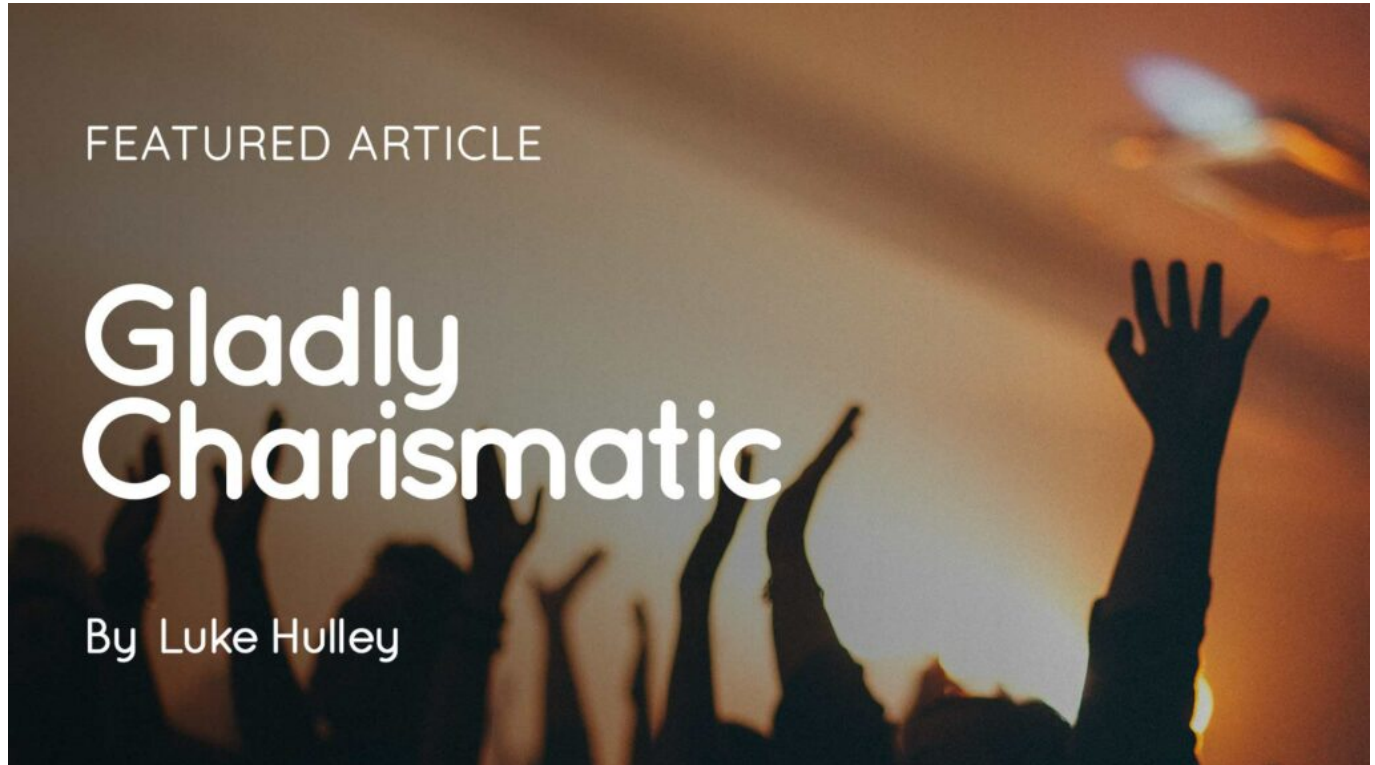


# Gladly Charismatic

14 June 2023



The modern church is divided on the issue of what it looks like in practice to be a Spirit-filled Christian. This divide has caused confusion for many saints who simply want to live out their relationship with Christ in a manner which is authentic and faithful to the Scriptures. These two camps are broadly referred to as 'Charismatic' and 'Reformed'.

The essential difference between the two views is as follows: Charismatics believe that all the spiritual '*charismata*' ('gifts') are still active in the church today, whereas the Reformed school believes that the more supernatural gifts (e.g. prophecy and healing) have ceased, because they were only given for a short phase of church history; they are no longer necessary today.

