

(Christian History) 3. the Montanists

by David Guzik

The Montanist movement was a 2nd-century Christian movement that emphasized a greater experience of the Holy Spirit, premillennial return of Jesus Christ, and moral purity, but was also criticized for its emphasis on self-mortification and legalism.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:8

Topics: "Spiritual Gifts", "Church History"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses a woman in the Montanus congregation who possesses the gift of revelation. She receives supernatural visions and communicates with angels and even the Lord himself. These revelations occur during various religious services such as reading scriptures, chanting Psalms, preaching sermons, and offering prayers. However, it is important to note that she does not interrupt the sermons to share her revelations, but rather presents them humbly to the church leadership after the assembly. The speaker emphasizes that this exercise of spiritual gifts is both dynamic and balanced with biblical principles.

Transcript

In this lecture we are going to examine something that you may never even have heard of. It's a movement in the early church known as the Montanist movement, starting approximately about 150 AD and running about 80 years, at least in real strength, till about 230 AD. The Montanist movement, I think, is very interesting and important for us to understand for a few different reasons and that's why we're going to spend one whole lecture taking a look at it.

Somewhere in the middle of the second century, again we're talking about approximately 120 years after Jesus ascended into heaven, there arose a movement within the Christian community which was praised by some and condemned by others. The movement bore many different titles. Some people called them the Phrygians or the Catephrygians because they were originally based in the region of Phrygia, that's an area of Asia Minor, today Turkey.

The group often referred to themselves as the Spirituals. That was sort of their effort to contrast themselves with what they considered to be carnal Christians that populated the church in their day. But the movement was and is most commonly called Montanism after its founder Montanus.

Montanus was a native of this region of Phrygia. He was a unique man who is sort of problematic for church history. His movement lasted again, as I said, for about 80 years and certain splinter groups seem to have hung on for a few more generations.

They were virtually excommunicated in the year 230 when the Synod of Iconium refused to recognize those Baptist by Montanists as genuine Christians. Now understand that. This is what this Synod said of Christians.

It said that if you were baptized in a Montanist church, you weren't a real Christian. And so obviously this really was a very strong condemnation of the Montanist movement. The later literature of the church fathers almost unanimously rejected the movement as being very dangerous.

Now Montanists in his movement had three main emphasis. First, they emphasized a greater experience of the Holy Spirit. Second, they emphasized the premillennial return of Jesus Christ.

Third, they showed a passion for moral purity, holiness, and what we might call an ascetic tendency. Do you understand what I mean by an ascetic tendency? Asceticism is that tendency to sort of deny yourself in radical ways. Fastings, wearing rough clothings, sleeping or depriving yourself of sleep, I should say, you know, sleeping in difficult situations.

It's basically, and I mean this sounds a little bit strong for me to say it, but it's basically self-torture to mortify the flesh. And this was an aspect of the Montanist movement. Now the Montanists expected the Holy Spirit to manifest Himself in their meetings through prophecy and through speaking in tongues, and they gave great prominence to the words spoken by those who had a reputation for prophecy.

They generally considered the church in general to be sort of what you might call soft on sin and insensitive to the Holy Spirit. So I want you to notice that it's very interesting to see that already in the year 150 A.D. there are significant numbers of Christians within the whole Christian family saying, where is the movement of the Holy Spirit in the church? We need to get back to a more active experience of the Holy Spirit. And number two, they're saying, hey, the church is soft on sin and we need to have a greater passion for holiness and sanctification.

Montanism had three main leaders. The first, of course, was its founder, Montanus. There's little reliable history on him.

Generations later, Montanist opponents alleged that he was a former pagan priest who had merely Christianized pagan ecstasies under the guise of the Holy Spirit's work. Additionally, some of these ancient histories, and again, I don't really regard them as reliable myself, they say that Montanist had committed suicide in the same manner as Judas. These allegations have no additional or especially contemporary substantiation.

What I'm trying to get at is nobody was saying at the time Montanist died that he committed suicide. Two or three generations later, several of his critics said that of him. But you know, I think that you have to be careful to see what critics say about people because they don't always tell the truth, and I think this was the case somewhat in Montanism.

The other two leaders of the Montanist movement were women, actually. A woman named Priscilla and another woman named Maximilla. These women, along with Montanists, formed what you might call the prophetic core of Montanism.

