

Exercising a True Deliverance Ministry

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The title of this article is obviously not meant in a charismatic sense. We offer no advice on how to cast out demons, rather on how to help true believers who have been heavily influenced by charismatic ideas, and who have come to see them as wrong. They have come away from the world of tongues, visions, prophecies, ecstasies, dancing, falling down slain, and all associated activities, and have sought fellowship among 'traditional' Bible-believing Christians.

These friends often have many problems, and pastors and church officers must be ready to help. Some former charismatics have made the transition so well and so speedily that one can scarcely believe they once thought and acted very differently. We readily acknowledge that some need little or no help in adapting to conservative, biblical Christianity.

Many, however, find that their time in the charismatic movement has left them troubled, unsure, and perhaps even scarred spiritually. They have wrested themselves away from a host of emotional props, and severed connections with numerous dear friends, and this has cost them much pain.

Doctrine, worship, fellowship and service now take a vastly different form. Their new environment has a way of thinking and looking at matters utterly unlike that of charismatic circles. Furthermore, in the back of the mind lies the nagging fear that these 'traditionalists' are indeed the cold, lifeless formalists they have been long warned about – people who have never tasted the Spirit, and who wilfully oppose his liberating power.

Broadly speaking, there are three causes for people leaving the charismatic movement. The first one mentioned here is the best, and most often leads to them adjusting wholly to orthodox evangelical teaching. The last two give rise to the least stable 'converts'.

A first cause of leaving occurs when people experience some serious *disappointment or disillusionment* with the charismatic movement, and begin to evaluate its claims more carefully. Perhaps a relative or close friend has died and they have seen at close quarters the false promises and the failure of -healing prophecies. It may be that they have seen through some of the dishonesty and pride which stalks the citadels of charismatic activity, and have recoiled with shock.

Some years ago, for example, charismatics all over the world were shaken by the wild phenomena of the Toronto Blessing, and they turned to God's Word in a new spirit of enquiry. Objective Bible study then caused the entire edifice of charismatic practice to crumble and fall before them.

A second cause of departure from charismatic activity is *personal disaffection*. While this may lead to people's eyes being opened, it often does not. In charismatic house groups and cells an artificially high degree of emotional interdependence is fostered, and in such a climate offences can occur which drive people out. These may come over to the derided traditionalists almost as an act of protest. The real issue is one of personal disaffection, not doctrinal unease, and while these émigrés may criticise everything they have left, it may only be the outworking of hurt feelings.

Sometimes people leave because their 'gifts' have not been sufficiently recognised, or their own leadership hopes have been thwarted. Such leavers will probably return, if not to the same group, to another section of the charismatic camp. We may almost say that the more heated the invective, the sooner a person will go back. We certainly have an opportunity to help such disgruntled people see the real issues, and we pray that the Lord will open their eyes, but our efforts may well be in vain.

A third cause of departure which usually leads to people returning is that of a generally *unstable temperament*. This is not a comment on the mental stability of people, but on their inability to think clearly and to recognise foundational principles of biblical conduct. Because charismatic teaching is so subjective, experience-based, emotional and speculative, it produces this instability in certain people.

They take on a great mass of ideas and anecdotes, but possess no reliable way of verifying them. The mind trades so much in disconnected fragments, that it loses its capacity to get things in order of importance, and to judge clearly.

Helping friends in this state is almost impossible. As fast as you try to explain one matter, another dozen ideas leap into their minds. For such people, whether something is right or wrong is determined by the quantity of supporting claims which can be thrown into the discussion, not by the biblical validity of the claims. Unstable thinkers are likely to re-settle in the comfortable confusion of a charismatic group.

It is necessary to mention these last two categories because we must be ready for disappointment. However, the Lord is at work. Many of God's children are being led out for wholesome and biblical reasons, and we trust that many more will be. We would like to rescue as many people as possible from the mass of mistakes that make up the charismatic movement, and from their exploitation by insincere and dishonest 'top' leaders.