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That is the heart of the matter, theologically, but at a more cultural level there are several unhelpful stereotypes that I would like to debunk as well. For example, the Reformed camp is often thought of as the 'Sola Scriptura' ('Bible only') guys. The implication is that they are the ones firmly rooted in Scripture and are thus not easily swayed by culture or misguided zeal. On the other hand, Charismatics are often characterised as conference-junkies who are constantly chasing the next spiritual experience or prophecy.

But there is something deeper at stake here. God doesn't permit us to choose a camp which best suits our personality. Christians who tend towards a cerebral faith will often turn to the Reformed camp, whereas Christians who value experience and relationship with God will often tend towards the Charismatic camp. Here's the catch, though: Jesus said that true worshippers will worship Him "*in Spirit and in truth*". He wants us to worship Him with all of our *mind* but also with all of our *heart* and *strength*.

So, having set the context, let me dive into why I am very glad to be a *Charismatic* Christian.

## 1. Because it's Biblical

The irony here is rich. While the Reformed camp has a reputation for being *Sola Scriptura*, it is *because* of my reverence for the Scriptures that I am a Charismatic. All of the New Testament assumes that the saints are fully empowered by the Spirit to minister in the gifts. Paul explicitly states, “...eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy” (1 Corinthians 14:1). We are told that the gifts have been given “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

Another irony I have discovered is that the reason why many Reformed Christians believe that certain gifts have ceased is *primarily* because they haven't seen authentic prophecy or healings very often, or ever. The reason why this is ironic is because this is a very un-*Sola Scriptura* way of arriving at a theological conclusion.

Reformed churches get caught in a kind of endless loop. Because whole church affiliations are sceptical of the supernatural gifts, there is very little faith that God would speak or act in a supernatural way. Because of the lack of faith and expectation, there is thus very little or no *experience* of God acting in supernatural ways (because God responds to faith). This lack of experience, in turn, strengthens their collective scepticism.

We cannot create a theology which justifies our experience.

However, in Charismatic circles there is a collective inclination towards expecting the supernatural. They have the conviction that nothing has changed within God's church and that the same Spirit that was at work then is still at work in the church today. There is faith, and thus God regularly responds to that faith and they regularly *experience* genuine prophecy, healings, tongues, etc.

I want to stress this point. We cannot create a theology which justifies our experience. We are Evangelicals, we are *Sola Scriptura*. The Scriptures are our guide for spiritual life. To be *Sola Scriptura* does not simply mean that we reverence the Scriptures but then neglect to put them into practice. This is what the Pharisees were charged with. It is spiritual hypocrisy.

With regard to the supernatural gifts, if our experience does not match up with the expectation described in Scripture, then we need to seek the Lord and find out where we have grieved Him so that He can once again restore His Church to her former glories.

## 2. Our Faith is not merely Cerebral, it is also Experiential

God has called us to a vital faith, which is very much experiential. And I am very glad for it! This being the case, I want the full package. I want the faith of David, which is full of delighting in God's presence. I want a relationship with God like Abraham had, in which God speaks and guides me. I want a relationship with God like Paul had, in which the Spirit is moving and acting in and through

me. I want to experience, yes *experience*, the inexpressible joy in the Spirit that Peter described in his letter (1 Peter 1:8).

I am a man who likes to think and ponder on the mysteries of our faith. I love the study of Scripture, I love theology, I love to unpack the Scriptures in a way which stirs people's hearts to marvel at the glory and wisdom of God. But my faith is not merely cerebral. It is not just truth that I delight in. My goal is not only theological correctness and purity in the church. I have a soul, and my soul craves relationship. Yes, my soul craves an authentic experience of the living God. It was Jesus who said to the Pharisees, "**You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life.**" These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (John 5:39-40)

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In the same way the Pharisees loved the study of Scripture but missed the life to be found in Christ, the Reformed school is in danger of diligently studying the Scriptures but missing the life to be found in the Spirit; the very Spirit to whom the Scriptures point.

### 3. Passion is Freely Expressed

I am sad to say that within the Reformed church, emotions are often regarded as 'unspiritual' or unholy. But this is not true.

Our love for God includes loving Him with our whole *heart*. The heart is the seat of our will and emotions. It is the place from which our passions flow. This is why you find so much rejoicing in the Scriptures. When we get a revelation of God's true character, our passions are stirred up and we rejoice!