Now, in an act of renunciation, which we would regard to be unbiblical, these women forsook their husbands and their families and gave themselves as what was known as recommitted virgins to the prophetic ministry. This was not as uncommon as you would think in those days. In these early days of the monastic movement, which we'll talk about a little bit later on, but in these early days of the monastic movement, in this spirit of really radical self-renunciation, there were actually people who were married, both men and women, who decided, you know what, if I really want to please Jesus Christ, I have to give up my marriage, give up my family, and live celibate for the rest of my life, typically in a monastery somewhere or another.

Well, this is sort of the track that these two women, Priscilla and Maximilla, followed. The fact that these women were active in Montanist circles, and that these two prominent women had forsaken their family obligations, it really formed the basis of probably very legitimate arguments or accusations against Priscilla and Maximilla and Montanism in general. Montanism grew very rapidly through the region of Asia Minor.

Let's remember, Asia Minor was the area that contained many important churches that were founded by Paul, such as Ephesus and the congregations of Galatia. Later on, Montanism found very fertile soil in North Africa, and in North Africa, Montanism gained its most famous adherent and spokesman in the person of Tertullian. Now, I have to say, from my understanding of church history and from my reading of Tertullian, this was a stand-up guy, so to speak.

This was a man who knew his stuff and was really committed to Jesus Christ. It is largely because of Tertullian's understanding and appreciation of Montanism that I think that many of the things that the critics said about Montanism is not true, because Tertullian doesn't seem to be a fool, and yet he was a part of this movement and in his later years vigorously defended it. The two other prominent figures in Montanism also hailed from North Africa.

These were two women who were notable martyrs. Their names were Perpetua and Felicitas. The ancient writing, *The Passion of Perpetua*, you should look that up sometime.

Google it. I bet you can find it on the internet. It's a very moving account of the suffering of these women and their eventual death for Jesus Christ.

Now, though Montanism was roundly rejected by the church in general in the first part of the third century, in its early days it was received very warmly by many. The confessors of Vienna and Lyon in the year 177 wrote to the Montanist in Asia Minor and the Bishop of Rome and they asked them all not to quench the moving of the Holy Spirit that was taking place among the Montanists. Late in the second century Montanism almost won the official support of Eleutherius, or perhaps a successor, Victor, that is these Bishops of Rome, and he initially received the movement very warmly.

So what was it about the Montanists that was so controversial in practice? And again, listen carefully because I think there's very important lessons for us to learn about the Montanist movement. The Montanists were originally not a departure from the faith, as Phyllis Schaaf says. He criticized them because he believed that they were legalistic, especially in the sense of self-mortification.

Again, these practices that essentially amount to self-torture in the name of denying yourself. Now before you think that that's so radical, self-torture, how can you say such a thing? But wouldn't you say that actually fasting is a form of self-torture? It is, right? I mean you're denying yourself for self-discipline and

for the glory of Jesus Christ and to seek the Lord. Well people applied that same principle of fasting towards several other practices and sometimes it got quite out of hand and we'll talk about that later when we talk more about the monastic movement.

Kenneth Scott Laderet, one of my favorite church historians, also agrees about the Montanists. He said it, meaning Montanism, prized the records of the teachings of Christ and his apostles, but it believed, although not contradicting what had been said there, that the Holy Spirit continued to speak through the prophets and among these it included women. So from Laderet's assessment we would have to say that the real problem with Montanism, as much as it was a problem, was simply the idea that they believed that the Holy Spirit spoke in their own time and sometimes spoke through women.

We must say that in important matters of doctrine, Montanists were sometimes in the very forefront of the defense of the faith. For example, Tertullian, the prominent Montanist, was instrumental in helping to express an orthodox understanding of the Trinity when the Christological heresy was fermenting. The credentials of Montanism as a generally doctrinally orthodox movement are very strong.

However, there are several doctrinal distinctives of Montanism that would probably make us feel uncomfortable. First and perhaps most significant of all, Montanists considered his movement to be the inauguration of a new movement of the Holy Spirit, really a new dispensation of God's dealing with man. Montanists theorized that there were four stages of man's relationship to God throughout history.

First, he said there was the stage of natural religion or the innate idea of God. Secondly, he said that there was the stage of legal religion demonstrated by the Old Testament and God's covenant of law with Israel. Thirdly, he said there was the stage of the gospel having begun during the earthly ministry of Jesus.

And finally, he said that there was the stage of the Holy Spirit's revelation as manifest in the spiritual sensitivity of the Montanists. Now again, I want you to understand, do you really grab on to what he was saying? He was saying, we are launching a whole new work of God's Spirit in his redemptive plan. And you have to admit, that's a pretty big claim to make, right? Montanists believed that the coming of the Paraclete, you know, of the Holy Spirit, was only complete in the movement that he inaugurated.

