

The Charismatic Crisis: Part II

by Ern Baxter

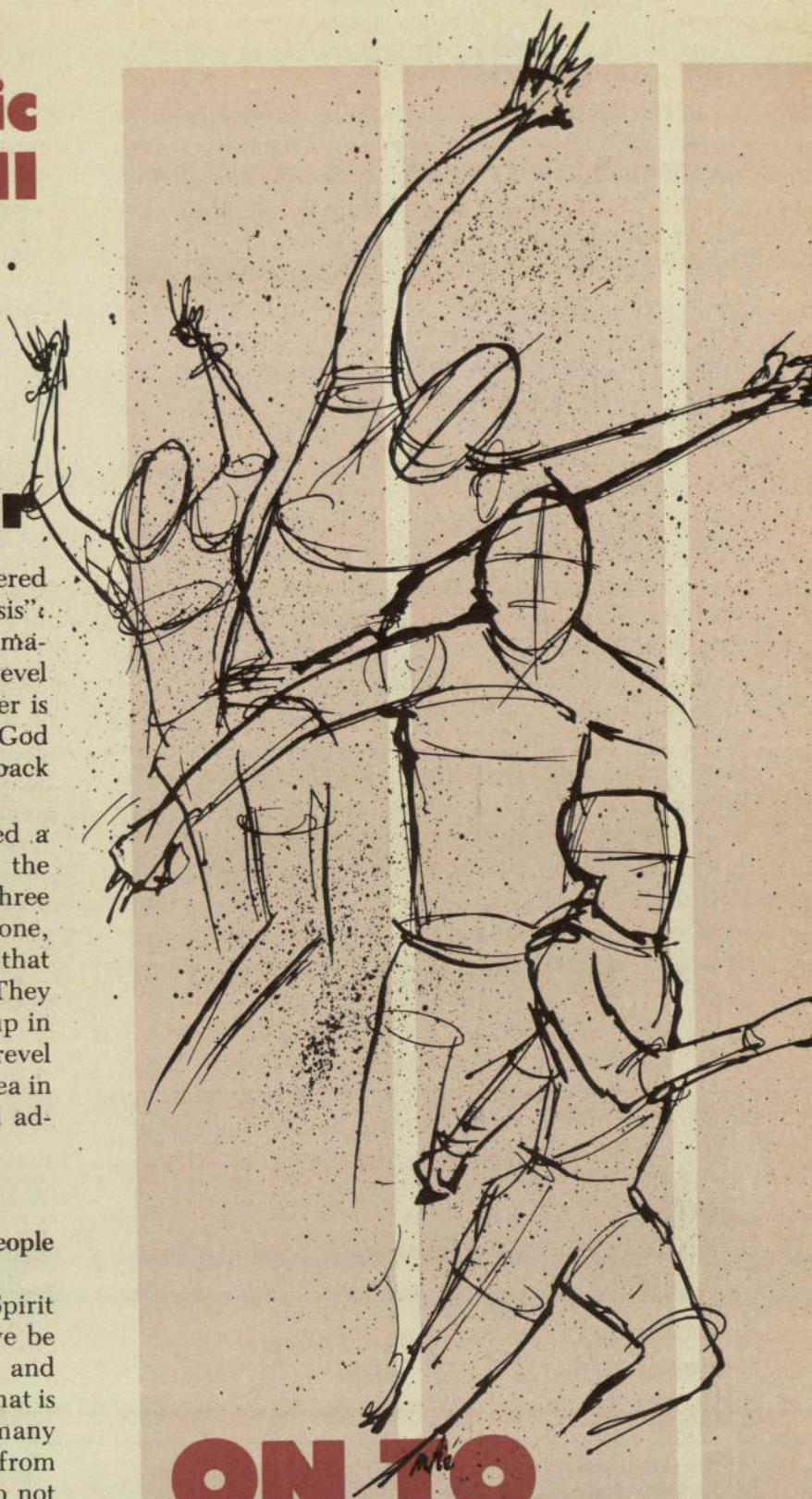
IN THE FIRST PART of this series we considered the prospect of what I called a “charismatic crisis”: the option of whether we will go on to spiritual maturity or stagnate and decline from our present level of growth. As I pointed out, the greatest danger is not that we may deliberately turn away from God and His purposes, but that we merely shrink back from moving on in Him.

