

J. I. Packer, in *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1984), pp. 200-234, 244-248, writes:

We move now to the main question, to which we have thus far been clearing the way. In what terms should we theologize -- that is, explain in terms of God -- the characteristic charismatic experience? What should we take the Holy Spirit to be doing in the lives of charismatics at the point where they profess a spiritual experience transcending that of other Christians? This is in fact the major question the movement raises; by concluding from its central convictional and ethical fruits that God is in it and by finding closer correspondence between "charismatic" and "noncharismatic" spirituality than is sometimes noticed, I have made it a more difficult question than it would be otherwise. If the typical spiritual experience in charismatic communities was Christless, loveless, and prideful, our question would not arise, for there would be no reason to ascribe such experience to the Holy Spirit at all; but as it is, the question presses acutely and cannot be evaded. For the fact we must now face is that the theology most commonly professed within the movement to account for its own claimed distinctives is deeply unbiblical.

The problem this fact creates for a movement that sees itself as a force for the renewing of true Christian experience is surely obvious. Experience is a slippery word, and experiences (that is, specific states of thought and feeling) coming to imperfectly sanctified sinners cannot but have dross mixed with their gold. No experience just by happening can authenticate itself as sent by God to further his work of grace. The mere fact that a Christian has an experience does not make it a Christian experience. The sign that an experience is a gift of God's grace is that when tested by Scripture, it proves to have at its heart an intensified awareness of some revealed truth concerning God and our relationship to him as creatures, sinners, beneficiaries, believers, adopted sons, pledged servants, or whatever. We have measured charismatic experience by this criterion and not found it wanting. But when that experience is pointed to -- and it often is -- as evidence for beliefs that appear to be biblically mistaken, we are left with only two options: either to reject the experiences as delusive and possibly demonic in origin, after all, or to re-theologize them in a way which shows that the truth which they actually evidence and confirm is something different from what the charismatics themselves suppose. This is the choice we now have to make with regard to at least the mainstream of charismatic testimony.

Some, noting the mistakes charismatic experience is said to verify, have taken the first course and written off the movement as delusive and dangerous. Nor can one altogether blame them when one thinks of the euphoric conceit with which the mistaken assertions are sometimes (not always) made, the naive mishandling of Scripture that often goes with them, and, most distressing of all, the seeming unconcern of so many charismatic spokesmen about