In other words, he would say that the stage of the gospel having begun during the earthly ministry of Jesus did not, if you want to say, completely launch the ministry of the Holy Spirit, but the ministry of the Holy Spirit was only completely launched in his own day. He declared that this age of the Spirit, as he talked about his fourth category, had superseded the age of Christ, even as what he said, the age of Christ superseded what he called stage two, which would be the age of the Father. You might say that Montanist was a dispensational thinker before dispensationalism, but it must be pointed out that there's no evidence that he embraced what you might call the Jesus-only doctrine that came in later.

Montanist also considered himself as the chief prophet for the Paraclete, in other words, the Holy Spirit, interpreting the fulfillment of John 14, 16, and 16, 7. At his baptism, Montanist said that he spoke with tongues, and he began prophesizing, declaring that the Holy Spirit, promised in the gospel according to John, was finding utterance through him. Now, so far, with just what I tell you, how would you regard the Montanist movement? You know, generally orthodox, right? Maybe a little weird Pentecostal, right? A little weird with some strange beliefs about their own age. Maybe, you might say, with this business, a little puffed up with pride, right? We're inaugurating a new age, but there's certainly nothing in this that would make me say, oh, they're heretics.

Oh, they're not real believers. At worst, you would say they're a little weird in their idea of this new movement of the Holy Spirit. This perception of a new era of God's dealing with the church, it really did a lot to shape the way that the Montanists saw themselves, and the way that outsiders saw their movement.

I mean, let's face it, if you go around saying, God has us on the forefront of his brand new thing, that's sort of a proud statement, isn't it? It creates pride within yourself, and you can't blame other people for sort of seeing you as proud when you talk that way. Another doctrinal distinctive of the Montanists was their firmly held belief in the second coming of Jesus Christ. This group was emphatically premillennial, and they laid strong emphasis on the imminent return of Jesus Christ.

They said, let's be ready for the return of Jesus today. Now, in Montanism, unfortunately, this also got extreme and kind of crazy. The leading prophets of Montanism announced the specific place of Jesus' return, a city of Asia Minor named Papusa.

Just think about that. It would be some prophets today say, Jesus Christ is coming soon, and he's coming to Shpital. You know, that's where he's going to touch down on the earth.

You can say, well, what about the scriptures that say he's returning to Israel, he's returning to the Mount of Olives, and so forth and so on. Well, they sort of disregarded those. Many believers who were sympathetic to the Montanists flocked to Papusa to await the coming of Christ.

And so many came that the Christian communities of some Asia Minor villages were effectively depopulated. However, when people were disappointed by this unwise eschatological expectation, they soon went back to their place, and the idea of the coming kingdom in Jerusalem was soon substituted. In all of this, the doctrines of Montanism, though some of them were definitely strange, and we would say, let's stay away from those doctrines, there wasn't anything extremely unorthodox.

They didn't deny the Trinity. They didn't deny the saving work of Jesus Christ. They just generally had a few strange ideas about the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and a few eschatologically strange ideas.

Now, as a movement distinguished by a desire to continually experience spiritual gifts, it's not as strange, we would expect it, that the Montanists would be familiar with the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in their own congregations. Philip Schaaf said this, he said that in Montanist meetings, scenes took place similar to those under the preaching of the first Quakers, and the glossolalia and prophesying in the Irvingite congregations. Now, Schaaf wrote that from a 19th century perspective, because that's when he lived and wrote.

If he was writing in the 20th century, he probably would have said Pentecostal, but that was before the time of Schaaf. He would have talked about it in terms of the Pentecostal movement, or the Charismatic resurgence. You see, among the contemporaries of Montanism, it was agreed that genuine supernatural phenomenon was happening among the Montanists.

Some of the critics said that the phenomenon was the manifestation of the devil, and not the Holy Spirit, but the reality of spiritual phenomenon among the Montanists was indeed very well attested. I find one of the most fascinating documents relevant to this is something written by Tertullian. Tertullian describes for us what a Montanist meeting was like, and let's take a look at that together.

It's in your handouts, but you can also look up on the PowerPoint as we read here. Tertullian said, We have now among us a sister whose lot it has been to be favored with sundry gifts of revelation, which she

experiences in the Spirit by ecstatic vision amidst the sacred rites of the Lord's day in the church. She converses with angels, and sometimes even with the Lord.

