

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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A LETTER TO CHARISMATICS

Dear Christian Friends:

It's difficult for non-charismatics to understand what's going on within the charismatic movement. Several things utterly confuse me. Maybe you can help me sort them out.

Here's what I've observed. A split seems to have developed in the Pentecostal camp. It parallels the split which has divided other Bible-believing churches and associations since 1975: traditionalists vs. activists. Traditionalists stick to the "tried and true" **religion of non-involvement**: worship, music, public prayers, and collection plate-passing. (Pentecostals add hand clapping, shouting, and public healing.) Traditionalists don't get involved in politics. They sponsor missionaries, feed poor people, set up orphanages, and run missions in the wino districts, but they are careful to tell everyone that they "don't get involved in social action." You get the idea: these people are **conservatives**. (They are what I call **pietists**.)

Other Pentecostals are calling for something called **renewal**. They aren't content with shouting and clapping and passing collection plates. They want healing, all right, but they see healing as something comprehensive: **healing the whole Christian community**. So in addition to orphanages and such, they set up Christian schools and family counselling centers, and that sort of thing. Even more astounding, some of them are at last registering to vote. (The humanist media can't believe who they're voting for! Why, it's people like . . . President Reagan! It has scared CBS News to death.)

A Strategy for Success

There's something else, too. These charismatics (activist Pentecostals) think that if they follow what they call "biblical principles," they'll get rich. Well, maybe not rich, but at least better off than their neighbors, and surely better off than the people who attend traditional Pentecostal churches.

They have a plan. Anyway, their T.V. evangelists have a plan. I think it's called "name it and claim it." Maybe I've got this wrong. Maybe it's "pray it and pay it." I even heard one skeptic call it "blab it and grab it." But what I think it's all about is visualizing what you want, and then working hard to save up the money to achieve it. I call it **slave and save**. People used to call this the Protestant work ethic, but then that idea was widely ridiculed as "materialistic," so respectable Christians stopped talking about it. Now "unrespectable" charismatics have rediscovered it.

Charismatic preachers are saying that when Christians pay attention to God's ethical requirements for mankind, Christians become capable of achieving victory in their lives—real, visible victory, not just inward "spiritual" victory. They are telling their followers that victorious living is not based solely on an emotional experience of God's power in their lives, but rather that experience, when coupled with **obedience to biblical principles**, produces outward fruit—

in other words, **God's manifestation of victory through His people**. They call this process **renewal**.

When charismatics say "renewal," they mean something more than the older term, "revival." They mean changing the world we live in by means of prayer, work, and an optimistic vision of the future. They mean **success**. Have I got this correct? And then they say that renewal leads to **dominion**.

Funny; that's what I say, too. So do a lot of other "activist" Christians who don't shout in church. What charismatics call **renewal**, I call **Christian reconstruction**. What they call **biblical principles**, some of us call **biblical laws**. Different names; same concepts.

What charismatics are being told is that there is a predictable relationship between **external success** and **self-discipline under God's law**. Not only does Christianity bring inward victory, but it also brings **outward victory**. Families are strengthened, lives are changed, and happiness increases. (Some of these T.V. preachers apparently believe that it is better to be able to afford to drive a new Cadillac than a ten-year-old Chevrolet. Shocking!) In other words, the word of God heals lives, businesses, and communities by placing people under biblical law. This teaching makes a lot of critics angry.

I'm arguing that these preachers teach a version of the Protestant work ethic. They don't teach that Christians will get rich merely by "naming and claiming," but that Christians must work harder, more honestly, more carefully, and more reliably than non-Christians. Why? To glorify God. The result? More wealth for the faithful. In other words, when people under God's covenant seek to glorify Him by their **outward conformity to His biblically revealed will**, God makes this glory visible to Christians and non-Christians alike. **He blesses faithful people**—for His sake primarily, but also for theirs.

Limiting Success

Obedience to biblical law brings success, not failure. This is what the "word of faith" ministers teach, right? **Obey God most of the time, and you are unlikely to lose most of the time**. And I do mean **time**. A **new view of time** is implied by such faith in the principles of godly living. **In time** we will be successful, not just at the end of time. God's principles are not principles just for successful dying, but **successful living**. God's principles do not lead to defeat in any area of life.

Do I understand these preachers accurately? Aren't they proclaiming **fixed biblical principles of success**? Aren't they saying that obedience to these universally valid fixed principles will eventually produce visible outward success? I think that's what they're saying. Correct me if I'm wrong.

Now, let me ask you something. Is there any area of life where these principles lead to **failure**? Are any of these preachers willing to make a list of those areas of life in which

the biblical principles of godly living **don't** apply? I've never heard any of them talk about such a list. They seem to believe that **these biblical principles are universal**. These principles worked in Old Testament days, and they still work in our day. Furthermore, these principles apply to **every area of life**. Do I understand their teaching properly?

