

**“SLAIN IN THE SPIRIT” -
DIVINE POWER
OR
HUMAN PUSHOVER?**

By Barry C. Hodson

“SLAIN IN THE SPIRIT” — DIVINE POWER OR HUMAN PUSHOVER?

In some churches it is common for people who respond to an altar call for prayer, to fall over backwards and end up on the floor on their back. This experience is called “slain in the spirit” or “falling under the power.” To a casual observer, it looks like fainting. It is believed to be the effect of the presence and power of God, as if to say God sweeps them off their feet when they pray to Him.

Whilst lying on the floor, people sometimes “speak in tongues,” or laugh or jerk uncontrollably, or just lie still as if in a trance. Some claim healing from sickness. Others report visions. Others claim to wake with a new hunger for prayer and a thirst for Bible reading, or other spiritual exercises. Some even claim to have been called and empowered with “spirit gifts” for “ministries” of various sorts, while lying on the floor. Usually the experience lasts for just a few minutes. However, for some it has been known to continue for hours, and in rare cases, for a day or more.

Falling over backwards as a result of prayer has, to many, become a sign of God being with them and responding to their prayer. This can inevitably result in concluding that God is not responding to those who don’t fall, and at this point it becomes a serious issue that needs to be addressed.

The question is: of what spirit is this so-called “slain in the spirit” - the Spirit of God or the spirit of man? Is it a divine gift or a human gimmick? Is it divine power or a human pushover? There is no question about God’s ability to cause people to fall over backwards, but the question is: is it God who is doing this?

It is not wrong to make such enquiries. The Bible encourages us to “test the spirits to see if they are God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 Jn. 4:1). And 1 Tim. 4:1 warns that “in the latter times some shall depart from the faith giving heed to seducing spirits.” Other Scriptures warn of false signs and deception.

How do we test the spirits? There is only one answer: By the Word of God! The Bible alone is the rule by which every doctrine and practise must be measured. We read in Isa. 8:20 that if anyone does not speak according to the divine testimony, it is because they have no light in them. And in 1 Pet. 4:11 we are told that if a Christian wants to speak, he must speak “as the oracles of God” i.e. what he says must be Biblical.

So then, we put no value on men’s opinions, assumptions and philosophies. We turn to the Word of God “as to a light shining in a dark place” (2 Pet. 1:19). As the Psalmist declared: “Thy Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105).

In turning to God's Word we will look at passages of Scripture which have been misconstrued and misapplied to support the falling over backwards experience. Unfortunately, many tend to seize upon any and every reference they can find about people fainting, falling asleep or falling down on their knees or faces, to justify the experience. Even the reference in Act. 20:9 to Eutychus falling asleep during Paul's lengthy sermon, and falling from the third story in an upper chamber and being taken up dead; has been quoted in relation to "falling under the power" i.e. being "slain in the spirit." This indicates what incredible and illogical lengths some go to in order to justify the experience.

SOME OBSERVATIONS

Several important observations need to be made in relation to this subject. The first one is that among the many references to people being prayed for in both the Old and New Testament, there is not a single example of someone falling over backwards as a result of prayer. There are many examples of Jesus praying for people and healing them, but no reference to anyone falling over backwards by the Spirit of God as a result. And he possessed the Spirit of God without measure!

There is however, a reference in Lk. 4:35 to a man being thrown down on the ground as a result of Jesus' prayer. But it was not by the Spirit of God that he fell. No! The man was possessed by an evil spirit and it was this spirit which threw him on the ground when rebuked by Jesus. Also see Lk. 9:42. Mk 9:20 for other examples of this.

It is significant that the only examples of people being made to fall over during Jesus' ministry as a result of prayer, relate to the influence of evil spirits not the Holy Spirit.

The second observation to be made is that while there are no references in the Bible to people falling over backwards by the force of the Spirit of God, there are many examples of people voluntarily falling forwards on to their knees, or lying face down on the ground, prostrate in prayer or worship. Unfortunately these examples are usually quoted to justify the falling over backwards experience, but they relate to an entirely different thing. They are as follows:

Gen. 17:3: When the Lord, by means of an angel, appeared to Abraham and spoke to him, he "fell on his face." He did not fall on his back. He fell forwards, not backwards. Again in Gen. 18:2 we read that Abraham voluntarily "bowed himself to the earth." He did this due to his reverential fear and deep respect for the Lord.