She both sees and hears mysterious communications. Some men's hearts she understands, and to those who are in need she distributes remedies, whether it be in the reading of the scriptures, or in the chanting of the psalms, or in the preaching of sermons, or in the offering up of prayers. In all these religious services, matter and opportunity are afforded to her of seeing visions.

Now, can we just sort of tear this apart a little bit and understand what Tertullian is saying here? We have now among us a sister. Now, by the way, does he ever name the sister? No, he doesn't, which I think is healthy, right? The idea isn't to glorify an individual who has these experiences, but he's just saying there's a particular sister among us, an anonymous sister among them, whose lot it has been to be favored with sundry gifts of revelation. In other words, he's recognizing that these were just bestowed on her.

It's not because she's more spiritual. It's not because she has a hotline to God that nobody else does. It's just God's giving to her that she has these revelations, which he experiences in the Spirit by ecstatic vision amidst the sacred rites of the Lord's day in the church.

In other words, while the church service is going on, she's receiving these visions. Sometimes it's as if she's conversing with angels. You wonder if this isn't referring to speaking in tongues, conversing with angels.

And sometimes even with the Lord, she both sees and hears mysterious communications. Some men's hearts she understands. This is what we would call the biblical gift of knowledge or perhaps a word of wisdom.

And to those who are in need, she distributes her remedies. I mean, this just seems like a flow of the gifts of the Spirit through this particular woman. Now, by the way, you would have to say that not everybody in the Montanus congregation did this, right? The whole reason why Tertullian writes about this is because it was remarkable.

And so he says, whether it be in the reading of the scriptures, in the chanting of psalms, or in the preaching of sermons, or the offering up of prayers, in all these religious services, matter and opportunity are afforded to her seeing visions. So she just receives a lot of supernatural revelation during the sermons. Now, what does she do with it, right? Does she stand up in the middle of the sermon and say, thus says the Lord, you know, my children are this? No, look at the next item.

Tertullian goes on to say, after the people are dismissed at the conclusion of the sacred services, she is in the regular habit of reporting to us, Tertullian being one of the leaders of the congregation, to us whatever things she may have seen in her vision. For all her communications are examined with the most scrupulous care, in order that their truth may be probed. The apostle most assuredly foretold that there were to be spiritual gifts in the church.

So do you see what the woman does with them? She receives all this revelation. What does she do afterwards? She comes up to the leadership of the church and she says, this is what I think the Lord told me. And what does the leadership do? Do they just say, oh, well, you said it, I guess it must be the Lord.

No, they judge it. They judge it according to the scriptures. They judge it according to their own wisdom.

They seem to be following biblical order altogether. I would say that this passage from Tertullian describes an exercise of the spiritual gifts, which is both dynamic, right? It's alive and active, but it's also tempered with biblical balances. This woman's speaking prophecy.

She hears the Lord's voice. She sees visions. She's speaking forth words of knowledge and encouragement.

Again, of special note, her revelations are not shouted out in the midst of the congregational meeting, but meekly presented to the church leadership after the general assembly is adjourned. And again, they examine what she said. I have to say that there's probably very little here that a mature, balanced, biblical, charismatic pastor of the 20th century would find strange or aberrant in Tertullian's account.

Now, by the way, the practice of judging prophecy was not limited to Tertullian's North African congregation. A later critic of Montanus would later admit that he openly corrected Priscilla and Maximilla in the context of judging the prophetic ministry. So even when these very two prominent women, who we would say were misguided in forsaking their families, but nonetheless, even when they prophesied, it wasn't just blankly accepted.

It was examined and judged as the Bible says prophetic gifts should be judged. So without doubt, in some particular congregations of the Montanists, there were specific instances of what we might call charismania, you know, sort of unbiblical exercise of the gifts. But yet we have distinct testimony right here of balanced biblical practice of a variety of spiritual gifts in Montanist congregations.

Now, if the pursuit of spiritual gifts among the Montanists was good, what was bad about them was their cultivation of legalism and asceticism, right? You remember what asceticism is? That sort of spirit of self-torture and a sort of pride as being a spiritual elite. I would say that in many regards, the Montanists parallel the phenomenon of Pentecostal holiness groups in the 20th century. I don't know if you've noticed this phenomenon of Pentecostal holiness groups, but you'll have groups that greatly prize this idea of the freedom of the Spirit and the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, while at the same time being extremely legalistic amongst themselves.