Another caution is necessary. We should not assume that all who leave the charismatic fold are truly converted. We say this with care, for many are, but we remember that numerous people have been lured in by promises of healing, and even prosperity, rather than by the challenge to repent and yield to Christ. Once there, they have been sustained, not by doctrine, but by a diet of emotional thrills. In many charismatic meetings life is all about the feel-good-factor of entertainment and personal happiness, and the real issues of the Faith are obscured. When the Gospel is presented, it is often no more than a shallow form of 'easy-believism'. Friendship and phenomena take the place of a real spiritual life. There will, therefore, be many who are not truly saved, and if they should leave and find their way to sound evangelical churches, their greatest need will be to hear the Gospel.

This caution must be balanced by a plea for respect for ex-charismatic people who most certainly are earnest believers. Some of these may even have been driven into the charismatic movement years ago by the lifelessness of a traditional evangelical church. There are numerous Bible-believing churches where so little is done for the Lord that one sympathises with members who defect to charismatic fellowships. They may be mistaken, but what an ordeal they have endured to keep their faith and love alive in an unenthusiastic 'sound' church! They have felt forced to leave that sound, but sound asleep, church. It has often been a hunger and thirst to please God which has led people (however mistakenly) into more lively charismatic churches. Their new teachers persuaded them that God wanted them to seek tongues and other phenomena, and their desire to obey God caused them to open their minds to these new experiences.

They were misled, but they were earnest, and this we must respect. They may have been more earnest than the sound fellowship they left behind.

We say this to inspire a due measure of respect for those who come back to us from charismatic groups. We, as traditional evangelicals, may have wronged them in the past through spiritual lethargy and coldness.

What are the problems or scars which continue to affect believers who have left the charismatic

movement? The following pages review some of the difficulties encountered and highlight the areas of biblical teaching to be stressed by way of remedy.

Ten Lingering Problems

1 Lordship of imagination

The first problem which may continue to trouble charismatic leavers arises from the lordship of imagination. For so many, imagination has worked overtime to create an artificial spiritual life in which God has spoken hour by hour through direct guidance and impressions. People have felt led to do this and that, and been 'given' knowledge of this and that. In many cases they have attributed every feeling to the direct impulse of the Spirit. They have been taught a religion very different from that of biblical Christianity, but they do not realise this.

They have been taught a system of thinking in which basic Christian beliefs are grafted on to a form of mysticism in which one may 'know' the touch of God, and receive in a direct, paranormal way knowledge unknowable by others. If someone is interpreting a tongue, whatever pops into the mind must be the correct meaning. For many, ordinary ideas and impressions must be elevated to 'words of knowledge'. The list of imagined inspirations is long.

It comes as a shock to many ex-charismatic friends to learn the true biblical teaching about union with God, and the way this works. Without grasping this, they will be confused, dependent upon their feelings, and dependent upon imagined impressions sent from God.

We will need to explain, both by way of preaching and personal ministry, the 'by faith' passages of the New Testament, not only to explain the way of salvation, but to explain the 'mechanics' of our continuing union with God. We will need to explain that we do not know the Lord by any physical kind of sense or feeling, or by any other direct or 'clairvoyant' type of link. Human feelings are a response to what we understand. We know God by what is revealed in his Word. We believe all that it teaches of him, and we trust, and enjoy him. All our precious views of Christ and of his ways, come from the Word into our understanding, and there they are met and embraced by faith. God primarily links himself to us via our understanding and trusting response. Of course, we have much evidence, such as answered prayer, and we have assurance also, but the key link is by receiving the Word.

What about feelings? We will need to explain that in genuine spiritual experience they are stirred by way of response to what is seen by the mind. God hardly ever goes directly to our feelings. Whether the feeling is one of love, gratitude, assurance or shame and conviction, it wells up within us as the result of what is grasped by the mind.

Everything in the Christian life comes 'by faith', and this, of necessity, means by the understanding. If we do not think about something, we cannot believe it.

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in this? We will need to teach and explain that the Holy Spirit illuminates the mind, enabling the understanding to grasp the truths of God's Word. He never imparts to the minds of believers spiritual truths which are not disclosed in the Bible. Rather, he sharpens our minds to see the things that are scripturally revealed.

Then, when we grasp these things and receive them by faith, the Spirit frequently touches our minds in such a way that we see them with even greater clarity, and then we are lifted up in great joy and love. An old Puritan phrase calls this 'the embrace of the Spirit'. How kind the Spirit of God is!

