

Serious Deception of Falling in the Spirit

Prof. Johan Malan, South Africa (Dec. 2006)

The phenomenon of falling (being slain) in the Spirit is an unbiblical practice which surfaced in the charismatic movement for the first time during the second half of the 20th century. Since then it has spread all over the world and become an instrument in the hands of the devil to establish a false kind of mystical spirituality in the lives of millions of people. This practice still continues, and it is imperative that young believers should be warned against its dangers.

Falling in the Spirit (or slain in the Spirit) was originally popularized by preachers such as Kathryn Kuhlman, Kenneth Hagin and William Branham, who were later followed by Gordon Lindsay, Jim Spilman, Derek Prince, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Rodney Howard Browne, Reinhardt Bonke and others.

Since then, the movement has spread widely and been accepted by many Pentecostal churches. The pastors who have the ability to bring about falling in the Spirit are regarded by their followers as specially anointed men of God who function on a higher level than ordinary pastors. For many of them, this manifestation of supernatural power brought instant fame and wealth.

The prophecy of Joel 2:28 is generally applied to falling in the Spirit. It is alleged that this is the Holy Spirit's special way of manifesting Himself in the last days, and for that reason it was unknown to earlier generations. Critics of the movement are warned that they should not resist the work of the Spirit – that is why many of them hesitate to even apply a basic scriptural test to this strange phenomenon.

Forms of falling in the Spirit

This 'touch of power' can be bestowed upon individuals or large groups. The persons are usually prayed for, sometimes they are blown upon, or they may be pushed over or only touched; the preacher may sweep his hand or merely snap his fingers, after which the person(s) will fall down backwards. When it only happens to one person at a time, an assistant will catch the falling person and lay him or her down on the floor. Towels are often used to cover the legs of women who have fainted and fallen backwards after being slain in the Spirit.

But there is also a chaotic way of falling in the Spirit which happens to a whole audience, or part of it. When certain words are uttered by the preacher, or when he sweeps his hand, the entire group of people will fall over backwards and cause a chaotic situation. Chairs are pushed over or displaced and people are falling on each other. Some of them

bump against the chairs or pews and may even sustain serious bruises or cuts for which medical treatment might be needed. Groans, babbling, laughter and other strange noises intermingle to underscore the chaos.

Experiences during falling in the Spirit

An investigation of this phenomenon has revealed that those who have fallen down all experienced a certain degree of absence of their mind. They may be placed in the following three categories:

Firstly, there are those who almost immediately recover again. They had no desire to fall, but were pushed over by other people and yielded to group pressure by falling down. They do not have any specific experience while lying on the floor.

Secondly, there are those who lie down for 10 to 15 minutes. They go off in a light trance during which they are still conscious of voices around them. They have nice feelings of peace and joy which they describe as the presence of God. They are convinced that these feelings originated from a spiritual realm outside their bodies.

Thirdly, there are those who remain in a trance for up to six hours. During this time they are not conscious of anything. Many of them attach great significance to the length of their trance since they are under the impression that God conducts His work of inner healing during this time. Benny Hinn calls it "God's operation table." The 'inner healing' is done while the person is unconscious and is therefore not dependent upon repentance or the confession of sins.

Significance of falling in the Spirit

The significance of this experience is described in various ways. The view is held that this is an overwhelming experience of God's power and glory. Human beings cannot resist it and fall down unconscious when a current of this power flows through them. Kathryn Kuhlman said: "All I can believe is that our spiritual beings are not wired for God's full power and when we plug into that power we just cannot survive it." They are strongly convinced that they are spiritually uplifted by it, of which there is no concrete evidence.

In certain groups falling in the Spirit is equated with salvation since unsaved people are also stricken by it. Ezra Coppin said: "I have seen many people so slain who were not Christians, and the experience had the fabulously glorious result of making believers out of them! They rose to a new life."

The view is also held that falling in the Spirit is an initiation to holiness for beginners. Such people were spiritually immature and need an experience of this nature to get

going. Morton Kelsey said: “An experience of going down under the power may give just the push that is needed to start an individual – like a car with a dead battery – moving towards growth in the Spirit.”