In many ways, the Montanists were a foreshadowing of this 20th century phenomenon. So there's a lot of things that we could say. As with other movements that are marked by what we might call a legal relationship with God, the Montanists had a long list of don'ts.

Don't do this, don't do that. There were specific regulations concerning what women could wear and couldn't wear. There were detailed ordinances regarding fast and Lenten observances.

Much of their insistence on a high ascetic standard had to be interpreted in light of their belief that Jesus was coming very, very soon. Now, Tertullian would freely admit that it was the legalism and the strictness of Montanism which caused its greatest opposition. Here he is explaining the criticism against the Montanists.

He said, It is on this account that the new prophecies are rejected, not that Montanists and Priscilla and Maximilla preach another god, nor that they overturn any particular rule of faith or hope, but that they plainly teach more frequent fasting than marrying. In other words, asceticism as opposed to enjoyment. They are therefore constantly reproaching us with novelty.

Well, I would have to say that in some regard we would agree with this criticism that was leveled against the Montanists. They were legalistic. They did have an unhealthy asceticism.

And again, it just seems to me very curious that groups which oftentimes emphasize great liberty in the Holy Spirit will sometimes be the most legalistic groups of all. Now, why did people criticize the Montanists? Well, again, we should understand first of all that not everybody criticized them. That especially in the beginning there were many groups who approved of the Montanist movement and saw it as something good for the church.

For example, there were a group called the Confessors of Gaul. I don't think I've explained to you what confessors were. Think of a time of persecution.

You basically had two kinds of martyrs, excuse me, two kinds of heroes that would come forth from a season of persecution. The first kind of hero would be martyrs. And martyrs were people who died for their faith, right? But the second group of heroes to emerge from a time of persecution were confessors.

Those were people who stood, you know, they were imprisoned, they were tortured, they were harmed in some way for the cause of Jesus Christ, yet they did not deny the Lord. They were confessors of His holy name, yet they didn't have to be martyred for whatever reason. So actually, in any time of persecution you had three categories.

You had martyrs, you had confessors, and then you had the lapsed. Those were those who had, you know, made some kind of denial of Jesus Christ to save their own skin. We'll talk about them later.

So the confessors of Gaul, these heroes of a season of persecution, stated in a letter in 1777, don't quench the work of the Spirit through the Montanists. And then also we see the Roman Bishop Eleutherius at least initially supported the Montanist movement. Tertullian specifically states that Victor, perhaps he confused him with Eleutherius, we know it was a bishop of Rome, recognized the prophetic gifts of Montanists Priscilla and Maximilla.

And he granted the Montanist church as a provision of peace until Tertullian says that he was swayed by false accusations. In other words, he says that when the heat started coming down on the Montanists, it was because people were lying about them. There's some evidence that Irenaeus was sympathetic to Montanism.

He's another important church father. And of course, there is the case of Tertullian himself. And so we have to understand that there were many people who looked at the Montanist movement, at least in the beginning, right? It seemed to get crazier more towards the end.

But at least in the beginning, it seems like a legitimate, what we would call sort of Pentecostal or charismatic movement that had some strange excesses in a few areas. But there did come critics of Montanism, most pointedly, a man named Hippolytus. Hippolytus was a very active battler over doctrinal issues.

And he was also an early participant in political intrigue and conflict surrounding what we would call the bishop's office of Rome. Hippolytus was also embroiled in the initial controversy, we've already mentioned him, of the Quartodeciman controversy in Rome. But this is what he accused the Montanists of.

Number one, he said that they failed to judge prophecy, and they failed to give heed to those who were competent to decide or judge prophecy. Now again, perhaps this was true in some Montanist congregations, but we would say this was not true widespread. It certainly wasn't true of what we saw in Tertullian and the few examples we have of Montanists judging the prophecies of Maximilia and Priscilla.

Secondly, he would say that they claim to have gone beyond the scriptures and the apostles. Well, I don't think you could say this in fact, because in fact they did submit themselves to the scriptures, but certainly you could see where he would get the attitude of this, right? The whole new dispensation thing. So I don't think you could say it was true in fact, but we can sympathize with the criticism that they felt like they had the attitude that they had gone past the apostles.

Thirdly, he claimed that they had new and legalistic practice, especially in diet and peculiar fasting. In other words, they would only eat like dry morsels of food, you know, just like dry dog food, that kind of thing. They would make themselves fast on that kind of diet.