We know that the Corinthian church faced a similar crisis. Although Paul recognized that the Corinthians were gifted spiritually, he saw three areas where they needed correction. The first one, which we talked about in the last issue, was that they failed to comprehend the divine purpose. They didn't realize that God wanted them to grow up in obedience to His calling rather than to merely revel in His blessings. That brings us to the second area in which the Corinthians (and many of us) need adjusting.

Area Two: Failure to cooperate with the divine people

In 1 Corinthians 12:13 we read, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” What is the pivotal word in that verse? *One*. How many bodies? *One*. How many spirits? *One*. We see from this the absolute essentiality of unity. If we do not find the unity of the Spirit, then we frustrate the Spirit's ministry.

In Ephesians 4, Paul speaks of two unities. First, the unity of the *Spirit*, which we are to keep until we come to the unity of the *faith*. Unfortunately, we have tended to reverse it by saying, “I'll be one with *you* if you'll agree with *me*.” But if we make the uni-



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ty of the Spirit contingent upon unity in our faith, we'll never get together.

In the beginning the charismatic renewal brought us all together because of a common commitment to the life and power of the Holy Spirit. But as time went on, divisions arose; and they remain today because we refuse to grow up and maintain our unity in the Spirit. Like the Corinthians, we are petty, small and controversial with one another. This should not be so. The people of God are to be a distinctive people, supernaturally composed and maintained by the Holy Spirit.

The second part of 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, ". . . all made to drink into one Spirit." Baptism is the crisis; drinking is the process. We have been brought in by the crisis; we are maintained by the process. The unity of the Spirit is a present fact of God. The unity of the faith is a potential fact which we obtain by obedience. *We are one.* That unity of the Spirit binds us together and allows us to differ on issues of faith without dividing.

Jesus Christ *promises* our maturity in corporate life and witness. Before Jesus comes back, He must have something to show to the Father. Jesus is coming back for a Kingdom He can turn over to the Father that will exemplify God's government in the earth. Do you think Jesus wants to show us off to the Father in the condition we're in? I'm certain that Jesus isn't going to take the mess that we have right now and say, "Father, here's the product of My work."

We are on the verge of the fulfillment of the word of the Lord which says that in the time of the harvest, Jesus is going to remove from the Kingdom all things that offend so that the righteous may shine forth. I believe that when God gave us this charismatic visitation, He gave us an opportunity to get it together.

I seriously believe that the next jolt is going to be a judgmental jolt. God is giving us opportunity to get ready. He will not tolerate our continuing stubborn division. God's people are a distinctive people. The Corinthians failed to recognize that and divided the one Body, the people who were drinking into the one Spirit.

Just one note of caution. Don't try to join the unjoinable. A few years ago I tried in my zeal to incorporate everybody who called themselves Christians. The Lord simply said to me one day, "You've been preaching from Ephesians chapter 4. Don't you know that 4 comes after 3, and 3 comes after 2, and 2 comes after 1?" So I went back to Ephesians, and I found out that the people He wants to get together

in chapter 4 are the people He began to process in chapter 1. I realized then that the people God is going to join are those who repent and are baptized and filled with the Holy Ghost, as they were in Ephesians 1.

The Corinthians failed to cooperate with the divine people in not handling the unity question or interpersonal relationships properly. This is a serious area of concern for us as well. We still talk and act as individuals. "I am saved, I received my baptism, I, I, I." The "I" emphasis is legitimate, but only if held in conjunction with the "we" emphasis.

