched professing believers are today! It is not on any subjective physical or emotional experiences that the Christian should base his sense of peace but, rather, on the objective fact of his having been reconciled to God through the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom.5:1). There is a vast difference between 'feelings' of peace and actually knowing that peace has been made. The first is an artificial peace based on subjective experience, while the latter is a true peace rooted in the objective work of Christ. The world will offer you an earthbound peace which is either the space between two wars or the illusion of bliss (Jn.14:27). But the Lord Jesus Christ brings about an actual condition of peace which is permanent and spiritual -- a state which persists even in times of affliction, and regardless of how 'good' or 'bad' we may feel. As a wise teacher from a former era has put it:

"While we must fight throughout this life under the cross, our condition is harsh and wretched... For this reason we ought to know that the happiness promised us in Christ does not consist in outward advantages such as leading a joyous and peaceful life, having rich possessions, being safe from all harm, and abounding with delights such as the flesh commonly longs after. No, our happiness belongs to the heavenly life!"

Understanding this mighty fact is the key to true Christian growth, which does not come through psychological catharsis, but through obedience to God's Word (1 Pet.2:1-3) and the hard road of suffering and adversity (Rom.5:3-4). Christians are exiles in a hostile world; but their joy comes through knowing that they have an abundance of heavenly treasures (1 Pet.1:3-5). If your peace and joy comes from being 'slain in the spirit' -- or any other psycho-religious experience -- then you have no conception of the heavenly life and are merely laying up for yourself treasures on earth.

"If this is not a genuine Christian experience, why do those who undergo it feel an apparent sense of renewed faith and zeal for God? Aren't we to judge things 'by their fruits'?"

It may surprise you to learn that increased devotion, reform of one's personal life, dedication to the faith and zeal for one's Lord are not necessarily sure signs that the experience which produced them is of a Christian origin. All the world's religions and cults can produce the same results, and the well-known Parable of the Sower shows that a professing Christian can have a very great apparent zeal that only lasts until the going gets rough (Mt.13:5-6, 20-21).

Zeal for God, if it is not accompanied by right knowledge, actually results in a self-centredness which ignores the will of God (Rom.10:2-3; cf. Prov.19:2). On the Day of Judgement there will be many such people who will claim to have regarded Jesus as their Lord, to have prophesied, cast out demons, and worked miracles in His name. They will no doubt have been very enthusiastic people, imagining themselves to be devoted to Christ and the Christian way; but they will have been deluding themselves, and will be rejected by the Lord Jesus as those who 'practise lawlessness' (Mt. 7:21-23). Bear in mind that these were professing believers who imagined that they were 'super-Christians', yet in reality they were so steeped in sin and rebellion that they are excluded from heaven. How had this come about? Surely, it was because they derived their understanding of God's will from their subjective experience -- 'It works!' -- instead of from His objective truth (something about which the Lord Jesus warned His disciples in Lk.10:20). And that is the primary problem in so many churches today.

People who have been 'slain in the spirit' will often make the claim that they have an increased hunger for God's Word. But if that is the case, why do they indulge in the use of "worship aids" and religious rituals which do not reflect the reverence and awe due to the Divine Godhead? If they truly hunger after God's Word, why do they deny the sufficiency of Scripture and its unique ability to make a person complete and equipped for every good work (2 Tim.3:16-17)? If they genuinely hunger after God's Word why do they continue to speak or pray in pagan gibberish, imagining it to be the biblical gift of languages? If they claim a desire to be faithful to God and His Word, why do they give out and soak up the most outlandish and banal statements as prophecies and 'words of knowledge'? How is it that in spite of their desire to study the Word they don't perceive their disobedience to it and incongruity of behaviour in relation to it? The questions could go on.

However ardently people may regard Jesus as their 'Lord', it is not necessarily the result of being filled with the Holy Spirit. As Jesus Himself said: 'Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven' (Mt.7:21). The only sure sign that there has been a true work of the Holy Spirit in a person is if there is a desire for complete obedience to the will of God; and the only place where that will has been revealed is in His written Word, the Bible. In the final analysis, obedience to the Word of God is the only fruit by which these phenomena can be judged.

"I have fallen down at meetings many times, and it hasn't done me any harm. I want it to happen again and again"

You might be under the impression that it hasn't done you any harm; but the fact that you desire this experience to be repeated so frequently shows that you have become more or less addicted to it. Perhaps the reason for this is because there is something fundamentally lacking in your Christian life -- namely, the assurance of salvation. Because there are so many professing Christians today who have undergone a highly spurious experience of conversion, they lack that genuine, ongoing inner assurance which is ordinarily given to all true children of God (Rom.8:14-16). Consequently, they must seek some other way of convincing themselves that they truly have the Spirit. They therefore become caught up in an endless round of sensation-seeking, hoping to confirm their faith through repeated religious experiences.

But for how long will your present 'high' last? How long will it be before you have to go back for more 'carpet-time'... and then more? For that is how it all works: sugar-coated enslavement to psycho-religious ritual. Whether you recognise it or not, in seeking after these ungodly experiences -- and especially by doing so repeatedly -- you are actually doing immense harm to your spiritual health.

"But I read somewhere that these Toronto-style phenomena always happen in revivals. Doesn't that mean this is a revival?"

No, it most certainly does not. You are making an illogical deduction, rather like the person who says: 'All Jews are circumcised; therefore all circumcised people are Jews!' In any case, revivals have by no means always been accompanied by physical and emotional phenomena; and the kind of phenomena we are seeing today would never have been countenanced by discerning leaders in past situations of genuine revival. You really need to read the history of revivals to fully appreciate this — and to go back to primary sources where possible.

A key problem today is that many have falsely deduced that they only have to mimic the outward aspects of certain phenomena associated with some revivals in order to generate a revival of their own. However, when any phenomena occurred in the revivals of earlier eras -- such as the Evangelical Awakenings in the U.K. and U.S. in the 18th and 19th centuries -- they always took place as a result of powerful preaching of the Cross from the Bible, an overwhelming sense of one's foulness in the face of an infinitely holy God, the shocking realisation of the impending reality of eternal punishment in hell, and a desperate desire to be free from the scorching blaze of God's wrath. In genuine revivals, any 'falling down' which occurred was the result of a sense of horror at one's sin and grief at the offence caused to an all-omnipotent God -- certainly not an experience one would want to be repeated.

In complete contrast to this, the phenomena that we are seeing in churches today are entirely unconnected with any of these contexts, and are, at best, the outworkings of a childish and hysterical mimicry; at worst, they are the result of something far more sinister.

"Surely the Lord would not allow His churches to fall into deception on such a vast scale?"

God certainly keeps His people from the powers of evil; and those churches which are faithful He honours with His protecting love (e.g. Rev.3:8-10). But the professing Church is now in the throes of a major time of sifting as a result of Divine judgement (cf. 1 Pet.4:17), in which there is a visible separation into two distinct kinds of churches -- one true, the other false. The true Church consists of believers who are obedient to the authority of Scripture and the doctrine of Christ and the Apostles, who establish their churches through the preaching of the Cross, who base their salvation on the atoning blood of Christ, and who are willing to die in order to defend the truth. The false church consists of those whose 'Christianity' is based on personal revelations, fashionable ideas, and religious experiences. The one is obedient to the revealed will of God; the other is manipulated by the powers of darkness.

Today, we have an entire generation of professing Christians who are deeply ignorant of the Bible and Church History. Having fallen prey to the 'trickery of men', they are being 'carried about with every wind of doctrine' (Eph.4:14). Instead of being allowed to dictate the Church's agenda, they need to be awakened to the fullness of their deception.