So these critics of Montanism made these claims as well. There were some other later critics quoted to us by Eusebius, who was a famous historian of the church, who would have written approximately a hundred years after the Montanist movement was ended. But in his church history, he quotes some people who were also critics of the Montanist movement, and these were some of their criticisms.

First of all, they said Montanist was a proud man, a man with an unquenchable desire for leadership. Number two, they said his manner of prophecy was that he became beside himself and being suddenly in a sort of frenzy and ecstasy, he raved and began to babble and utter strange things, prophesying in a manner contrary to the constant custom of the church. Third, he admits that Montanist would at times correct Priscilla in Maximilla, right, judging prophecies, but sometimes he rebuked them in an openly and a wise and faithful manner that he might seem to be a reprover.

In other words, Eusebius says that he just did it as a show. He didn't really correct them. Fourth, he gives the impression that the church as a totality rejected Montanism and considered Montanists a false prophet, which was not true.

Fifth, he implies that the three leaders of Montanism committed suicide, but he refused to be certain about it. This is sort of a bad tactic of Eusebius. He throws out a wild accusation and then he says, but we can't be sure about this.

Well, you know what, if you can't be sure about it, you shouldn't be throwing out the wild accusation. And then finally, he accuses them of legalism and recommending the disillusionment, the disillusion, I should say, of marriages, which is true. They did this.

That was a legitimate accusation against the Montanist movement. And so I just started giving you the picture here that there were some people who favored them. There were many people, by the way, much later, don't forget, Eusebius wrote about a hundred years after the movement was essentially dead, that here they were at the end.

I'll point out one other thing that I don't have up here on this list. Eusebius also quoted people who questioned the way that the Montanists handled money. They said that they were suspect in their financial dealings.

And so there were people who criticized them. There were some people who praised them. But what I want to do now is just sort of assess the whole idea of Montanism in this post-apostolic church.

First of all, assessing the Montanist movement is not easy. It's difficult to talk about this phenomenon that we don't see firsthand, right? I wonder what it would have been like to walk in on a Montanist meeting, right? You might have walked in there and said, man, the Holy Spirit is alive here and what a glorious exercise of the Holy Spirit in biblical balance. I've been waiting for this kind of thing my whole life.

That might be what you would say. Or you might walk into the Montanist movement and say, good heavens, these are the craziest Pentecostals I've ever seen in my life. I mean, so much of the feel and the atmosphere can't really be communicated from ancient documents, right? You'd have to walk in on a meeting to see what it actually felt like.

But I think it's important for us to see Montanism in general in a more sympathetic light than its third and fourth century critics did. After all, it was welcomed and approved by many in the church. And many of the critics' complaints might be true on some points or in isolated instances, but they're probably less than true regarding the entire movement as a whole.

So I like some of the assessments of the Montanist movement as given by great historians. For example, F. F. Bruce in his wonderful work, *The Spreading Flame*. This is what he says specifically about Montanism.

I'm going to quote here. He says, we shall recognize manifestations which have reoccurred time and again in the history of Christianity when the new wine of spiritual movement has proved too potent to be restrained within the old wineskins of too rigid an organization. And then another man, Ian Cairns, say in his classic textbook on the history of Christianity, he says, this attempt, speaking of the Montanist movement, this attempt to combat formalism and human organization led him to a reassertion of the doctrines of the second advent, the second coming, and the Holy Spirit.

It represented the perennial protest that occurs in the church when there's an over-laboration of machinery and a lack of dependence on the Spirit of God. Do you see what Cairns is saying? He's saying, look, they're just getting back to the spontaneity of the Holy Spirit and the excitement of Jesus' return. I like what David Wright wrote in the *Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity*.

He said this about the Montanists. The church lost much by excluding them. Despite their excesses, the Montanists stood for the conviction that the Spirit was as active in the contemporary church as he was in the beginning.

Greater manifestations, not lesser, were promised for the last days. Now again, I think it's just very interesting to see how the church reacted to Montanism in its day. Because I would say that the rejection of Montanism in the 3rd and 4th century, especially the 4th century, seemed to be like a pendulum swinging, right, from one direction to another.

If the Montanists were guilty of spiritual excesses, right, Pentecostal excesses, which certainly it seems that in some occasions they were, if the Montanists swung the pendulum to one side, then in response, the opponents swung the pendulum way to the other side. The rejection of Montanism seemed to occasion a pendulum swing against the gifts of the Holy Spirit within the church. If Montanism was a movement eventually rejected by much of the church, then it's two outstanding doctrines.