There is no such thing in the New Testament as a Christian living by himself. In fact, the New Testament categorically says, "No man lives unto himself." In God we are made to relate. God has deliberately placed in you and me a notch that can only be filled by somebody else. I don't have it all, nor do you. But, I'll tell you something—we have it all.

The totality of God's provision is not given to me or to you; it is given to us. In the Body He has placed all that is necessary for our corporate welfare. If any one of us fails to make his contribution, he robs the Body of what he has to give and hinders the fulfillment of God's purposes.

We are to be a distinctive people, supernaturally composed and equipped for the distinctive purpose of being a redeemed community for world witness.

Area Three: Failure to Continue in the Divine Power

God chose Paul, gave him tremendous revelation, and Paul shared that revelation in several letters. When the canon of Scripture was put together by the providence and oversight of the Holy Spirit, Paul's letters were not put in chronological order. They were put in the order of truth. So the first Pauline letter is Romans, which is a divinely inspired essay on the meaning of salvation. Paul taught in Romans that salvation is by grace through faith—that man is justified by faith. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul declared the mind of God so clearly regarding salvation by grace that people responding to the truth of Romans did one of two things. Number one, they said, "Well, that's great! If I'm saved by grace, not by works, then I can magnify the grace of God if I just throw in a few extra sins. Just think, if I sin a little more, He can grace a little more."

Paul said, "Know ye not that so many of us who

were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death?" The whole idea of grace is not only to save you from your sins but to save you *from sin*. Sin is the factory that makes sins.

So Paul says, "You didn't understand my message in Romans. I not only said Christ died for your *sins*, I said that Christ died *unto sin*. Christ dealt with the root of sin." In your baptism you are saying, "I am dead now to that to which I gave my members in my past life." So the first wrong way of reacting to Romans—the reaction of the Corinthians—was to commit more sins, so God could exercise more grace. The Corinthians went the route of licentiousness, shallowness, worldliness and carnality.

What was the second wrong reaction? We see it in the Galatians. The Galatians said, "You can't just be saved by grace. That's too easy. We had better tack on some religious observances just in case—a few holy days, new moons, sabbaths and probably some dietary changes." And so they went the route of legalism.

Paul's response to the Galatians' reaction is frightening. "Oh, foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you that you should not obey the truth?" Notice that he did not say, "not *believe* the truth." He said, "not *obey* the truth." There is no such thing as believing the truth and not obeying it. Believing embraces obedience.

Since Christ had been so clearly preached to the Galatians, the fact that they could have been bewitched is even more frightening. If converts of Paul who had come under the apostolic impact of the

pure message of this man could be bewitched, then we should consider that as a warning for us today.

The point I am concerned with is the ongoing work of the Spirit in us. As Galatians 3:3 says, "Surely you can't think that a man begins his Christian life in the Spirit and then completes it by reverting to outward observances." One of the crisis points at which we now find ourselves in the Charismatic Movement is the danger of failing to continue *in the divine power* which will ultimately lead us to maturity. The Holy Spirit has begun something. He is going to complete it. Our problem is that we might stop with what He has begun.

The two-fold reaction to the truth of Romans is manifest today—the Corinthian move toward licentiousness, shallowness, worldliness and carnality, and the Galatian route of legalism and deception. Either response cancels out the Holy Spirit as the ongoing effective, life-giving source from God.

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ROLE

The Holy Spirit is the operative agent in the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit convicts us and converts us. He regenerates us and empowers us. We receive gifts from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us in the Body. He is the active agent of the Trinity.

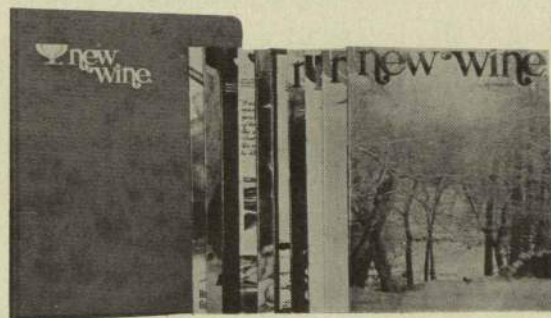
If that is the case, how can a man, after having been introduced to salvation by the Holy Spirit, be so foolish as to say, "Now I'll run my own show."