The key point is that all true spiritual experience must be routed through the conscious mind, and

received by faith. As soon as we are able to convey this fundamental fact of the Christian faith to former charismatics, the scales fall from their eyes and they see how they have been misled by a distorted form of Christianity. They are then no longer at the mercy of imagination.

Of course we will need to assure these friends that there is much tangible evidence of God's work in our lives. We see it in the new nature we receive at conversion, and in the countless answers to prayer which follow. We have so often been strengthened for our duties, enabled to witness, and delivered from trials in answer to prayer. We have repeatedly seen our circumstances changed by the clear intervention of the Lord. In these things we see the Lord's hand, but only in the Word do we hear, as it were, his authoritative voice, revealing doctrine and commands.

In summary, we know the Lord by what he has said (in the Word), and this is supplemented by what he does in answer to prayer. We do not have direct communication from God on authoritative matters.

How different this historic, biblical teaching is from the mystical and occultist ideas which have swept into modern charismatic teaching! 'Switch off the mind,' they say, 'it is an obstruction and a nuisance. Raise your hands, close your eyes, sway to and fro, launch out into the deep, let your emotions go free, let your spirit take over, repeat the name of the Saviour, speak in a tongue, and as you do so, your direct, mystical link with God will be effected, and you will feel and see according to the movement of the Spirit.'

We repeat, God speaks from the Word to the mind, which is the organ of understanding and the palace of faith. Here are some of the great passages we will refer to as we stress the pre-eminence of faith (which naturally presupposes understanding).

'So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God' (*Romans 10.17*).

'That their hearts might be comforted . . . unto all riches of the full assurance of UNDERSTANDING' (*Colossians 2.2*). 'BY FAITH ye stand' (*2 Corinthians 1.24*).

'For we walk BY FAITH, not by sight' (*2 Corinthians 5.7*).

'Above all, taking the SHIELD OF FAITH, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked' (*Ephesians 6.16*).

'BY FAITH he [Moses] forsook Egypt . . . for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible' (*Hebrews 11.27*). 'That Christ may dwell in your hearts BY FAITH; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God' (*Ephesians 3.17-19*).

2 Anecdotes & revelations

A second problem which afflicts many friends who leave charismatic circles is their past trust in non-biblical sources of doctrine and comfort, such as anecdotal experiences and new revelations. Most charismatics theoretically believe that anecdotes, visions and words of knowledge should be submitted to Scripture for verification, but in most circles this hardly ever happens. (When charismatic leaders do attempt to justify their visions by Scripture, these attempts range from the superficial to the absurd.)

The problem is that former charismatics often feel a great void once they leave behind the flow of anecdotal teaching and prophetic words. Some continue to be vulnerable and ready to believe anything and everything that they read in lightweight, anecdotal items of Christian literature.

We often refer to how the charismatic movement lowers the credulity threshold of people, and so it

does. The welter of anecdotes of healings, extraordinary experiences and revelations must, in general, be believed, or the Christian life would be a nightmare of suspicion. Some solve the problem by believing everything (however unbiblical), and others by believing everything 'slightly'. (See problem number 10 for further comment on this.)

It is not enough, however, only to direct to Scripture, because charismatic friends have had Scripture quoted to them to justify the most bizarre things. By their indifference to any rules of interpretation, charismatic teachers have robbed Scripture of its clarity, consistency and authority. We will need to encourage a new respect and a deeper reverence and love for Scripture, introducing friends to the Bible's own interpretative rules. They must come to take the context seriously, and to compare scripture with scripture. They must learn about the 'analogy of faith' concept of the Reformers, which calls us to equip ourselves with a clear mental picture of all the major doctrines so prominent in the Bible, and then to test all our ideas about the meaning of any particular passage against these.

This article is not the place to rehearse the basic rules of interpretation, but ex-charismatics need the liberating experience of serious, logical Bible study. They need to see what they have been deprived of. Then they will rejoice in a Bible that really guides – not a chaotic mystery-book which depends upon the whims of personal revelation before one may know what it really says. We must therefore give time in our teaching programme for the subject of 'Bible interpretation for all'.

We need to point friends to books such as Thomas Watson's Body of Divinity, where they will rejoice to find the wonderful system of doctrinal Truth which has been kept from them. This will help them to have the anchor of sound doctrine, without which they will remain at the mercy of unbiblical, human ideas.