It is clear from other examples in Scripture that sometimes when humans encountered divine holy angels, they were overcome with fear. For example, when Zecharias saw the angel Gabriel, "he was troubled and

fear fell upon him” (Lk. 1:12). We also read in Lk. 24:1-5 that when certain women saw two angels standing by them in dazzling bright garments, “they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth.”

There are also many examples in the Bible of people bowing or falling on their knees before men in authority, either out of fear or as a sign of submission, respect or gratitude. For example see: 1 Sam. 25:3. 2 Kng. 1:13. 4:37. Matt. 2:11. 18:26, 29.

When Joshua encountered the Lord, he didn’t fall over backwards by the overpowering divine presence. No! “He fell on his face to the earth and worshipped” (Josh. 5:14).

There are also four references in the book of Ezekiel to the prophet falling forwards on his face in fear as a result of an encounter with the presence and power of God: Ezk. 1:28. 3:23. 43:3. 44:4. However, the Spirit of God clearly did not force Ezekiel to fall on his face, for the Lord spoke to the prophet and said: “Son of man, stand upon your feet and I will speak to you. And the Spirit entered me and set me upon my feet” (Ezk. 2:1-2. 3:24. 43:5).

The prophet Daniel also fell on his face when he was visited by the angel Gabriel. He says in Dan. 8:17: “I was afraid and fell on my face.” But he goes on to say that Gabriel “touched me and set me on my feet.” The Lord had a message to convey to Daniel but didn’t want to deliver it while he was lying down on the ground. It should be clear from this that the Lord did not put him on the ground. It was not the power of the divine Spirit that caused him to fall, but the weakness of the human spirit.

Again in Dan. 10 we read about an awesome vision involving divine glory that Daniel saw, causing his strength and energy to evaporate making him feel faint. He was overcome with such fear that he fainted and ended up with his face on the ground. But an angel’s hand touched him and set him up trembling on his knees and upon the palms of his hands. The angel had a message for Daniel from the Lord and told him to stand up on his feet to receive it. Daniel says that when the angel had spoken, “I stood trembling.”

If the Lord required the prophet to be standing when he appeared to him to speak to him, why would he push him over? The fact that the Spirit of God had to enter the prophet to set him on his feet, surely indicates it was not the spirit that made him fall. The narrative clearly indicates that it was overpowering fear that caused Daniel to faint and fall.

When the apostle John saw an awesome vision of his glorified Lord, he “fell at his feet as dead” (Rev. 1:17). This is often quoted to justify the “slain in the spirit” experience. It is claimed that it is a lovely, exhilarating experience, involving a “floating” feeling - sometimes ecstatic - a “spiritual trip” or a “buzz.”

Well, according to Rev. 1:17, John fell down out of fear; he was

deeply disturbed and afraid. This is indicated by the fact that when he fell, the Lord laid His right hand upon him and said: “Fear not” i.e. “don’t be afraid.” These words explain why John fell. Through fear he went weak at the knees and collapsed. He probably fainted.

This calls to mind the effect that the transfiguration of Jesus had upon the disciples who witnessed it. The awe-inspiring manifestation of Jesus in dazzling glory overwhelmed and overpowered them with fear. Matt. 17:6-7 says they “fell on their face and were very afraid. And Jesus came and touched them and said: Arise (stand up) and be not afraid.” Fear caused them to fall but Jesus didn’t want them to be petrified with fear or to be lying stunned on the ground.

In all of these cases that we have been looking at, falling on the ground did not involve a gliding, floating sensation like a lovely ecstatic swoon. Quite the opposite! Petrification, fear and trembling was involved. They weren’t lying down on their backs on carpet with a smile on their face saying: “Glory to God, hallelujah.” No! They were lying face down on the ground, full of fear and trembling. Even Jesus fell on his face sweating and praying as he experienced fear of his terrible forthcoming death by crucifixion (Matt. 26:39).

The apostle Paul likewise “fell to the earth” when light brighter than the midday sun shone upon him on his way to Damascus. The Lord then spoke to him and said: “... rise, and stand upon your feet” ... (Act. 9:3-4. 26:14-16).