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This is the issue in the ongoingness of the Holy Spirit. The alternatives are carnality or legalism.

How many men have heard their earthly fathers say, "All right, boy, grow up!" Similarly, I can see the heavenly Father looking down and saying to us, "Grow up!"

There comes a point when we need to get rid of "the teddy bear." I have no problems with people being immature when they first come to Christ. The beginning in the Spirit can be simple and beautiful and a new convert often has all the characteristics of a newborn babe. But a child eventually has to grow up. The subtle danger for us today is that as the gentle pressures of the Holy Spirit are lovingly and effectively prodding us on to maturity, we are saying, "I don't want to go on."

After all, a child does not have to pay the bills, take responsibility in a family, plan or organize. That is for the mature, and many in the charismatic scene are saying, in effect, "Who wants to grow up and pay the bills? We are having such fun!"

Five years ago when some of my brothers and I started talking about discipleship, submission, shepherding and authority, we thought it would be a blessing to the people of God. We believed people wanted to mature and accomplish God's purpose. Instead, they screamed to high heaven. They said, "You're taking away our teddy bears."

Are we going to sit around charismatic conferences fondling our teddy bears until Jesus comes? It is wonderful to go to a conference, get all goose-bumpy, and say, "Jesus is Lord," but that isn't where the purposes of God are going to be proved. For example, communism hasn't taken over three fifths of the earth's surface and infiltrated the other two fifths by holding conferences. They have done it by making converts and absorbing those converts into cells!

The Holy Spirit is the agent of the Trinity to bring to pass in you and me the whole purpose of God. The Holy Spirit will continue to inspire us in praise and worship and singing. These inspirations are

valid. Yet the Holy Spirit is also interested in helping us get our finances straightened out. He's interested in helping us get every area of our lives adjusted to the will and word of God. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Jesus Christ, whose character and quality of life are to be reproduced in us.

If you suffer at all in your Christian life, you suffer for some area where you have not developed into maturity. That continuing area of childishness in an adult body can cause you many concerns. The Holy Spirit wants to speak to you and to me about the childish areas of our lives. Those areas will not vanish simply by our talking in tongues. They are going to go away only as we expose them to the light of the Spirit and the word, and let Him minister maturity in those areas. The Bible says, "Grow up into Christ in all things." This means *all*, not some.

The charismatic crisis in Paul's day was the failure to cooperate with the divine people and failure to continue in the divine power. Its relevancy to us is obvious.

THE WAY TO MATURITY

Although Paul gave stern warnings to those facing the charismatic crisis, he also gave a positive emphasis, basic and essential for them and for us today. It is in three aspects.

1. The Authority of the Word

When people have stopped growing up, it isn't long before they start denying, either in conduct or in concept, the authority of Scripture. The Corinthians were carnal, and their carnality started to cause them to question the authority of the apostolic word. It all boils down to this very simple fact: if God has spoken and the Bible is God's speech (which I believe), and if you tell me that the Bible is not inerrant (or that the Bible has error in it), then you are telling me God is capable of speaking error.

His word came through holy men as they were "borne along by the Holy Spirit." God is capable of



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preserving His word. Not one jot or tittle will pass away until all is fulfilled. I have absolute faith that it is God's word, spoken out of His veracity and His integrity, and that it is without error in the original autographs. But I find that whenever men want to tamper with God's truth, they have to attack the Bible.

I want to point out how Paul dealt with that tendency:

If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37).

Now, the next verse is very interesting: "But if any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized" (NAS). Another translates it: "If any man be ignorant, let him be ignored." I am not going to fight with people who deny the authority of the word of God. If God has not spoken, I have no grounds for my Christian convictions. My convictions would then become only opinions.

