

The evaluation of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement on the basis of Sola Scriptura

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Introduction

When evaluating a certain religion or religious movement, it is vital to evaluate its epistemology. The abstract science of epistemology is the method in which knowledge is gained, and the validity of the accumulated knowledge. In other words, epistemology is about how we know what we know, and whether what we know is valid. The Pentecostal-charismatic movements are developments of neo-protestantism, and many individuals within this movement claim Luther and Calvin as their heritage along with the principle of Sola Scriptura as their epistemology.

Thus, we must evaluate the Pentecostal-charismatic movement in light of this principle. The principle of Sola Scriptura states that the Bible is the sole highest authority. In other words, the Bible is the sole highest court of appeals when determining the truth of a given doctrine. If the doctrine goes against what Scripture says, then we must reject the doctrine, regardless of the authority, popularity, intelligence, and learnedness of those who are propagating it. Some Bible verses which support Sola Scriptura are Acts 17:10-11, 1Cor. 4:6, and 2Tim. 3:16-17. Luther formulated Sola Scriptura during the Reformation to counteract the multitude of man-made doctrines devised by the Roman Catholic church and its traditions. Theistic evolution is rejected on the basis of Sola Scriptura, since the adherents of the many various forms of theistic evolution have erected the idol of Darwin besides the authority of Scripture. In this case Darwinian theory informs these people's interpretation of Genesis 1-11.

Religious experience and Sola Scriptura

When examining the claims of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement we must examine how religious experience, private revelation and supposedly extra-Biblical revelations all relate to Sola Scriptura. Charismatics and Pentecostals all claim adamantly that they uphold Sola Scriptura, but is this really so? These people claim to receive special messages from God by the Holy Spirit, speaking to them from within. Some also claim to have seen vivid, extraordinary visions, some supposedly cast out demons, and have interacted with the spirit world, others claim to have seen Jesus; others speak in tongues and heal. These experiences are so vivid that these people truly believe that they are true manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

But does it all really add up? Is what we experience on par with the Word of the Scripture? The Bible says in Luke 16:29-31: "Abraham saith unto him, **They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.** And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, **If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.**" In this passage Abraham tells the rich man who is burning in hell that Moses and the prophets (the Old Testament writings) have a greater convincing power than someone rising from the dead. This means that the Scriptures have been given to us as a standard for defining truth. In 2Tim. 3:16-17 we read that "**All scripture is given** by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: **That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.**"

The Bible is the standard of all truth, and we need no other revelation to augment it. If God has declared that the Scriptures are complete, then no other form of revelation is needed for the man of God to discern the will of God and to be complete (to be perfect). Charismatics and Pentecostals and the rest of us do well if we heed the warnings found at the end of the book of Revelation: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, **If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:**" (Rev. 22:18). God takes it very seriously that He has closed the canon and that there is no extra revelation.

God's will

This is especially important when trying to discern God's will. Many charismatics and Pentecostals claim that the Holy Spirit speaks to them either in a spiritual whisper or even some audible form. Things such as who to marry, or which house to buy. In some extreme cases some charismatics have conundrums as to what color shoes they should buy. In such an extreme case a woman thought that she had to audibly hear the voice of the Spirit before she would even get out of bed in the morning! This mentality is reflected in the motto "Let go and let God". Some people even say that they have to empty themselves to the point that God thinks instead of them. Others play Bible roulette and open their Bibles at random and read random verses which their eyes just so happen to fall on. This becomes hilarious if one happens to read Matthew 27:5 "And he [Judas] cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.", and then "And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise." (Luke 10:37)

God is a God of order and not one of impersonal randomness. Book editors arrange their books in chapters which follow one another in an orderly fashion. Since God is greater than mere men, God would naturally order His Word with meaningful structure in it. The Bible is God's self-revelation; it is a revelation of His character and Being. If you know and understand the Bible, then you know God. That is because God is one with His Word, that is why Jesus Christ, the Son of God is also called the Word of God (John 1:1). The Bible also says: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: **the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.**" (John 6:63). If you know the Bible, then you understand the way God thinks. It is akin to how lovers get to know each other through the letters that they write to each other. If you know the Bible, you will be able to apply what you have learned to your everyday life situations. Based on the value system found in the Bible you will be able to discern what is pleasing to God, and what is not (Romans 12:1-2). For example, when choosing an occupation, a Christian will know that it is better to work as a doctor in order to save lives than become a prostitute or a hitman. Think about how poorly many of us know the Bible! We should all get to know our Bibles better! We can have only as much zeal as we have knowledge!