Apart from the general need for spiritual growth, falling in the Spirit is also associated with a baptizing or anointing with the Holy Spirit. In this way, gifts are imparted to believers. Various manifestations and gifts of the Spirit may follow this experience. It is also said that during these times the Lord Jesus appears to believers to make promises to them or to give specific commands.

New manifestations

Various other phenomena, such as laughing in the spirit, prophesying in the spirit and dancing in the spirit, which result from falling in the Spirit, are also attributed to the Holy Spirit. Many people blindly accept these phenomena without testing the spirits, despite the danger of spurious satanic imitation in such manifestations.

Most of the Word of Faith preachers create strong expectations of powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit. However, there is no scriptural basis for the signs that allegedly occur at their meetings. Apart from the signs already mentioned, one of the more recent phenomena is the so-called “New Wine” meetings where people stagger like drunks. This is accompanied by falling, dancing and laughing in the spirit, also pogo stick jumping and making a wide range of animal noises such as barking like dogs, bleating like sheep, crowing like roosters and roaring like lions.

Physical symptoms that accompany these experiences are severe shaking, electric-like surges, the loss of physical strength, labored breathing, fluttering eyelids, trembling lips, the seeming appearance of oil or gold dust on parts of the body, uncontrolled laughter, a feeling of drunkenness, nausea, vomiting, complete disorientation, mystical visions, audible voices from the spirit world, the absence of pain, a feeling of weightlessness which makes you jump up and down, a feeling of heaviness which causes a person to reel to and fro and fall down on the floor, shouting and the making of various animal noises.

Some of these manifestations also occur at the services of TB Joshua in Lagos, Nigeria. One of them is vomiting in the Spirit. He teaches that the evil and spiritual impurities hide in a person’s stomach, and that vomiting during a service can remove it. Some of the objects that come out resemble pieces of stone, shells, worms and blood.

A very common manifestation of the anointing associated with falling in the Spirit is the ability to prophesy in the Spirit. Such people claim that God speaks to them directly, not

through His written Word, and that they conduct dialogue with one another on various matters. It is very obvious that these people entertain a serious misconception about God speaking to them as they merely project their own thoughts in the second person to God and then mistake it to be His voice. They often distort biblical truths and always have personal messages from the Lord to other people. Because they elevate themselves to a level where God speaks to them personally, they do not have a teachable spirit to heed other people's Bible-based correction of their views. They also attach great significance to other extra-biblical experiences such as dreams, visions, and angels who appear to them. It is obvious that they are caught up in a strange reality which has been created by their own imagination. Deceiving spirits may also play a role in deluding them to believe what they do.

There are many examples of self-appointed prophets who proclaim false prophecies derived from unbiblical sources. *The Berean Call* of November 2006 says: "There are so many false prophets on radio and TV (most of them on TBN) that we couldn't begin to name them all. The most popular today is Benny Hinn... His false prophecies are too many to recite. One is enough: On December 31, 1989, claiming that he was in the very throne room of God, Hinn declared: 'The Lord also tells me about '94 or '95, no later than that, God will destroy the homosexual community of America by fire.' It didn't happen. Yet the more false prophecies he utters, the larger Hinn's following grows and the louder do Paul Crouch and his TBN dupes praise him." Benny Hinn is a big supporter and practitioner of falling in the Spirit.

Evaluation

The following discussion and evaluation of falling in the Spirit was done by Rev. Denzel Dick of South Africa:

The only true test for falling in the Spirit is God's Word. The common argument that, in terms of the prophecies of Joel, God is doing something new, amounts to reading meanings into Scripture which were never implied by it. In this way, the devil can give any new experience to open, naive people who will accept it without testing the spirits. Paul says, "Beware lest anyone should cheat you through... empty deceit" (Col. 2:8).