Another passage often quoted to support the “slain in the spirit” experience is in 2 Chr. 5:13-14. We read here about Solomon’s temple being filled with a cloud of divine glory, “so that the priests could not stand to minister due to the cloud” (A.V.). This has been interpreted to mean that the divine glory swept them off their feet and laid them flat on the temple floor on their backs. But it doesn't actually say that. Such an interpretation has to be read into it.

It would be just as easy to read it to mean that, as in other cases, the divine glory was so awesome, that they fell to their knees out of fear or reverence or both. This in fact, is the explanation given in 2 Chr. 7:2-3 where we are told that due to the glory of the Lord filling the temple, “the priests could not enter the house of the Lord” i.e. they could not stand inside the temple to perform their duties. Instead, “they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement (outside the temple) and worshipped and praised the Lord.” This is simply what is meant when it says they could not stand inside the temple to minister.

“AS DEAD”

The reference in Rev. 1:17 to John, as a result of fear, falling at the feet of Jesus “as dead” is interesting. It is a known fact that intense fear can actually cause people to literally drop dead. Cases have been cited during the first world war of men dropping dead through fear of the prospect of climbing out of their trenches to run headlong into enemy fire. In other cases such fear has paralysed men and prevented them from standing on their feet. This reminds us of a verse in 1 Sam. 28:20 which tells us that as a result of king Saul being told that he and his sons were going to be killed in battle the next day, he “fell straightway his full length on the ground, because he was terrified and there was no strength in him.”

There are three other cases in the Bible relating to death at a time when fear gripped the hearts, resulting in falling to the ground.

1. Nabal: 1 Sam. 25:37.

2. Eli: 1 Sam. 4:18.

3. Ananias and Sapphira: Act. 5:5.

In all of these cases their fall was a judgement of God. They were all truly “slain by the Spirit” in the real sense of the term. It is important to observe that the word “slain” is never used in Scripture to describe a happy, joyful, ecstatic experience. It is used in a judgmental sense in relation to people being put to death, usually by the sword. For example: Isa. 66:16: “For by fire and by His sword will the Lord execute judgement upon all flesh, and the slain of the Lord shall be many.”

The expression “fell down slain” occurs a number of times in Scripture, and relates to falling down dead. For example see 1 Sam. 31:1. 1 Chr. 5:22. 10:1. So then, the expression “slain in the spirit” used to describe an experience involving blessing and joy, is not only inappropriate; it is unbiblical. This may not mean much to those who are not Bible oriented and who are led by their feelings and emotions instead; but to those who insist on a “thus saith the Lord” for every doctrine and practise, it means everything, as it did to the Bereans (Act. 17:10-11).

FALLING OVER BACKWARDS IS A BAD SIGN

As mentioned before, there are no examples in Scripture of people falling over backwards as a result of Holy Spirit blessings being bestowed. There are however, references to people falling over backwards, due to a judgement of God, making it a sign of divine displeasure. For example: Gen. 49:17: “Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path that bites the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backwards.”

1 Sam. 4:18: When Eli heard that the Philistines had taken the ark of the covenant, “he fell backwards off his seat and broke his neck and died.”

Ps. 40:14: “Let those who seek to take my life be driven backward

and put to shame.”

Isa. 1:4: “Ah sinful nation ... you have gone away backward.”

Isa. 28:13: This verse relates to those who mocked and scorned the words of God’s prophet. They were told that as a punishment they would “fall backward and be broken, snared and made captive.”

Isa. 44:25 Says “God frustrates false prophets and their signs, and makes fools of diviners; He turns wise men backwards and makes their knowledge foolish.”

Jn. 18:6 is sometimes quoted in support of the “slain in the spirit” experience. It refers to the soldiers coming to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. When they arrived, Jesus said to them: “Who do you seek? They replied, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, I am he. ... As soon as he said to them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.”

It is difficult to see how this can be equated with the “slain in the spirit” experience, which is generally understood to be a blessing from God for those who have humbled themselves, repented of their sins and accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour and are seeking him with all their heart. The soldiers who came to arrest Jesus failed to qualify for God’s blessing on all counts. They were not humble or repentant, neither did they accept Jesus as Lord. They came to arrest him with a view to take him away to be killed.

