

DO CHRISTIANS HAVE
TO BE FREAKS?

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by

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DO CHRISTIANS HAVE TO BE FREAKS?

The other day a large metropolitan news paper carried a story about a girl who had won a very prestigious scholarship and who was, to everyone's surprise, a Jesus freak. It was apparently newsworthy that a young person who was not without intellectual endowments would openly declare that she was a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I am sure that many who read the story were surprised to discover that such a person existed. For Jesus freaks, apparently, are not supposed to be able to win scholarships.

There is enough evidence around, though, that suggests that it is precisely the young who have the intelligence to recognize the supremely fascinating importance of Jesus Christ, and who at the same time are able to master some of the tools needed to make good academic records. And I know that many were encouraged as I was that the young person who made headlines in terms of her scholarship was forthright in her witness to Jesus as well. All this raises an interesting question. She stated that she was a Jesus *freak*. And it is worthwhile asking whether it is necessary for the followers of Jesus to be freaks. Is this really necessary? I would like to have a chance to talk with her about this, because I wonder if she really means what she says when she says she is a Jesus freak.

I am well aware that those who follow Jesus have been willing in some instances to be identified this way ... as freaks. But I cannot help wondering if this kind of terminology is actually fostering certain ideas about what Christianity and should be that is not really accurate. Again, I want to emphasize that I raise this question while I have profound appreciation for those

who are willing to be known as freaks in contrast to the straight society which is not freakish, but which seems to be headed straight to destruction. But freaks? Must the followers of Jesus be freaks?

A freak, after all, is generally unhappy himself and he shocks others. I don't know about you, but I associate this word with circuses and side shows. I guess that freaks are generally associated with side shows, aren't they? The bearded lady, for example, and other people who awaken curiosity but who, in terms of their deformity and their strangeness, are more deviant than anything else.

And today the idea of freak has become intimately associated with the drug culture. One of the main authorities on the Jesus movement among young people has said that the idea of Jesus freaks was a direct carry over from the drug culture. Whereas young people who were into speed became speed freaks, spaced out on drugs, those who substituted Jesus for speed became Jesus freaks. Okay. It's not hard to understand how this could happen. But the question still remains: Are we doing ourselves a favor when we think about Christianity this way?

It is especially useful to talk about this right now, I think, when many people are thinking about Pentecost. In fact, this program is being heard throughout the world mostly on Sunday, and this Sunday is Pentecost. The Jesus movement and the Jesus freak idea have been fed to a great extent by ideas that supposedly have their roots in the Pentecostal experience. Sid Lyra, Jr., writing on the Jesus movement, has said, "From the very start, Jesus Freaks have received leadership from many Pentecostal evangelists and ministers." And he has added

that the well-known Pentecostal phenomenon of speaking with tongues has been a mark of the Jesus Freaks in many cases. He says, "Of all charismatic gifts the one most prominent among the Jesus Freaks is glossolalia. In deed, the Jesus freak movement has been greatly influenced by certain events which Christians commemorate right now, the great Christian holiday called Pentecost. The question, then, is this: When Pentecost hit the followers of Jesus with all of its mighty power, did it produce freaks or didn't it?

Well let's recreate an actuality of what really happened on Pentecost. We will use our radios to tune in on an eyewitness account of what happened then. * * *

There is a lot of excitement here in Jerusalem this morning. I am standing outside one of the buildings here in the city and about an hour ago there was a tremendous sound that seemed to be coming from this vicinity! The city is filled right now with all kinds of pilgrims who come from all over the world to worship God here at this holy season, and many of them have come together here. You can hear the sound of the crowd around me.

Evidently what happened was this: Some of the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified a little more than a month ago, were meeting in one of the rooms of this building, praying. Suddenly there was a tremendous sound evidently the same sound we heard and strange things started to happen in that room. This is all very weird because there have been some rumors around during the last week that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead. That's incredible, isn't it? Some have even said that they saw Him rise bodily into heaven. Anyway,

I talked to one of the followers of Jesus a few moments ago and he told me how the room was filled with dancing flame-like appearances, which settled on the heads of the people. They rushed out into the street and by that time some of the pilgrims were beginning to gather outside, curious because of the big noise. And the amazing thing is that the disciples of Jesus began to speak about the great things of God in the languages of the people who were standing around.

