

A Preface

by Judy Reamer

In March 2018, I found myself at a three day conference in Orlando, Florida. Friends wanted me to go and offered to cover the expensive registration. My Jewish heritage clicked in. The free deal was not to be dismissed.

The conference was held at the beautiful First Baptist Church which seats about 3,000. I'd never heard of the five male speakers who were all dressed in suits and ties. Each speaker had authored books heavy in weight and thought. The first part of the conference thrilled my soul because the music was majestic and the speakers handled the Word skillfully. The men were all academics and intellectual, effective and articulate. I loved listening because I am an intellectual wannabee. All appeared to love the Lord and they consistently used biblical proof texts for everything they presented. I'm one who loves the deeper stuff since I'm a thinker, a researcher, a fact checker, and an avid reader. I'd rather read and learn than do anything else. I enjoyed their style of teaching. All talked in normal tones and didn't scream at the audience.

The theme of the conference was "Awakening." Every teacher spoke about various revivals that had taken place in history since the Apostolic era. Having studied revivals since the Apostolic era myself, I kept waiting for at least one to mention the Azusa Street Revival or the Welsh Revival in which both had miraculous signs before and following the preaching. What about "The Jesus Movement" of the early 1970s? Also, my former Mennonite close friends experienced a miraculous awakening in Lancaster, PA. I learned about it firsthand so I knew it was true without embellishment.

During a question and answer session, one of the teachers announced, "I am a **cessationist**." The other men seated beside him nodded in agreement. (I had never heard that the word "cessationist.") As I listened to him address the question, I learned cessationists believe the canon of Scripture closed with the Book of Revelation. We were to disregard the practice of the spiritual "signs and wonders" gifts since these were no longer in operation. I felt like something died in my soul. I did not know until that conference that many Reformed theologians believe tongues is mere gibberish and not a spiritual prayer language. Also, one of the teachers said, "Put no stock in dreams and visions today. They're not from God and we should regard those who advocate they are, or accept this belief, as dangerous. God's revelation has ceased." The others nodded again. Meaning that the dreams, for instance, or the appearances an angel or of the Lord that Muslims, Hindus, African tribes people, have had which caused them to appropriate a great salvation – those were discounted.

I've had a few visions and dreams whose fruit has born witness which could only have come from God and not my flesh. One vision I share in my autobiography as well as telling of one amazing dream that was of utmost importance for one of my trips operating as a Bible smuggler to the U.S.S.R. Another vision was transformative for me and birthed a series I've done many times by request and is in manuscript form right now. In my book, I share what God did with me a year before my salvation that caused the loss of my sight after He had spoken a New Testament verse I'd never known as a Jewish person.

What would these five men do with someone such as I? Count me dangerous? Everything they espoused as cessationists convinced me that these esteemed authors, pastors, and presidents

of organizations were effectively quenching the Holy Spirit – perhaps not consciously – but their theological views quenched the Spirit.

BUT their sermons (which never mentioned the Holy Spirit's power)... I agreed with! They revered the Cross, God's grace, His Providence, and His holiness. I soaked it all in. They spoke of the need for repentance, for obedience, and urged us to keep a pure heart and clean hands.

When I returned to my hotel room, I faced quite a dilemma! I wept hard after learning what cessationists believe and teach about any and all miraculous signs. So after the conference I threw all those teachers at the conference away with the dirty bathwater and never wanted to be anywhere near them again. I was angry with each one since they were influencing untold numbers worldwide with – what for me – was a lie. I exclaimed to my hotel room's four walls, "I'm finished with the Reformed gang!" (I have since found out that the pastors of my church – a church I love – are continuationists. They're somewhere on the spectrum of "Open, but cautious" or "Open, but overly suspicious." I'm in the closet 90% of the time because I respect my shepherds and would do nothing to divide. And to this class – all of you – Shhhh!)

And then... about two months later an announcement that came out of left field showed up on my computer screen. A three day Charismatic conference was to be held (exactly three months later to the day of the Reformed conference) in Orlando (the same city) at beautiful Faith Assembly of God Church which seats about 3,000 – the same as beautiful First Baptist Church. The theme was even the same as the other conference: "Streams of Revival." I certainly didn't want to go. I had already disregarded and dismissed so many of the extreme charismatics. But it was the only group in Christendom that acknowledged and accepted what happened to me (which I'll share Sunday in class) as valid. My daily life was already swamped. The trip with conference fees, flights, meals and hotel would cost a fortune in my eyes. But "Go, go, go" was the prodding from the heavenlies. Why? I didn't know, other than it was the Lord's business.

Well... it had been decades since I'd been to a Charismatic Conference with thousands of attendees from all over the nation. I'd ministered at several of these with as many as 15,000 attendees. But those days were long gone.

At this conference the worship went on for over an hour before the speakers took to the pulpit. There was tremendous delighting in the Lord. Some were praying on their knees, some sitting, some standing, some dancing in the back. Others were weeping in gratefulness. The singing was to Him not about Him. Such joyful excitement about Jesus.

Oh, how I had missed the wonder of putting aside self-consciousness to fully glorify the Godhead. I worshipped Him the way I used to do for decades. Nobody cared what anyone else did. Being true to yourself before the Lord was encouraged. The worship times were glorious. Three thousand people worshipping together was quite wonderful. I knew not one person at the meetings. Yet, I knew I was with family. No one was in a hurry to stop praising God in song.

I will take a little time to tell you about some of the experiences at that conference when I speak on Sunday. But as the conference went on with five speakers (authors, pastors, presidents of organizations) I became aware that there was no call for repentance, nor was there any mention of sin. It was about the power of God and "The joy of the Lord is our strength." Both biblical for sure.

But as the conference went on, I became aware there was no call for repentance nor any mention of sin. I found myself getting more and more upset because I thought the emphasis on holiness and repentance of sin at the Reformed conference was so very important. At this charismatic conference there was a lot of preaching, but little teaching. But the testimonies were inspiring as they encouraged God's children to increase their faith and trust in our powerful and loving God. The Body of Christ at these meetings fully realized how the spiritual gifts were a valuable help in their journeys. Praise was real and often!

Well, after the last meeting I returned to my hotel room in the same city I was in three months earlier. I began to cry as hard as I did exactly three months before. I told the Lord, "I can't go back!" I'm not ever going to a charismatic convention again even though I had been one of the popular teachers at their huge conventions a couple decades earlier. "I'm finished with the charismatic crowds!" is what I spoke to the four walls of my hotel room in Orlando.

After both conferences I wanted to file a lawsuit against them for spiritual malpractice. Where can I go to worship? All that was left to do was God and me in my home with my Bible. I was angry and appalled by both camps. I wanted to yell to both the reformed crowd and the charismatic crowd in the Body of Christ: "Reformed followers, you're missing it here. And then to the charismatic followers, "You're missing it here!" "You both think you've got it down, but you don't. Both of you have extremes on the fringes."

In my opinion both groups are unbalanced. But I must remind myself often that we all see imperfectly! There is no perfect church, no perfect person, no perfect author, pastor, or president of an organization Every single group that assembles together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ doesn't get it! I must remind myself also, "***I know what I know, but I don't know everything!***"

That's my testimony of doing deep dives into alternative sides in Christianity who struggle to love and accept one another. I've lived in both "houses," and I have grown away from the anger and grown in love. God's grace gets the blame for that finale.

See you Sunday – and please the tar 'n' feathers home!

In Him, with you,
Judy