Some suggest that Jesus caused the soldiers to fall to the ground to demonstrate his power to discourage them from arresting him. This is most unlikely. Prior to the soldiers arriving, Jesus had prayed three times that if possible he might be able to avoid being arrested and crucified. But he learned that it was his Father’s will to go through with this, so he humbly resigned his will to that. So why would he knock the soldiers to the ground when they came to arrest him?

And if Father God knocked the soldiers over, what did He achieve by this? Nothing changed. They still arrested Jesus when they got back on their feet again, and took him away to be crucified!

Not the slightest hint is given in Jn. 18:6 that the soldiers were bowled over by supernatural power. The record simply says that when Jesus fronted up to them and affirmed that he was the man they were looking for, “they went back and fell to the ground.” Some of the modern translations say “they drew back” i.e. they took a step or two back; they firstly stepped backward and then fell over. They fell over as a result of stepping backwards. Why? Because those in the front stepped back into those who were behind causing them to trip over and fall like dominoes, which would have been rather undignified and humiliating and quite funny if the occasion had not been so serious!

As a result of Jesus previously marching into the temple precincts in anger, overturning the tables of the money changers, chasing the people

out and driving the animals with whips; the soldiers who went to arrest him in the garden would be wary of him and maybe nervous to some extent - especially in view of the swords that some of Jesus' disciples were brandishing. If Jesus boldly fronted up to them and affirmed in a loud confident voice that he was the man they were looking for, and if his face shone for a moment as did Stephen's when he was in a somewhat similar position; one can well imagine the soldiers being startled or intimidated and taking a step back to put some distance between themselves and Jesus, resulting in tripping over themselves or each other and falling over.

As we have seen from other Scriptures, falling over backwards is not a good sign. It is not a sign of divine blessing but of divine disfavour. It is surprising therefore that anyone would quote the reference to the soldiers falling over in support of the "slain in the spirit" experience which is supposed to be a blessing.

INDECENT EXPOSURE

Another reason for believing that the experience of being "slain in the spirit" is of the flesh and not of God is because of its tendency to expose the flesh, causing indecent exposure.

When women not wearing long dresses fall over backwards and end up sprawled out on the floor with their dresses up their legs, their flesh is exposed. This has been so common that it is not uncommon for some churches to have "catchers" standing behind people in the prayer line with towels or blankets draped over their arms or shoulders, to cover up the nakedness of women who fall in indelicate positions.

Can we really believe that the God who made coverings for Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness and who speaks so many times in His Word against nakedness in public, could possibly be the author of a "spiritual experience" which causes women to fall in such a rude and undignified posture?

Such exposure is clearly contrary to the way of God. This is evident in Ex. 20:26 where God commanded that the priests "must not go up by steps to my altar, that thy nakedness be not exposed on it." The altar had to be on ground level, not on a raised platform where those below could look up the skirts or robes of the priests. Even though the robes of the priests were long and they wore long linen bloomers underneath, God would not allow them to place themselves in a position where people could look up their gown. God required extreme modesty and decency at His altar where He was worshipped. He required the full focus and

attention of His people and would not allow the slightest fleshly attraction or distraction.

Now, the front of the churches where people go for prayer and have their “slain in the spirit” experience by falling over backwards, is called an “altar.” Inviting members of the congregation to go down to the front is called an “altar call.” In view of God’s disapproval of people looking up the skirts of His priests who served at the tabernacle and temple altar, He is not likely to allow women to fall over backwards, exposing their nakedness at the altar of their church. To do so would be to contradict Himself and violate His own will.

The only Scriptures which refer to God allowing skirts to be lifted and displaying people’s nakedness, relate to Him allowing enemy nations to invade a country and strip captives of their clothes and make them march naked into exile as a punishment for their sins and rebellion. This punishment was done to degrade, abase, disgrace and humiliate. We read for example in Nahum 3:4-5: “Because of your many whoredoms and witchcrafts ... I am against you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will lift up your skirts over your face, and I will show the nations your nakedness and the kingdoms your shame.” Other examples can be seen in Isa. 20. Ezk. 23:29. Hos. 2:3.