What were its two biggest doctrines? The second coming of Jesus Christ, right, the immediate second coming of Jesus, and the experience of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. People started saying, listen, if we emphasize the second coming, if we emphasize the gifts of the Spirit, people will think we're just like the Montanists, and we don't want to be like that. You see, the pendulum swung in the other direction from those two doctrines.

This is what a historian named McGiffert says of the rejection of Montanism. Listen. He says, for one thing, it brought the gift of prophesying into dispute.

As already remarked, prophecy had been gradually waning and the number of Christian prophets had been much reduced. Only in the conflict with the Montanists did the church at large come to recognize that the age of prophecy was past. Let me read that to you again.

Only in the conflict with the Montanists did the church at large come to recognize that the age of prophecy was past. In condemning their false prophets, the Catholic church really condemned all prophecy that is contemporary prophecy. Therefore, the claim to prophetic gifts was commonly regarded as a sign of mania or blasphemy.

Now listen, this is a very, very interesting thing. It's vital to understand that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were understood to be an important part of the church life before the Montanist controversy. The phenomenon of and the reactions of its detractors provide a dramatic picture of how the gifts of the Holy Spirit were understood in the first two centuries.

I don't know, let me see if I can explain this to you and you grab onto it, because to me I'm very excited about this, as you can tell. Okay, you know today that there are many people within the Christian circle who say that the gifts of the Spirit died with the apostles, right? Now, you have to ask yourself the question, when did people start saying that? Did they start saying it when the apostles died? Well, there goes John. There go the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit.

No more speaking in tongues, no more prophecy, no more miraculous healings. The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit are gone because John just died. Did they say it then? No, they did not.

I want you to understand, they only started saying it after the Montanist movement. You see, because the Montanist movement occasioned this pendulum swing against the gifts of the Holy Spirit. You see, it's very important for us to understand this point.

First of all, let's take a look at what Hermas says about true prophets, because what you need to understand is that before the time... Okay, I'm not explaining myself well. Let me just rewind just a little bit. Picture in your mind the death of the Apostle John and the Montanist movement, okay? This period of time represented by my two hands right here.

In between that time, were people talking about the gifts of the Spirit and experiencing the gifts of the Spirit? Well, what did the Scriptures say they would, of course? But what does church history say? Well, look at Hermas, okay? Writing in his work, The Shepherd. He says, first, the man who thinks that he has the Spirit exalts himself and wishes to have the preeminence. And straight away he is heady and shameless and full of talk and conversant among many luxuries and other deceits.

And he receives higher for his prophecy. And if he receives not, he prophesies not. Can then a divine Spirit receive higher on prophecy? It cannot be that a prophet of God should do this, but the Spirit of such

prophets is earthly.

And then he never at all approaches an assembly of righteous men, but flees from them. And then he joins to the double-minded and empty and prophesies unto them in corners and deceives them by speaking all things emptily according to their lusts. For it is to the empty that he replies.

Because an empty vessel set with empty ones is not crushed, but they agree with one another. Now here, Hermas is putting forth the legitimate office of prophecy as opposed to the illegitimate one, right? If you were to ask Hermit, is there prophecy, Hermit, Hermas, in your day? If you were to ask him, is there prophecy in your day, what would he say? He would say yes. He would say there's also false prophets and you have to watch out for them, but there is the true gift of prophecy in our day.

Apparently, nobody told Hermas that it died with the Apostle John, right? Well, here's somebody else, Justin Martyr on the gift of prophecy. For the prophetic gifts remain with us even to the present time. Now it is possible to see amongst us women and men who possess the gifts of the Spirit of God.

Could you imagine going up to Justin Martyr in the second century and saying, hey Justin, you know, didn't you know that the gifts of the Spirit died out with the Apostles? Well, he would say, what are you crazy? He says, we see them in our churches all the time. Next, we have Irenaeus on the gifts of the Spirit in the early church. He says, wherefore also those who are in truth as disciples receiving grace from him do in his name perform miracles so as to promote the welfare of other men according to the gift each one has received from him.

For some do certainly drive out devils. Other have foreknowledge of things to come. They see visions and utter prophetic expressions.

Others still heal the sick by laying their hands upon them, and they are made whole. Yea, moreover, as I have said, the dead even have been raised up and remained among us for many years. And what more shall I say? It is not possible to name the number of gifts which the church throughout the whole world has received from God in the name of Jesus.