During falling in the Spirit in meetings people always fall backward to have a positive experience with the Holy Spirit. The Bible, however, mentions four instances where people fell down backward as examples of God's judgment and rejection because of their infidelity and sin:

1. “Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse’s heels so that its rider shall fall backward” (Gen. 49:17).
2. “Then it happened... that Eli fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died” (1 Sam. 4:18).
3. “But the word of the Lord was to them, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little, that they might go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and caught” (Isa. 28:13).
4. “Then – when He said to them, I am He – they drew back and fell to the ground” (John 18:6).

John 18:6 is commonly used by supporters of falling in the Spirit. However, the following needs to be said about this practice from a biblical point of view:

Firstly, the people who allegedly fell in the Spirit in John 18:6 were the enemies of Christ, including Judas Iscariot.

Secondly, the falling backward was not a condition of unconsciousness or fainting. It was rather a reaction of shock by lost people after meeting the Lord. John 18:6 can, therefore, not be used as justification for the present practice of falling in the Spirit, because it clearly suggests that those who fell down were lost sinners.

Thirdly, in the Bible people fell forward on their knees or face. Every time when that happened (about 30 times) the results were good and profitable.

The following Scriptures are used in defense of falling in the Spirit: Gen. 17:3; Num. 16:4; 24:4; Lev. 9:24; Jos. 5:14; Jud. 13:20; 1 Kings 18:39; 1 Chron. 21:16; Ezek. 1:28; 2:1-2; 3:23; 43:4; 44:4; Dan. 8:17; 10:9; Matt. 2:11; 17:6; 28:1-4; Mark 5:33; Luke 5:8; 8:47; 17:16; Acts 9:4 or 26:14; 16:29; 1 Cor. 14:25; 2 Cor. 12:2-4; Rev. 1:17; 4:10; 5:8; 19:4.

Although supporters of falling in the Spirit use these scriptures to justify their practice, the contrary is true. These verses explicitly refer to a falling forward on the knees or face. That was mostly a conscious act: “Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him” (Gen. 17:3).

It was also a traditional way of greeting and a form of showing respect when people bowed down before their king, or slaves subjected themselves to their lords. It was also a sign of humbling and showing respect and fear to a holy God – cf. Peter who fell down at the knees of Jesus (Luke 5:8), Paul’s conversion in Acts 9:4, and John humbling himself on Patmos when he fell down at the feet of Jesus (Rev. 1:17).

In ancient times it was the most natural thing to fall on your knees or face to take on a position of prayer or honoring someone. It was in no way associated with fainting or incoherent talk. In Matt. 2:11, the wise men “fell down and worshipped [the Child]”. 1 Cor. 14:25 refers to a member of a congregation, “falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among [us].”

The reason for the falling down was not, as some people say, that the person was stricken down by the Spirit of God. The Bible never says that the Holy Spirit struck people down. They fell because of one the following human reactions:

Fear (Num. 16:4; Jos. 5:14; Jud. 13:20; Dan. 8:17; 10:9; Matt. 17:6; 28:1-4; Luke 8:47; Acts 9:4).

Joy and thanksgiving for blessings (Lev. 9:24; Matt. 2:11; Mark 5:33; Luke 17:16).

Honor, humbling and worship in the presence of God (1 Kings 18:39; 1 Chron. 21:16; Ezek. 1:28; 2:1-2; 3:23; 43:4; 44:4; Luke 5:8; 1 Cor. 14:25; Rev. 1:17; 4:10, 5:8; 19:4).

The Spirit of God rather set people on their feet than striking them down. When people have fallen down because of one of the reactions mentioned above, it is often said that the Spirit of God raises them to stand upright. Ezekiel says, “...the glory of the Lord stood there... and I fell on my face. Then the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet” (Ezek. 3:23-24).

Even the falling forward gets little Scriptural support or encouragement because God, Jesus or an angel often tells people to stand up (Ezek. 2:1-2; 43:3; Dan. 8:17-18; 10:9-10; Matt. 17:6-7). In Matt. 17:7 Jesus said to His disciples who fell on their faces because of fear: “Arise, and do not be afraid.” The Holy Spirit is rather associated with the act of rising than with falling.