Evaluating this mentality is especially critical when charismatics believe that God had told them to do something which is contrary to Scripture. One person claimed that God told him to divorce his wife and marry someone else, which breaks the seventh commandment condemning adultery. In another case a girl from a particular youth group claimed that God wanted her to become a Bible study leader, despite how the Bible says that men are supposed to be spiritual leaders in the church. This type of mentality is wide-spread in the neoevangelical church as well as the Pentecostal-charismatic movement. This mentality is fundamentally flawed since it wants to bypass Scripture as a source of Revelation. It is as if though these people have a special backstage entrance to God so as to be privy to special personal

revelation meant for them and them only. This leads to an over-spiritual mentality of some people being haves whereas others being have-nots. This leads to divisiveness and has no place within the church.

Some charismatics will claim that they receive private revelation only, and that it is not meant for general truth. This claim fails on two major points. First of all, whatever revelation one receives from God, it can be used to edify others. A charismatic friend of mine once claimed that the Holy Spirit led him to buy a house for a certain value, but that this message was only for him, since it was his house. However, it would have been edifying for me (if his charismatic epistemology of by-passing Scripture was really true), since it would be an example to me that God listens to prayers and helps His people out.

Secondly, if it really is true that the Holy Spirit personally whispers words of wisdom and guidance to people, then it's obvious that these words of the Holy Spirit could and should be written down. College students make profuse notes of the words of wisdom imparted to them by their professors. Everything is written down in script so that information can be retained. How would we then not write down the words of who we believe to be the very Spirit of God, the Spirit of Truth, the third Person of the Trinity, who these people believe to be truly and very present before them? God spoke through the prophets, and His word was recorded in the books of the four major prophets and those of the twelve minor prophets. In fact, if we would record in writing what millions of charismatic and Pentecostal believers believe to be the very words of the Holy Spirit, then we could fill whole volumes of books of these bits of wisdom spoken to them by the Creator God of the universe through His Spirit. Somehow, charismatic believers do not feel the need to do so. For some reason they do not believe these words to be weighty enough so as to merit writing them down as testimony to later generations to edify and encourage them. This mirrors a lax relationship on the part of charismatics towards God, which is not encouraging.

Finally, we should also note that some false religions also claim to have received personal revelation from God. For example, Joseph Smith, the man who started the Mormon religion (which denies the Trinity) claims to have received new private revelation from the angel Moroni by reading golden tablets and writing down this information down as the book of Mormon. Since all such private revelation must be measured against the canon of Scripture, it follows that these private revelations of charismatic believers cannot come from God, since why would God give less weight to some of what He says than to other things He has revealed to us? It is as if though God is asking us not to take Him so seriously.

Claims that the Holy Spirit has spoken privately to charismatic people means that their experience is highly subjective. They ask us to believe what they experienced at face value. As someone standing outside, you are simply incapable of getting into the other person's head in order to validate their experience. In fact, one could perform a thought experiment whereby two charismatic people confront each other with completely contradictory messages, both supposedly from God, trying to convince each other that they are right and that the Lord spoke to them. That's why we have the Bible as the sole highest authority. Sola Scriptura!

Charges of Pharisaism

At times the charge of Pharisaism comes forth from charismatics against Bible believers. This stems from how charismatics view spirituality. 2Cor. 3:6 is the verse they commonly quote when making these accusations: "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." So they say, that the words of the Bible alone are dead unless the Holy Spirit comes and enlivens them. This is eerily similar to the liberal teaching that the

Bible only becomes true in human experience. This, despite John 6:63 which has been cited previously that the words of the Bible are spirit and life. You are not to contrast God's written Word with the Holy Spirit so sharply! What this verse properly refers to how the law cannot give eternal life, since the law only shows us our sins and condemns us, and that God by His Holy Spirit gives us new life.