Question: Do charismatics really believe in this program? I would like to think so, since I believe in it, but I have my doubts that they really do. The program sounds terrific, but there seems to be a hesitation on the part of most charismatics to follow the logic of their position. For instance, do they really believe that these biblical principles operate in the area of politics? Shouldn't **civil government** be governed by biblical law, the same way that **family government** is supposed to be governed by biblical law? How about law enforcement? Telecommunications? Publishing? Education? Why don't most charismatic preachers ever explain how these principles apply in these broader areas of life? Ignorance is one thing, but could it be that they don't really trust in the Bible's laws concerning these areas? They could read R. J. Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* if it were just a matter of ignorance. They could read James Jordan's *The Law of the Covenant*. But they don't. Why not? Maybe they just don't trust biblical law, even though they say they do. This baffles me.

If these biblical principles really do apply, then the next question is inevitable: "Why aren't Christians dominant in these fields? Why do pagan, humanistic, God-hating people dominate these areas of life? How is it that bad principles have driven out good principles?"

There is an answer, of course. **Christians have not obeyed God's principles in these cultural areas of life**. Quite so; they haven't. But this fact should prompt us to ask ourselves: **Why have Christians abandoned these principles?** One answer is easy: sin in their lives. It is a sin to disobey God's principles in any area of life. But don't we believe that personal sin can be overcome? Of course. How? By God's grace. All Christians say this.

Then why hasn't God given His people the grace to overcome sin and corruption in these broader areas, and therefore granted them the promised victory? **Because they haven't asked**. And more important, **because they haven't been willing to pay the price: obedience to biblical law**. Christians have been taught in this century that they **aren't** under God's law. And with this antinomian (anti-God's law) doctrine has come failure—massive cultural failure. Christian failure.

To mentally justify this failure, millions of Christians have adopted **an eschatology of earthly failure**—an eschatology which teaches that in time and on earth, God's people will be persecuted, defeated, bankrupted, ridiculed, imprisoned, and generally made to feel as though God is voluntarily impotent to implement His principles on earth through the efforts of His faithful servants. This doctrine is called **premillennial dispensationalism**. It is radically pessimistic.

Most charismatics say that they still believe in premillennial dispensationalism, even though they also say they believe in biblical principles of successful living. This baffles me. Are they pessimists or optimists? Do they believe in biblical law or don't they? Dispensationalism explicitly teaches that "we're under grace, not law," but charismatics also proclaim that "we're supposed to honor biblical principles."

It is understandable that most Protestant Christians seek to justify the church's failure in this century. But what I don't

understand is why it is that **those charismatics who preach victorious personal living through obedience to biblical principles have also retained their belief in a theology of antinomian (anti-biblical law) cultural defeatism**. As dispensationalists, they have to **deny** the doctrine that Christians are under an obligation to obey biblical law, yet they also insist that Christians are **supposed** to honor biblical principles. I can't figure this out. Can you?

Charismatics teach what appear to be two conflicting doctrines: 1) **personal**, visible, external victory is required by God and is made possible by the grace of God, and 2) **cultural**, visible, external victory by Christians is not expected by God and will not be made possible to His people by means of His grace until after the great tribulation, and only because Jesus comes back to take over personally. (And even then, according to dispensational theory, those who return to earth after the Rapture in victory with Christ will be in sin-free, perfect, zero-temptation bodies, so during their earthly period of testing, before the Rapture, Christians never can become cultural winners.) Christians can become personal winners before the Rapture, but cannot become cultural winners before the Rapture. Does this make sense to you? It doesn't to me.

Why is it that Satan's earthly followers, who violate God's principles for successful living, supposedly will remain in control of the world until the Rapture? Are we supposed to believe that Satan's principles produce personal failure but cultural success, while biblical principles produce personal success but cultural failure? Does this make sense to you? It doesn't to me.

If I ask, "Can Christians achieve progressive (though not perfect) victory over indwelling **personal sin** before Jesus returns in person?" I am told, "Absolutely!" But when I ask: "Can Christians achieve progressive (though not perfect) victory over **cultural sin** before Jesus returns in person?" I am told, "Absolutely **not!**" Can you explain this?

Charismatics say that God can heal bodies, and does. They say that God can heal churches and families, and does. They say that God can heal the whole world, but won't. Why not? Is there something the matter with God? **Or is there something the matter with premillennialism?**

My Two Questions

Question number one: Why aren't all the optimistic "word of faith" charismatics **postmillennialists**? Why don't they preach the possibility of **the visible historical victory of Christians in every area of life before Jesus returns at the Rapture**? Why don't they explain to their people that premillennial dispensationalism is **pessimistic** about the efforts of Christians, while postmillennialism teaches **victory**? Why don't they preach sermons based on David Chilton's book, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion*? (I know, some of them do, but why not all of them?)

Question number two: Why aren't all these "word of faith" charismatics **theonomists**? Why don't they start preaching the authority of God's law in our day? Why don't they encourage their followers to search the Bible (Old Testament and New Testament) and discover God's permanent, universal rules for godly living in every area of life, including civil government?

If you can help me figure out answers to these questions, I'll be grateful to you.

Sincerely yours,
Gary North

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