3 Reverent worship

A third problem troubling many former charismatics is that of adjusting to a reverent form of worship. In most charismatic communities worship is primarily designed to be subjective and arousing only at a human level. To achieve this, instrumental music and rhythm are used as major ingredients. Also, worship is usually informal in character, thus sacrificing awe and reverence. It has more to do with the feelings and the body than with the mind and the soul.

Those who leave charismatic groups will find themselves either in a Bible-believing church which holds to conservative worship, or one that compromises by using charismatic songs. This second kind of church will obviously not be able to teach former charismatics the glories of true worship, for it has violated them.

Hopefully, former charismatics will find themselves in sounder places where the biblical objectives of worship can be explained. We will need to point out the most fundamental of all principles, that worship is to be 'in spirit and in truth'. This includes the idea that it is to be intelligent, and in accordance with God's revealed Truth.

It is crucial for believers to realise that worship must be capable of being put into words (whether thought, said or sung). Nothing else is true worship.

Worship is to be objective as well as subjective; and to be rich with praise and adoration of God and his attributes and works. It is to be humble and reverent. It is to include repentance (so often absent from charismatic songs). It is not to be subjected to the competition of elaborate music and instrumentalism, so that this is enjoyed more than the spiritual worship, and people show off their skills.

Worship must never borrow the rhythms and chord-forms associated with the secular entertainment

industry, and its anti-God, anti-moral campaigns. The Word of God demands an unbridgeable gulf between sacred and profane.

These are the kind of principles we must present from such Bible passages as John 4 and Revelation 4-5. Former charismatics need to see that they have had foisted upon them a fleshly, worldly, self-centred form of worship, grievous to the Spirit. Human pleasure, derived from debased worldly styles, has eclipsed true spiritual activity, and all this must now be rejected as illegitimate and harmful. Only then will they be free to enter wholeheartedly and feelingfully into genuine, respectful, thoughtful worship, with true spiritual rejoicing.

4 Visible phenomena

A fourth problem troubling many former charismatics is a continuing thirst for phenomena such as healings and prophecies. If denied these things they often feel unstirred and unassured. Such supposed proofs of the Holy Spirit's presence have long served as a substitute for faith, and now that they have been left behind, leavers may find it difficult to live by faith.

As Christians, however, we are not bereft of evidences of God's work within us, and it is good to help troubled friends look at these evidences. Conversion, sanctification and preservation are the greatest evidences of all.

It is even more important to train friends to put their faith in what God says in his Word. Faith grows most of all when it is exercised, first by receiving and believing the teaching of the Word, and secondly by coming to the Lord in prayer in response to all the problems and needs of life.

Former charismatics need to be encouraged to exercise sober discernment, trusting only the Word, and assigning no significance to charismatic explanations of strange experiences. It may be helpful for them to learn that the very phenomena and 'wonders' they once relied on occur equally outside Christian circles. They are common even among pagan cults, and are not evidences or proofs of the work of the Spirit. Even within the charismatic movement many godless (even immoral and criminal) leaders have been able to produce all these so-called signs of God's approval and power.

Former charismatics also need to appreciate that unrecognised hypnosis and psychological influences play a great part in producing surprising experiences. In summary, we must help these friends to embrace 'Scripture alone' as the rule of their Christian walk, and to get great pleasure out of the wonders of the Word. As for encouragement, are not the unmistakable evidences of God's power in sustaining and blessing our witness enough?

For the strengthening of faith, it is vital that we show ex-charismatics how to lay hold on the promises rather than to look for earthly wonders which, in the event, are a mixture of theatrical tricks and psychological effects. An excellent book to 'prescribe' is Thomas Watson's little volume *A Divine Cordial*, also published under the title *All Things for Good*. Equally superb is A W Pink's *Comfort for Christians*. Such works show believers how to view trials of all kinds. The Christian life is a life of faith, not a life of sight, and to walk this road must be the new aim of former charismatic believers.

5 Lack of service

A fifth problem troubling some former charismatics arises from a lack of application and commitment to genuine service for the Lord. We are saved to serve the Lord and to be at his disposal. We are intended to pull together as congregations in the work of evangelism. The charismatic scene, however, is predominantly self-serving. Certainly there are exceptions, and some charismatics engage in strenuous activity for the Lord, including compassionate ministries. But generally the situation is quite different.