Bible believers are compared to the Pharisees who are viewed as "keepers and interpreters of the word", but deny spirituality. A grave charge this is against conservative Bible believers, for the Pharisees were also Christ killers. The author is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), which came out of the Presbyterian Church, USA (PCUSA) in the thirties. It was the Auburn affirmation in the twenties around which liberals rallied stating that in order to be a good Christian it was not necessary to hold to necessary doctrine such as the Virgin birth, or the Resurrection. Liberals nowadays even deny the inerrancy of Scripture, the very sacrifice of Christ, and even the Trinity, and by doing so bear the spirit of the antichrist. It was in the thirties when J. Gresham Machen, the founder of the OPC, then still a theology professor in the PCUSA was suspended in a most heinous and criminal manner in 1935 by members of his own church who denied the Westminster Standards that they had sworn to uphold. Liberals are the true Pharisees in that they persecute the true church, and introduce masses of false doctrine just as the Pharisees did with their traditions.

Speaking in tongues

Another grave issue is that of speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues (called glossolalia in Latin) is a phenomenon whereby someone comes under the direct control of a spirit in such a way that he utters at times unintelligible words in a condition of utter ecstasy. We read about speaking in tongues in chapters 12-14 of 1 Corinthians. In 1 Cor. 14:22 we read that "**Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.**" Tongues were a sign peculiar only to the age of the apostles to signify the authority of the apostles and their finished and sealed teaching. Thus, the Bible tells us that tongues will have ceased some time: "Charity never faileth: but **whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease**; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. **But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.**"

These verses state quite plainly that tongues shall cease, and even some charismatic historians concur. Thus, the onus is truly upon the Pentecostal/charismatic movement to prove that God will for some reason, contrary to all logic restart what He has put an end to. Verse 10 has also been highlighted because charismatics counter that tongues will only cease at the fullness of time, when the perfect will come. Thus, they claim, tongues have not ceased and will continue until the end of all time. There are good reasons why this claim cannot be true. First of all, verse 8 talks also mentions prophecy as well as tongues. If tongues will cease only at the end of time, then so too will prophecy also cease, only at the end of all time. However, we know that prophecy has ceased because the canon of Scripture has been closed, excluding new prophecies, and any new additions to revelation. Tongues are only a temporary gift; a sign as the Scripture says so that when the early church received God's written Word they knew that they had received all the information they need, so that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:17). If even your interpretation of Scripture contradicts Sola Scriptura, then you know that your doctrine must be wrong, since the doctrine of Sola Scriptura is revealed within Scripture!

Some charismatics, in not wishing to offend non-charismatics claim that visions, tongues, and other extra-Biblical revelations are not for everyone. This may seem wise, but is really a superficial ad-hoc explanation.

It would make more sense if not everyone within all church congregations have the gift of tongues, rather than only a specific denomination having received that gift. We should be seeing people speaking in tongues regardless of whether they are Pentecostal, Methodist, Baptist or Reformed. We should see a number of people in each church speaking in tongues rather than this phenomenon being localized only to the Pentecostal/charismatic denominations.

Jesus Christ Himself never spoke or prayed in tongues, yet He is the absolute example for His followers in how to pray. In Matthew 6:9 this is how Jesus taught us how to pray: **“After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name...”** Imitation of someone is not always equivalent of following that person. Just because we imitate Christ doesn't necessarily mean that we are following Christ. Christ died a unique death on the cross that we cannot imitate (despite how Roman Catholics go so far as to even have themselves crucified so as to supposedly partake in the sacrifice of Christ). In a similar vein just because we would like to imitate the apostles and the early believers by praying in tongues doesn't necessarily mean that we are following Christ. Also, we have no way of identifying whether tongues spoken today are the same as those made manifest at Pentecost. In other words, no kind of 2000 year old tape recording exists of people speaking in tongues by which we could verify whether they and modern tongues are one and the same.