Jesus said, "*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Matthew 6:21). 'Heart' speaks of desires. Eternity with Christ should be what my heart is set on. Our desires dictate how we live, so Jesus constantly brings us back to a heart that is fully satisfied in Him.

And what kind of desire is this that we are speaking of? It is the same kind of desire that is misplaced in material temptations, like money. My point is simply this: it is REALLY important that our passion is directed towards Christ, because the alternative is idolatry.

Which is why it is important to me that when we worship Christ, we do so *passionately*. If I truly love Christ with 'all of my heart', surely this will be reflected in my worship?

In fact, my faith is on its surest footing when I am 'overly' passionate about Christ.

Charismatic churches are often accused of being overly-zealous, overly-emotional, hyped or frothy. These kinds of critiques spring from the assumption that our faith is primarily a cerebral kind of faith. But this is not a helpful assumption.

It would be reasonable to criticise a football fan of being overly-emotional. After all, it's just a game. But it is not possible to be overly-hyped about Jesus. In fact, my faith is on its surest footing when I am 'overly' passionate about Christ. When He is my number one passion, I find that all my other interests and passions find their proportionate size in my life.

Also, passion is infectious. When I am gathered with a bunch of Jesus-loving saints, their passion provokes me to love Jesus like I should. And I am grateful for that.

## 4. It's very New Testament

I love the fact that when I read the book of Acts, my own experience of Christianity fits right in. This is the way it should be. To be a Christian means to be a member of the New Covenant community. Right at the beginning, the New Covenant Church saw the fulfillment of this promise: *"I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions"* (Joel 2:28).

This is one of the key distinguishing marks of the New Covenant community: the Spirit has been poured out on *all* believers. Previously, prophecy had been the domain of the prophets and priests. In the New Covenant, it becomes the domain of all believers. In the Old Covenant, it was only the prophets and judges who worked miracles, but in the New Covenant, God's Spirit is poured out on all.

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Unfortunately, many New Covenant churches need to be reminded once again that *"you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation"* (1 Peter 2:9). God has not called us as believers to simply attend preaching centres where the 'professionals' do all the work. That is a very Old Covenant model!

I love the fact that in my church it is common to see 'ordinary' saints prophesying, performing miracles, driving out demons, speaking in tongues, leading people to Christ, preaching; continuing the story of the church in Acts. I love the fact that on many Sundays it is quite difficult to identify who is paid staff!

## Conclusion

It is with sadness that I notice how the Charismatic church worldwide is increasingly being ridiculed and denigrated, as though it were somehow weird to be living out your faith in a manner completely consistent with the portrait of the church given in the New Testament.

Much of the criticism of 'Charismania' that can be found on social media is tainted by an unhealthy scepticism of any modern church professing to be practicing supernatural gifts. The equivalent of this might be a plumber who is hyper-sceptical of the workings of electricity, critiquing the trade-craft of an electrician. I admit that there is great need of increased accountability within the global Charismatic church, and some of the well-publicised excesses are deplorable, but dare we turn to the 'plumbers' for counsel in correctly handling the power of electricity? Dare we go to those who

believe prophecy has ceased to learn about the true nature of prophecy? Dare we go to those who believe all faith-healers are frauds to learn about healing for the believer?

God loves it when I delight in Him – He loves my zeal, He loves my exuberance

This is why it is not helpful to form two camps, one for the Scripture-lovers and another for the Spirit-lovers, as this is a false dichotomy. We need churches which are as passionate about faithfully exegeting Scripture and upholding what it says as they are about promoting passionate worship and the healthy practice of *all* the spiritual gifts.

As a Charismatic, I often identify with David, passionately dancing in celebration of the Ark of the Covenant finally returning to its rightful resting place in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). He was despised by his wife, Michal, because she felt his behaviour was not fitting of the dignity of his kingly position. She felt that he was overly exuberant in his worship. I sometimes feel the sting of that criticism as a Charismatic. But then I remind myself that I live before 'an audience of One'. God loves it when I delight in Him – He loves my zeal, He loves my exuberance – and He has given me His Spirit so that I would fully enjoy His manifest presence. And so I will go on enjoying Him, and let the haters hate.

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This is an edited version of Luke Hulley's original blog on **Epiphanies and Orthodoxy**.