So then, while it is true that God requires modesty and decency, it is also true that when people persist in carnality and sensuality, one of the punishments He inflicts is indecent exposure, shame and disgrace.

To offset this, some refer to 1 Sam. 19:24 which relates to king Saul stripping off his clothes and lying naked upon the ground, after coming under the influence of the divine power of prophetic inspiration. But several points need to be observed in relation to this:

1. Saul himself voluntarily stripped off his clothes while he was standing on his feet before he lay on the ground. He was not pushed over on to his back by the power of God, resulting in his robe coming off or going up his legs! He lay down voluntarily.

2. The event did not occur at God’s altar and there were no women or children present. Only messengers (soldiers) from Saul’s army were with Saul.

3. The reference to Saul lying down naked does not necessarily mean he was completely nude without a stitch of clothing on. For example, the word “nakedness” in Ex. 20:26 in relation to priests’ nakedness being exposed if they go up steps to the altar, cannot mean exposure of their private parts because they wore bloomers under their robes. “Nakedness” means exposure of areas of their legs normally concealed and not exposed. Sometimes in Scripture the word “naked” means being stripped of the outer garments down to a loin cloth or underwear i.e. scantily or poorly clad. For example, see 1 Sam. 18:4. 2 Sam. 6:14, 20. Jn. 21:7. Act.

19:16. 1 Cor. 4:11. 2 Cor. 11:27. Jam. 2:15. Matt. 25:36.

So then, the question is: Why did Saul strip off his outer garment and lie down on the ground scantily clad? The answer is because he became hot and tired - exhausted, as a result of continually prophesying while walking a considerable distance dressed for battle, encumbered with armour. He lay down through fatigue. God took away Saul's energy and strength by causing the spirit of prophecy to come upon him. The exertion involved in the walking and talking wore him out.

Why did God do this? Because Saul was on a mission to capture and kill David, and it was not God's will for this to take place. As the saying goes: "God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform." By His Spirit, God preoccupied and side-tracked Saul!

There could also be a symbolical significance to Saul stripping off his royal robes. In 1 Sam. 18:4, Saul's son Jonathan stripped off his royal robe and gave it to David as an acknowledgement that David was heir to the throne. In like manner, Saul stripping himself of his royal robe could be seen as prophetic of him being stripped of the kingship in preparation to being superseded by David.

One thing is certain: Saul was not a "holy roller." He was an unholy evil man who was eventually literally slain by the Spirit. He fell down dead on the battle field by the sword.

To summarize: As far as Scripture is concerned, people have ended up on the floor in the following way for the following reasons:

1. Through fear some fainted and fell down forwards on to their knees or face.
2. Out of reverence some have voluntarily bowed their knees or prostrated themselves.
3. Some were cast down by evil spirits.
4. Divine displeasure and judgement caused some to fall over backwards.
5. In Jn. 18:6 some tripped over others behind them and fell backwards.
6. Eutychus fell out of a window due to falling asleep. Act. 20:9.
7. Saul lay down due to fatigue.

ANOTHER REASON

Now, those who believe in the "slain in the spirit" experience, do not of course attribute the falling over to any of the reasons or causes listed above. And because the Bible gives no other causes for falling over, we will have to look in other directions for the cause.

One possible answer is indicated in what I witnessed when I attended a Pentecostal church for three years as part of my spiritual training, and development of spiritual discernment. During the first year or two, no one ever fell over during prayer or worship or when hands were laid on them.

However, a group from the church went to Australia to visit a church which had a reputation for having a very dynamic pastor who only had to point his finger at someone or blow at them, and they would fall over. When the group returned from Australia they started falling over backwards during prayer and laying on of hands. Before long, others started doing the same until it became a common and expected procedure. Why? Because it came to be regarded as a sign of spirituality and submission, and of God being with you, not to mention being with the one whose hands are laid upon you.

Once this experience became such a sign, it resulted in psychological pressure being exerted upon all to conform to the falling over fad. But, in spite of people falling over, there was no evidence of a greater measure of Holy Spirit power in the church. Sight was not being restored to the blind, neither hearing to the deaf, and the dead were not raised. It clearly wasn't due to more of God's power being in the church that people fell over. No! They were falling over because the idea was put into their heads and they believed it. And such faith can have this effect, even when it is unfounded and misdirected!