The issue of tongues is a very grave matter indeed, since if tongues have ceased, then modern tongues are not of God. Consequently they must come from somewhere else. **“And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”** (2Cor. 11:14) Indeed, many people who have been known to have prayed in modern tongues used words from other languages which instead of praising God were actually cursing Him. Other people devolved to the level of barking like dogs. Linguistic analysts have said that modern tongues, as practiced by people in the Pentecostal/charismatic movement very much resemble ecstatic tongues of pagan religions, or that even people under demonic possession spoke in tongues similar to what is experienced in charismatic circles. Some may be relieved to know that not all of modern tongues are demonic but rather psychosomatic in origin; modern tongues can be learned, and controlled. It is as if charismatics claim that can somehow hold the Holy Spirit on a leash, and that they have the power to beckon Him at will. This, despite the Scriptural fact that the Holy Spirit cannot be constrained: **“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”** (John 3:8)

Demonic influence a grave issue

Paul writes to the Corinthians with these words: **“But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.”** On the converse side it is quite possible that if someone speaks in modern tongues, he is under demonic influence, or possibly demonic possession. If you speak or pray in tongues, you should know very well that in such a way you are opening yourself to the spiritual realm. If so, then you cannot know who you are opening yourself up to. You could be open to a goodly influence, but you might also be opening yourself up to demonic influence. It was absolutely terrifying when I discussed this issue with a friend of mine who was on the path towards charismaticism. He claimed that though it is possible that if you speak in modern tongues you could open yourself up to demonic influence, you could also be open to godly influence. Would you ever get on an airplane if there was a 10% chance that it would malfunction and fall to the ground in mid-air? This is nothing to be taken lightly and trifled with, and reflects a poor relationship with God if one does so.

Another more far-fetching consequence of by-passing Scripture in order to please oneself with playing with trinkets of the spiritual realm is that it can introduce serious, fundamental, or even fatal error into one's theology. For example, one such fatal error involved false teachings about the Trinity. The Oneness Pentecostal movement claims that the Trinity is made up of three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who existed separately during different epochs of human history. According to them, only the Father existed in Old Testament times, while excluding the Son and the Holy Spirit. Only the Son existed during His time here on earth. Finally, only the Holy Spirit exists starting from the time of Pentecost until today. Another error a charismatic friend of mine told me is that they state that Jesus Christ never claimed to be God Himself. This despite John 10:30 where Jesus says that "I and my Father are one", or Romans 9:5: "Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." The verses and arguments they used are similar to those used by Jehova's Witnesses. This is very, very serious in that if someone gets the teaching of the Trinity wrong, then they cannot know God, because the Trinity is the teaching of the very nature of God, this is one thing which sets us apart from Muslims. But, even more seriously, we then know that this person is speaking from the influence of the spirit of the antichrist: "And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world." (1John 4:3)

True spirituality

What then is true spirituality? In these modern, atheist, spiritually dry times, many people would like to be wowed by the supernatural manifestation of God, to see something miraculous of God. It is something like the mentality of consumerism where people want to put God in a television box and watch him like a circus clown do tricks or have him play the part of the bazaar monkey. Some people would play the part of an over-spiritual mystic who claims to be so tightly in communion with God so as to receive extra-Biblical revelations from Him.

True spirituality is to follow God's will, and to be obedient to His Word. It doesn't necessarily mean flashing lights and thundering voices. To discern God's will should not be hard if you know the Bible. God does not play hide-and-seek with His own children. It is to humbly follow God and to rely on His grace on a daily basis. In the words of James, one of the writers of the New Testament: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27) True spirituality involves understanding the Word of God and allowing His Holy Spirit to guide us unto all truth.

Discerning the will of God and hearing His still, small voice (1Kings 19:12) is not hard at all, and can be done without the cacophony of modern charismatic languages. Psalm 37:7 says: "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him" "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth." (Psalm 46:10) God knows what is on your heart even before you ask it: "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." (Matthew 6:7-8)

Amen.