You do not often find charismatic fellowships toiling in evangelistic Sunday Schools and similar activities operated for the spiritual good of the community. You find considerable activity going on, but most of it is for the benefit of believers and for their excitement and fulfilment.

Charismatic church activities are labour-intensive in terms of instrumentalism, singing and all the practice involved. Giftedness, body-ministry, personal empowerment and so on are the all important matters. 'My walk...my health...my experience' is the chief focus of life. House groups frequently constitute 'love-ins' where mutual coddling and sympathy are the order of the day. The ethos is that we are to be cared for. We are so important. All our energy is for us.

A believer who forsakes the atmosphere of charismatic Christianity is likely to feel painfully abandoned in a traditional fellowship. It is important that the real cause of this vacuum is understood, and we must show how life should be filled with a new kind of activity – unselfish, overflowing spiritual service for Christ.

We are forced to admit that some traditional Bible-believing churches nowadays are as bad as charismatic churches for self-serving, self-interested church programmes. Hopefully, however, ex-charismatics will find churches where the fun and pleasure of believers is not the primary objective, but rather the work of taking the Gospel to lost souls.

In these days so many labourers are needed. A new perspective and a new commitment will be the greatest help to the ex-charismatic, who will find true spiritual blessedness in this context. (The author's booklet on the working church – *Your Reasonable Service in the Lord's Work* – may help in this matter.)

6 Cessation of sign-gifts

A sixth problem troubling former charismatics is whether the gifts of the Spirit have or have not ceased. How could they possibly have ceased as the Scripture does not specifically say so? Lingering and recurring anxiety about the gifts can only be relieved when former charismatics gain a clear view of the reasons why cessationism was the view of the overwhelming majority of Christians until as recently as the 1960s. In this connection, beware of literature which warns against charismatic practices while at the same time refusing to teach the cessation of the sign and revelatory gifts.

Some writers have adopted the view that cessationism is not valid, and that instead we should judge the validity of every charismatic claim on its merits. The idea is a nightmare. From a practical point of view alone, it would take a thousand tribunals of seasoned judges sitting in permanent session to merely scratch the surface of the present scene. Claims to gifts and phenomena are to be numbered in their millions.

The truth is that the Bible is clear on this matter, and most former charismatics are very ready to examine the texts. Of course, we must help friends to see that only two kinds of gift are at issue: the revelatory gifts and the sign-gifts. All others, such as gifts of ministry and government, remain.

The writer has set out the texts teaching the cessation of the revelatory and sign-gifts in *The Healing Epidemic*, chapter 7 – 'Proving the Gifts Have Ceased'. Without repeating all these texts and arguments here, it should be obvious that the sign-gifts were not intended to be permanent. They were specifically described as signs or pointers. The apostolic miracles pointed to the apostles, saying to the world, 'these are the true witnesses and apostles of Christ, and the inspired channels of Holy Scripture.' But now that their witness has been incorporated into the Bible, we possess the substance. The signs fell away once the substance to which they pointed was given to the Church.

It was the same with tongues-speaking. The miraculous tongues were a sign or pointer. God had said through Isaiah that the age of the Messiah would be validated by the phenomenon of gentiles

preaching the Word of God to Jews. However, at the time of Pentecost, and for a short while afterward, there were no converted gentiles, and so God at first employed gentile tongues miraculously spoken by Jews. This was one of the signs that the new age, the Gospel Age, had dawned, when the Gospel would be preached in every language throughout the world. But soon the reality took over and real gentile converts were preaching the Gospel to both Jews and gentiles. Once this occurred the sign had fulfilled its duty. The reality to which the sign pointed had itself arrived, and the 'shadow' had given way to the substance.

This writer has found that most charismatics have been given the impression that in New Testament times healings were accomplished constantly by all believers. They are usually very surprised to hear that this is utterly contrary to the record, which shows only one case of a healing by someone not in the apostolic band – and that was the singular case of Paul healed by Ananias (at the Lord's command).