I am concerned about the authority of the word being dissipated in many circles, and I say to you bluntly, you and I have to take a simple and firm position on the word of God. If you are for it as the inerrant Scripture, then it will be the base of your conviction. If you are not sure, then you are going to live in the tents of uncertainty. Our stance must be: "I affirm the word of God to be inerrant."

2. The Healthy Maintenance of the Charismata or the Gifts

One of the easiest and quickest ways to get rid of your charismatic troubles is to throw out everything charismatic. I remember a woman coming up to me in Chicago one day and saying, "I have had it up to here with spiritual gifts. I'm not going to believe in them any more. I've heard some crazy things," and she flounced out of the meeting.

You never solve a problem by destroying it. You solve it by *solving* it.

With all the excesses in the charismatic church at Corinth, with everybody talking in tongues at once and four or five prophets prophesying simultaneously, there was confusion. However, Paul never said, "Your gifts are of the devil." He said, "Your *handling* of them is carnal." But Paul never questioned the validity of the gifts.

In Thessalonica, which was a Roman army outpost where everything was done by Roman law, they were so proper and conservative that when they had a few bad prophecies, they said, "We don't want any more prophets." We must not get turned off by the misuse of spiritual gifts by carnal people. We must seek to excel in spiritual gifts and press in to use them properly. We should not forbid them, nor despise them, but rather adjust them.

3. The Absolute Essentiality of Unity

Carnality is always divisive, always questions the word of God and always misuses spiritual gifts. From I Corinthians 1:7 you would have thought the Corinthians were the greatest bunch of people who ever lived. Listen to this:

... ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (vss. 7-10).

The Corinthians were gifted, but they were also carnal and contentious as verse 11 points out:

For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

Without digressing, let us recall that many Christians talk about the “old man” and the “new man” as if one or the other were “in” them. While there is a tension between the Spirit and the flesh, the “old man” is something you were *in*, not something *in* you. Likewise, the new man is something you are *in*, not something *in* you.

When Paul is talking about “the new man,” he’s talking about a *social* situation. You and I were in the old man. Through faith, repentance and baptism, we came out of the old man and were translated into the new man—Christ. 1 Corinthians

12:13 tells us that we were all baptized into “one body”—God’s people. The Body of Christ in Corinth, Ephesus, or any other place is the “new life, new man” community. So we are baptized into life, and we are baptized into *people*.

This “new man” into which we’re baptized should be a well-ordered, disciplined community of people. The New Testament gives directions and guidelines to ensure the true nature of this new society. On the day of Pentecost, the Bible says, “And there were joined unto them 3,000 souls.” Those 3,000 people were joined to the already existing people and came into its government, its oversight, its discipline, its order. I can’t believe that God would put order into this physical universe and put order into Israel gathering around the Tabernacle without putting order into His redeemed new covenant people.

LET GOD’S ORDER ARISE

Now we have examined three areas (and undoubtedly there are more), of failure in the charismatic Corinthians. There was failure to comprehend the divine purpose, failure to cooperate with the divine people, and failure to continue in the divine power.

In dealing with “charismatic crisis,” we have affirmed the authority of the word, the healthy maintenance of the charismata, and the essentiality of unity as basic positive values.

Unfortunately, we see, as we read history, that it is almost habitual for God’s people to mishandle God’s blessing. If you read both biblical and Church history, you will start to grow sick as you see again and again how God graciously visits His people, and they repeatedly mishandle His grace.

In my own lifetime I have watched several visitations of God, some of them local, some of them more widespread, which had all the promise of developing into major continuing impacts in the world, only to see them frustrated by human irresponsibility and immaturity.

If the God of history is in charge of the Charismatic Renewal, it will have order in it. The God that upholds all things by the word of His power has put laws in all of the created universe. Israel’s every tribe knew exactly where to camp in relation to the Tabernacle. There was order in Israel. Today, we must heed God’s call to move on into our rightful place and function in the community of the redeemed.

Let divine order come into the camp! ♥