The dynamic Australian pastor even played games with his so-called power of the Holy Spirit. I was told that one day down at the beach he was playfully touching members of his church and they would sink into the surf. He blew at a row of guys and they all fell over. They were all laughing and treated it as a game.

Some of the guys told me that they deliberately fell over because it was the thing to do and they didn't want to be spoil sports. They were humouring or patronizing the pastor.

It is hard to believe that God would allow men to play games with His power. A true and genuine man of God possessing the real power, would not want to play games with it or use it for his own personal aggrandisement or glory. Jesus refused to use it to turn stones into bread to satisfy the intense hunger he had after having gone 40 days without food. He also resisted the temptation to indulge in theatrics by leaping off the pinnacle of the temple so people in the court below could see an angel swooping down to catch him.

FALLING THROUGH HYPNOSIS

It is no big deal that people can fall over when touched. Hypnotists can do the same to anyone who has handed their mind over to them and come under their "spell." And, interestingly enough: those who are hypnotised on their feet fall backwards where a "catcher" is appointed to stand and catch them, and put a covering over their legs if necessary.

As in the case of a public hypnotist performance, people who respond to a church altar call for prayer, also stand out at the front in a line with their eyes shut, waiting for hands to be laid on them. Those with a high susceptibility to suggestion will fall over if they believe this is what should happen.

Once the human spirit (sub-conscious mind) comes under the influence of a hypnotist, he can manipulate the mind to do whatever he wants at the touch or flick of his finger. He can tell people that every time hands are laid on them they will fall over and they will do so without even trying to. A secular (unspiritual) hypnotist could even tell a secular person who has come under his hypnotic influence, that he will fall over when he hears a certain secular song and he will. People who are highly susceptible to suggestion are the most vulnerable, and even people with high IQs can fit into this category. I've met some very gullible people with high IQs!

There is also the very real phenomenon of self hypnosis, which involves a person talking himself into and convincing himself, either consciously or sub-consciously, to do a certain thing at a certain time. If one convinces himself that he should fall over when hands are laid upon him, the ground is laid for him to do it. The extremes to which this falling over phenomenon can go, was seen in a Roman Catholic church where a group of people fell over when "holy water" was sprinkled on them!

Much of what I have seen where being "slain in the spirit" takes place, falls into the category of deception due to wrong perceptions influencing those who are susceptible to them. Its success is due to ignorance of the Word of God and ignorance about the powerful influence that the suggestions of influential religious leaders can have on susceptible and receptive minds.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

As mentioned earlier, falling over can be psychological, and some can go into motor automatism, which is clinically described as radical inward detachment from one's conscious surroundings. Motor automatism results in disassociation of nearly all voluntary muscles from conscious control.

Have you ever watched a newscast that showed young teenage girls at a rock concert? In the excitement and the emotion, the fervour and the noise, they get so wound up with emotional excitement, they lose voluntary control of their vocal chords and muscles. They fall to the floor or the ground and just start shaking or flopping. I've seen this happen in Pentecostal meetings and it also happens at pagan festivals. It has nothing to do with the spirit or power of God, but the power of emotion.

SWEPT OFF THE FEET BUT NOT HEALED

In testing the “slain in the spirit” phenomenon, I discovered that often people who went for prayer to be healed, fell over but were not healed. One woman in particular, week after week went for prayer for healing and fell over but was never healed. I asked her each time: “Were you healed?” She replied: “No, but it was lovely.” By “it” she meant the falling over experience. I found it incredible that people could believe the spirit of God was so powerful that it swept them off their feet but didn’t heal them. How gullible can you get?

Someone may say: “What about the people who fall over and claim to be healed?” If the healing is genuine by the Spirit of God, and not just psychosomatic or the “placebo effect,” it would be a mistake to think that the falling over was necessary for the healing to take place, i.e. that the healing would not have taken place had they not fallen over.

To give an example: God told Jacob that he would cause pure bred goats to produce striped, speckled and spotted ones. Instead of leaving it to the power of God to do this, Jacob took fresh cut branches of certain trees and peeled white stripes in them, exposing the white of the rods. He then set them up in front of the water troughs where the animals mated. Jacob figured that if they mated while looking at the stripes in the rods, they would produce striped young.