We constantly need to make clear to ex-charismatic friends that we believe in miracles today, including healing. God can do anything, and he has promised to heal. What we reject is the notion that he channels his power through gifted miracle workers and healers. Apostles, with 'signs of apostles', have long since ceased, but the Lord continues to heal directly in answer to prayer (and according to his sovereign will). These are some of the issues which we need to make clear to former charismatics.

7 Prevailing worldliness

A seventh problem which frequently troubles those who leave charismatic circles stems from the degree of worldliness so often encouraged, and sometimes the level of lawlessness. Throughout the world the majority of charismatics have an approach to holiness that is quite different from anything previously seen in the history of the Christian Church. Separation from the world has little or no part in their holiness scenario. Nor (in most circles) does resistance to earthly wealth and comforts.

Affluence and pleasure are legitimate objectives. Fashion, self-expression, and close familiarity with the current pop and movie scenes are acceptable interests. Charismatic song performers look and sound just like worldly performers. The likeness is even deliberately cultivated.

Believers who leave the charismatic world will have to adapt to entirely different standards. They will have to appreciate that the Lord commands different attitudes in his people, and that the ethos of the world is offensive to him. For some, the doctrine of sanctification will sometimes need to be explained almost from scratch. A new commitment of life and stewardship will need to be embraced.

We referred to lawlessness in the introduction to this seventh point, because it is an undeniable truth that among professing Christians, charismatics are known to have by far the most cases of unacceptable behaviour. They experience the most occurrences of immorality, divorce, criminal fraud, and other serious misdemeanours.

This observation is not intended to taint thousands of more serious-minded charismatics who mortify the deeds of the body, and strive to lead lives pleasing to God. But the charismatic environment as a whole is not conducive to conscientious holiness, and that is painfully apparent.

Lawlessness may well be encouraged by the lack of repentance in the style of worship found in many charismatic churches. Services characterised by dancing, swaying, clapping, the singing of repetitive phrases to deafening rhythmic music, and working up the emotions are not occasions for genuine repentance and dedication to holiness.

There is no quietness before God; no sense of – 'The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth

keep silence before him.’ In some charismatic circles the spiritual warfare is defined entirely in terms of challenging demons, rather than in fighting against personal sin and temptation. It is no great wonder that we have read of so many leading charismatic evangelists falling into immorality, and being brought before the courts for a variety of criminal offences.

It is important that we communicate to believers who come to us from charismatic fellowships that we act in all matters out of obedience to the Word, and not just from personal choice. We must show chapter and verse for every facet of our personal and church lifestyles. Christians are those who willingly conform to all the rules of the New Testament, including separation from worldliness. Only as the Spirit shows these friends the true nature of the Christian walk, will they be at peace. Many have been deprived by their former teachers of vast areas of Truth. These must now be embraced.

8 A Superior experience

An eighth problem likely to trouble former charismatics is a sensitive and difficult one, but it must be mentioned. This will not necessarily apply to all such friends, but it will afflict some. It is the problem of pride. Charismatic teachers have probably convinced them that they have superior light and experience, while traditional Bible believers are spiritually ignorant, cold and unblessed. Many charismatic teachers adopt a boastful, triumphalistic style, encouraging a sense of spiritual superiority.

The lack of truly objective worship (which is humbling in its effect) may also contribute to pride. So also may the sense of specialness derived from the supposed possession of spiritual gifts. Even after leaving charismatic circles, some of this pride may stick.

All this puts one in mind of the many Exclusive Brethren who left their movement in the 1960s. They had seen that much was wrong, but unfortunately many of those who left took with them an unshakable belief that they were infinitely better taught than those in the traditional evangelical churches. Clothed with such confidence, what could they really learn? Some (but certainly not all) became misfits and serious thorns in the flesh to the churches they joined.

We shall need great grace as we try to help ex-charismatics realise that they do not tower above traditional Bible believers in spiritual understanding. We will need the patience of Job, the wisdom of Solomon, and the gentleness of Barnabas as we show them that their former camp represents a radical departure from Scripture and its doctrine in many ways, and that they have much to re-learn.

It will be no use correcting just a few wrong notions. Charismatic pride rests on a dozen foundations. It is only as we knock all these away (but carefully) that the delusion of grandeur will fall, and the mind will open fully to the Word. The kindest way to do this is often by prescribing books, so that friends can think through the issues in privacy, checking the texts as they go, and calling upon the Lord for help.