There is indeed a spirit that makes people fall down, but that is not the Spirit of God – that is an evil spirit. There are various examples of this in the Bible. Mark says, “For [Jesus] healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him. And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried...” (Mark 3:10-11). In another case a boy with a mute spirit was brought to Jesus, “and wherever [the spirit] seizes him, he throws him down... Then they brought him to [Jesus]. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and he wallowed” (Mark 9:18,20). After Jesus rebuked the spirit and commanded him to leave He assisted the boy to get up: “Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose” (Mark. 9:27). A case has also been recorded in Capernaum where Jesus delivered a man who was possessed by an unclean spirit: “Jesus rebuked him, saying, Be quiet and come

out of him! And when the demon had thrown him in their midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him” (Luke 4:35).

The supporters of falling in the Spirit also have a big problem to prove from the Bible that this experience may be linked to a baptizing (or anointing) with the Holy Spirit. Except for cases where people had problems with demons and fell down during the process of deliverance, there is no relationship in the Bible between healing or anointing with the Spirit and falling in the Spirit. The supporters of this strange experience have a double problem: firstly, to find a similar phenomenon in the Bible, and secondly, to connect this experience to baptizing with the Holy Spirit.

Easy salvation

The normal way in which God deals with sinners – i.e. through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus – is brushed aside and substituted by a strange experience such as falling in the Spirit. In this way, biblical truths are ignored or wrongly applied. In this way salvation is made easier and cheaper, i.e. without repentance and counting the cost by those involved.

Falling in the Spirit is used as a crush-pen for salvation through which people are forced or manipulated; consequently, they are not confronted with a choice whether they wish to repent or not. The experience of falling in the Spirit replaces a conscious decision that sinners must make when they are convicted of their sins. Suddenly, they find themselves in a mystical trance. After recovering their consciousness, they regard themselves as believers who were changed by the power of God.

Because of this way of dealing with lost people, preaching the gospel of salvation has virtually become redundant – unbelievers only need to fall in the Spirit. But the problem is that such people’s lives are not built upon the foundation of Christ but upon a mystical experience. In this way, the biblical message of repentance is bypassed. That is one of the reasons why preaching on sin has become such a rare feature of modern evangelization.

It obviously does not trouble the leaders of this movement that the basis of salvation through falling in the Spirit is unbiblical. Coppin says, “Even if there were no biblical basis for the phenomenon, it might be contended that since many are strengthened through the experience, it is worth entertaining.” The general approach is: “Be open to new ways in which God by His Spirit may be speaking to the Church.”

The distorted view that unsaved people, who are still in bondage of sin, may have certain experiences with the Holy Spirit is completely foreign to Scripture. The biblical way of

salvation is that the Holy Spirit first convicts people of their sins. Only after they have confessed and forsaken their sins and put their trust in the Lord Jesus to save their souls by virtue of His work of atonement on the cross, are they regenerated by the Holy Spirit who will then establish His presence in these persons' hearts. After the experience of being born again they must continuously be filled with the Spirit.

It also does not make any sense that people can have many experiences of falling in the Spirit. Some people refer to the new experiences as a recharge. It is obvious that a deeply-rooted discontentment and opportunism lies at the basis of falling in the Spirit. Sinners are looking for an easy and physically tangible way to become Christians without really changing their lifestyles. Many Christians are not content with the normal views about spiritual growth and are looking for extraordinary experiences in their spiritual lives. They want to be baptized in the Spirit in one dramatic moment and also obtain special gifts to enhance their boring lives. This approach opens the way to various forms of deception.

In this way, the door is opened to the sensual and the spectacular, thereby enthroning the flesh. A humanistic self-image is stimulated which may have an outward appearance of the person being Christian, but in reality he/she has no inclination towards true spirituality. The new gifts and strange manifestations are used to glorify the self, and are practiced for entertainment rather than the promotion and extension of God's kingdom on earth.

The Holy Spirit warned us that in the last days the devil will succeed in even seducing believers to accept wrong doctrines which are propagated by deceiving spirits: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). John says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

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