Well, you can imagine the excitement this caused. You know, these pilgrims all understand Hebrew and they are accustomed to hearing about religious matters in Hebrew. But you know how it is—some of them have been born and raised in Parthia and Mesopotamia, and many other places, and they are accustomed to the dialects that are spoken in the streets. It really shakes you up to hear these great subjects discussed in your native language. Once word got around that this was happening, people came from everywhere. There are about 4,000 here right now. Most of them are trying to listen to the disciples of Jesus. You ought to see this. Not only the men are speaking about God in other languages, but the women are, and even some of the children. There are some people who are beginning to say that the whole business here is a hoax and the disciples of Jesus are drunken.

I just noticed that Peter, a fisherman from Galilee who evidently has a position of leadership among the disciples of Jesus, is beginning to speak. Let's try to get what he is saying. We'll move in a bit closer and I'll try to tell you what he is talking about.

Peter is beginning his speech here with a reference to the prophet Joel of the Old Testa-

ment. This is a very fascinating prophecy and sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Listen, he's continuing. "For the promise about a day that was coming when God would pour out His Spirit upon all people, young and old, slaves and freemen, men and women, and they would all become prophets. This is what is happening right now, Peter is saying.

Now he is talking about Jesus of Nazareth, the one who was crucified over a month ago. And Peter is claiming that Jesus was raised from the dead by God. Now he is talking about David the king and he is applying one of the prophecies from Psalm 16- David wrote that to Jesus. Imagine! Jesus was executed. But Peter is keeping right on talking about Jesus. Listen to this! Let me tell what he said there: "This Jesus God raised up and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out that which you see and hear." Imagine! He is saying that the Jesus who was crucified is alive, and He has poured out the Holy Spirit. This is fantastic. I think the people would stone him; the evidence of the Holy Spirit's power is too great for that.

Oh. . . ! Do you know what he just said? He said that God has made Jesus Lord and Christ. The one you crucified.

Well, this is almost too much. They are beginning to shout. I can hear one call over to the others. Many of them are joining in, in a rather frantic cry. They are asking, "Brethren, what shall we do?" This is a surprise. They are calling Peter a brother, even after what he said to them- listen to what he is saying: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your

Well, that's what happened on Pentecost.

And before we leave this, let me just read the closing sentences of Acts 2, which describe what happened after Peter's speech. And then we will return to the question we raised. Is there anything in the Pentecost event that suggests that Jesus people should be freaks?

"So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

"And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (vv. 41-47)

Now, really, is there anything in this Pentecostal event that suggests that Christian people should be freaks? What was Pentecost, really? It was a very powerful event, indeed. The Lord Jesus of Nazareth sent His Holy Spirit into the lives of His followers. There is no question about that. But was the result people who were, so to speak, "spaced out" on the Spirit? Were those who were filled with the Spirit, all

◆ tongue-speaking, exuberant people who could, in a sense, be called freaks? No.

Let's look at the matter of speaking in tongues, for example. This is a complicated subject. But notice a couple of things. A very small percentage of the Christians on Pentecost spoke with tongues. Only the original followers of Jesus did. And we do not read that the three thousand who were added to the church that day did. It is also important to notice that the tongue speaking that did occur was not excited or static speaking, which much tongue speaking is today, but it was a language miracle used for communication. Those who spoke, spoke emotionally, carefully, and about a specific subject. They spoke in order to communicate the facts of God to the people who were present.

The tongue speaking that is often associated with Jesus freaks is generally ecstatic, excited praise more than anything else. One of the reasons they are called freaks is that they engage in such unintelligible speech. Now, whether or not such speech is desirable is not the question. I only wish to point out that that kind of speech was not present on Pentecost.

In fact, the great emphasis of Pentecost is upon something that is not freakish at all; something that is fully meaningful and strengthening. The emphasis is on communication. Those who spoke other languages, communicated. And the main address, which was delivered in the broadly accepted language of the street in Jerusalem, communicated a specific message. In other words, Pentecost was a great holiday that consisted in the restoration of real communication between man and God. And that's what makes it so important.