The goats did produce striped young, but it was not Jacob’s action of cutting branches, making them fall to the ground and peeling stripes in them that caused it. What he did was foolish and unnecessary. It might have made him feel better, but it was a waste of time and effort. God did the miracle, not because of this, but in spite of it.

SUMMARY

To sum up then, there are several explanations as to why people fall over in Pentecostal and charismatic meetings:

1. Through high susceptibility to suggestions from those they believe and respect.
2. Through the psychological pressure caused when everyone else seems to do it, making you feel spiritually inferior - a misfit if you don’t.
3. Some may simply faint, as members of bridal parties sometimes do out the front at the church altar.
4. Some are literally and physically pushed over. It is not difficult to get a person off balance and push them over, if pressure is applied to the forehead while they stand up with their feet together and with their eyes closed. Many have testified that great pressure has been applied to their forehead in an attempt to force them to fall backwards.

An elderly blind friend of mine visiting from out of town, and who was a small and light man, attended a meeting conducted by a visiting overseas evangelist, who claimed to have the gift of healing by which he could restore sight to the blind etc. So my friend went out for prayer. Being blind, I went with him and stood behind him to hold him because I was aware of the pressure some exert on the forehead. I was amazed at the physical force that was exerted. I had to brace myself to hold him upright. After the meeting my friend who had never been to that sort of meeting before asked me: "Why was that man trying to push me over?" Needless to say his sight was not restored. The only power that could be seen and felt at that meeting was human, not divine!

5. Others have testified that they deliberately let themselves go and fall over voluntarily, because it is the expected thing to do. One person who refused to do this, told me that the minister told her to let herself go and fall (there was a "catcher" behind). When she refused, he said: "We have a stubborn one here." Sometimes it is good to be stubborn!

It is very sad that in some circles, falling over has become regarded as a sign of spirituality, submission and blessing, to the point that those who don't fall can be regarded as inferior spiritually, and unsubmitive. As mentioned before, this puts psychological pressure upon people, resulting in many deliberately falling to save face.

Also, ministers can feel let down if people don't fall down, because it makes their ministry look powerless and robs it of its entertainment value - its dramatics and theatrics! After all, if falling over as a result of prayer is a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the person being prayed for doesn't fall over, then both he and the one doing the praying are shown up in a bad light - like a hypnotist failing to get people hypnotised! Hypnotists usually blame the other person and many ministers blame the person they are praying for, saying they lack faith etc. I've never seen a minister blame himself!

For many of these ministers, getting people to fall over when they pray for them, is the only effect they can get. They can't restore sight to the blind or hearing to the deaf and neither can they raise the dead. No wonder it is so important to them to get people to fall over, because it gives the appearance that something is happening and that there is power in the ministry when there really isn't. What a deception!

Falling over out at the front of a church before the whole congregation can also easily become an ego-trip, demonstrating to everyone how submissive, spiritual and divinely blessed you are. Some have freely confessed this! It can also be a "buzz" knowing that the minister praying for you will be pleased that you fell, for by falling you are instrumental in promoting his ministry, demonstrating that there is power in his prayer.

Much of what is happening today is a mental escape from the discipline of objective teaching, to a world of subjective experiences. Many people prefer to disregard the objective truth of God's Word in favour of a subjective experience. Many are looking for an "experience" oriented faith instead of a faith oriented faith i.e. looking for, and needing dramatic experiences, signs and evidence of God being with them. But the problem is that an experience oriented faith keeps needing experiences to remain on a spiritual high. Such a faith has to see and feel things all the time. And if God doesn't give them things to see and feel, they can end up, out of desperation, self-inducing and self-generating things.

Such people become an easy prey to gimmicks and spiritual quackery, like falling over backwards, self-generated "tongues," prophecies, dreams and "visions." Self induced experiences may be emotionally satisfying for a time, but because they are of the flesh and not the spirit, they lack substance and depth and will not last or satisfy.

"Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a person,
but afterwards his mouth will be filled with gravel" (Pr. 20:17).

"The simple person believes everything he hears,
but the wise man understands the need for proof" (Pr. 14:15).

I would like to conclude with the prayer recorded in Jude v24-25: "Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to God alone our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, both now and forever Amen."

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