9 Emphasis on fellowship

A ninth problem sometimes troubling the peace of former charismatics has to do with relationships. We have already referred to the artificially close fellowship fostered in house groups or cells. Charismatics usually excel at organising friendship-promoting activities, and this will inevitably lead to pain and loneliness when people leave.

Most traditional Bible-believing churches do not have this forced, hot-house approach to promoting friendship. They depend more on the natural process of ties forming as members worship and serve the Lord together.

Hopefully, former charismatics will find their way to churches where people are outgoing and welcoming. But it will be over time, and usually while working in some aspect of Christian service, that deeper ties will form. Real friendship is not usually manipulated into being.

We will need to extend a degree of special understanding and fellowship to those who come out of a system excessively dependent on friendship, remembering that they have probably left behind something that cannot be quickly replaced in their lives.

Another relationship difficulty may arise from the dominating, authoritarian leadership practised in many charismatic churches. If people have experienced a high degree of directive interference in their lives, some may feel lost without it. However much they may have resented it, they may still miss it. For some, this may reach 'dependence' proportions.

Pastors must be careful never to tell these friends what to do in personal decisions, however much they may ask for definitive direction. Always we must limit ourselves to counselling the biblical principles, and honour the individual's responsibility to apply those principles carefully and prayerfully to the decision in hand.

10 Uncertain belief

A final problem sometimes encountered by former charismatics is that of weak and doubting belief, leading either to shallowness or cynicism. This is a product of their former intense loyalty to healings and other phenomena. The trouble arises from the simple fact that they never saw these wonderful things really happening in a certain, verifiable way. Even the miraculous signs have had to be taken on faith!

If we ask charismatic friends why the weekly run of healings never includes clear-cut, medically verifiable miracles, involving the cure of serious physical illnesses, they immediately talk about cases they know of from other churches, and which probably took place months or years ago. They seldom make any attempt to defend the regular healings of their own fellowship. This shows that within themselves they realise that these healings are more to do with charismatic culture than with reality.

A charismatic author (a doctor) once set out to validate charismatic healing in a book, and his book revealed the same tendency. To prove his case he wrote about healings that occurred years before, and in other countries. Inadvertently, he was admitting that he placed no credence on the regular healings that surrounded him week after week in his own charismatic assembly. He believed in them in a way, but not enough to use them as examples, preferring to draw his 'proof' from afar.

This writer has asked charismatic believers in five continents why their own local healings were either unsuccessful, or short-term, or minor, and why they could not perform healing of verifiable, major illnesses. Always their response has been to draw their confidence from healings reported from somewhere else.

The point is that charismatic friends must adopt either a stoical, unquestioning form of belief in these phenomena, or a vague, general belief. Either attitude is harmful to real Christian faith. In the case of the first, the mind closes to any new biblical and doctrinal challenge. The person says, 'I know what I think, and am not open to further consideration.' Such a friend must be helped to see that all our opinions must be verifiable from the Word of God. We must always be open to correction.

In the case of vague belief, the whole of our Christian walk may be damaged if we allow ourselves to believe vaguely and lightly in things we do not really see happen, and cannot be certain of.

This kind of belief will infect our whole outlook. We may well develop a shallow view of many other aspects of the faith.

This undoubtedly happens to many Christians. They believe they should go to worship regularly and serve the Lord. But at the same time, like the healing miracles, the standards of God need not be taken too seriously. They are real, but they are not real. They are important, but not important.

Vague belief or light belief produces uncommitted and semi-sincere Christians, and even lawless Christians. The antidote and corrective is to help people to see that in God's true plan for the Christian life everything is true and reliable; everything works just as it should.

The charismatic culture of working up miracles and signs which cannot be validated is harmful to true faith, producing either gullibility on the one hand, or submerged cynicism on the other.

God and his Word are to be taken very seriously, and believed with the whole heart. All his commands are to be obeyed; all his standards are to be diligently honoured.

These are the issues which trouble or handicap those who leave charismatic circles, and which pastors and spiritual shepherds will need to address, with gentleness, patience and understanding. They are all critical, key matters which, if ignored, will surface later, possibly with unhappy results.