Another thing that happened on Pentecost was that people were brought into proper rela-

tionship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The people who were gathered around the apostle Peter were Christ rejectors. Some of them were present when Christ was on trial and some of them had said, "Crucify Him." After Peter concluded his speech as we heard, they were stunned and they asked what they should do. And Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." And they did that. The people who had killed Jesus received His mark on their forehead. They received the sign of His blood on their bodies. They were saved. They received the Holy Spirit.

There is nothing freakish about repenting of your sin, believing in Jesus as your Savior, and having His Holy Spirit in your heart. That's the beginning of life. Do you know who Jesus is? He is the one who created everything. He died on Calvary's cross so that creation could be redeemed. He paid for human sin so that those who believe in Him would not have to be punished everlastingly for their sins, but they would have eternal life. And so repenting of one's sin, and turning to Jesus is the beginning of real life. Jesus is the source of life and happiness. When you know Him, that is the beginning of a life experience that is glorious.

So you see, God found man on Pentecost. He came out to meet them in the miraculous speech of the followers of Jesus. And men found Jesus on Pentecost, as they turned in repentance and claimed Him as their Messiah and Savior. And men found each other. For the Bible continues and tells of the way the first Pentecostal Christians gathered together in fellowship around the teaching of the apostles, and in so doing they found a fellowship that was absolutely breathtaking. Part of the Pentecost miracle, indeed, one of the most remarkable-

ments of the events that occurred then, was the fact that the people saw one another as being one in the Spirit and one in Christ. They recognized that the greatest thing about each of them was the fact that all possessed the Spirit of the Living God and they were followers of the Savior. And so they cared for one another.

We cannot imagine what it must have been like, for we are too encrusted with our own selfishness and too busy building our own empires. But the Bible says: "All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need." There you have a picture of human fellowship preserved. And that's part of the good news of the gospel. It not only brings people to God and to Christ the Savior, but it brings people together again.

No, there is nothing freakish about any of this. Real Christianity, the Christianity that is founded in the reality of that which happened on Pentecost, does not turn people into freaks. Those who repent of their sins and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and who have the Spirit of Jesus in their hearts are whole men who are restored to newness of life. They are people who have "put off the old nature with its practices and they have put on the new nature which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Colossians 3:9, 10). Once you become part of Jesus' great salvation, that is the beginning of normalcy. That is the beginning of wholeness.

Oh, I can understand why there are those who speak of themselves as Jesus freaks these days, and admire greatly the girl we talked about at the beginning of this program who wanted to be known as one, even though she

was smart enough to get a scholarship. But for the sake of the great message of the Bible, let's all understand that this is a time of speech.

The followers of Jesus are not really freaks.

They are not side show deviates. They are not Christian counterparts of those who are spaced out on speed and other drugs. They are freaks only when they are compared to the rest of the world which is perishing. They depart from that norm. But what an ugly norm it is.

Look what normal people are doing today.

Some kill their unborn children and have little respect for life. Many of them love pornography. They are into drugs. Their families are a shambles. They are selfish, neurotic, hateful, enslaved to all kinds of things that are ruinous. In a world in which the norm has become insanity and madness, those who follow the Lord Jesus Christ appear to be freaks.

But they are not really freaks. The power of the Holy Spirit, given to the church on Pentecost, takes people who are by nature abnormal, misshapen, broken, and corrupted, and it restores them so that they become the new creation of God. Those who follow Jesus and who have His Spirit are the new creation of the Lord.

I just wanted to talk with you about this because I thought you might have gotten the impression somewhere that Christianity is a rather weird religion. And Pentecost is a good time to talk about this, because there are some who feel that Pentecost was an event that gave people an experience that is so weird that which a person gets while on drugs. You know that that is not true. Pentecost was a time when men were put back together. People who had been separated from God by their rebellion were summoned to believe on Jesus and to be

saved. And they did that. Three thousand did, that day. And life began for them, life that was whole and complete, sane and beautiful. It was the new life in the Spirit that Jesus gave children.

How about you? Are you part of the world of those who think that they are the cool and normal people, but they won't have anything to do with Jesus? Are you out there with them? If you have not confessed your sins and turned to Jesus, that is not normalcy you're experiencing. Not at all. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Confess your own sins and repent. Turn to Christ, and receive His Holy Spirit and become part of His new creation. Pentecost tells us about this great possibility.

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