Now again, don't you see what a dramatic statement that is by Irenaeus? If you were to ask Irenaeus, are the gifts of the Spirit in the church in your day, he would say, absolutely yes. And then there's a couple other ones too that I found, and perhaps there's more that I didn't find, but Cyprian contended that the church continued to experience visions, revelations, and dreams. And then Eusebius quoted an anti-Montanist critic who declared that according to the apostles, prophetic gifts would last until the death of the apostles? No, until the return of Jesus Christ.

Do you understand what this means? I find this very exciting. Therefore, when I read people who say, well listen, the Bible tells us that the gifts of the Holy Spirit died with the apostles, or as a matter of fact, died with the creation of the New Testament, sometimes they say that. I can tell them two things.

I say, the Bible says you're wrong, because any careful examination of 1 Corinthians will tell them that the Bible says they're wrong. But I'll also tell them, history says you're wrong. The decided testimony of the church says that during this period, before the Montanist movement, and even into the Montanist movement, they said the gifts of the Spirit are for today.

It was only after the Montanist movement, and I might say some years after, up to a hundred years after the Montanist movement, that people came forth and said, well, you know, this shows us that the gifts of

the Spirit aren't for today. By the way, it's very interesting that none of the contemporary critics of Montanism said the reason why they're wrong is because the gifts of the Spirit are not for today. In all those criticisms I listed for you, from Eusebius, from Hippolytus, did any of them say that it was because the gifts of the Spirit are dead with the Apostles? No.

You see the difference there. And so it's very interesting for us to realize this, and to understand that in the early church, it's an absolute historical fact that the gifts of the Spirit did not die out with the Apostles, and did not die out with the formation of the New Testament canon. I would say that the Spirit only died out, and I say that they didn't actually die, but they were moved into much less prominence, and sort of forced underground as the pendulum swing against Montanism.

And that's why I think it's important for us to understand this movement in the ancient church. I think that there's some lessons that we can draw from the Montanist movement for us today. The lessons that I would draw is that, well, you know what, let me go back to one more point.

Let me read some summations here by some historians that I just want to get at. I've got it up on the PowerPoint, so we may as well look at it. He says, Yerosof Pelican, who, listen, he's just a historian.

This man is not an evangelical believer. He's just a good historian. He says, Most Orthodox writer in the 2nd and even in the 3rd century maintained that such inspiration of the Holy Spirit was not only possible, but present and active in the church.

In meeting the challenge of Montanism, they could not, for the most part, take the approach that the age of supernatural inspiration had passed. Among the earliest critics of Montanism, there was no effort to discredit the supernatural character of the prophecy. I mean, doesn't that show it to you right there? Oh, how I wish some of these critics of the charismatic movement, some of those who say that the gifts of the Spirit died with the apostles or the formation of the New Testament canon, would just do their homework.

And then another man, John DeSoyas, writing in the 19th century says, It is indisputable that Clement, Ignatius, Hermas, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus unanimously affirmed their belief in or even continued experience of the continued distribution of the charismata. All right. So for all of that, let's go on to some lessons from the Montanist movement.

Number one, as illustrated from those previous quotes, I say with you without any reservation at all that the Montanist movement shows us that the gifts of the Holy Spirit did not die out with the apostolic church or with the formation of the New Testament canon. You can be sure of it. Secondly, it shows us the danger of proclaiming a new spiritual age.

We must admit that as much as some of the detractors or the criticisms of Montanism were wrong or inaccurate or lied about them, there still was plenty to criticize within the Montanistic movement, right? There were definitely things to criticize, and one of them was sort of their elitist attitude of a new spiritual age. You really have to be careful of that kind of thing. Listen, you don't have such a pride in your own movement or what God is doing that you see yourself as a new thing detached from what God has done in the past or from what God will do in the future.

So there is the great danger of proclaiming a new spiritual age. Third, those who value the activity of the Holy Spirit must guard against legalism and a lack of discernment. You know, listen, I think we just have to say that as much as we admire the Montanistic movement, for some points they were definitely wrong in

their legalistic attitudes, in their ascetic tendencies, and in their ability to do things like, well, as we just saw, cut off marriage, right? The way that Maximila and Priscilla both denied their husbands and their children for the sake of this new prophetic calling they got, we would have to say that biblically speaking, it was just plain wrong.

And so this is what we understand by this. These things have to be counteracted. And I have to say, it sort of mystifies me, but I find it very interesting why those who value the activity of the Holy Spirit sometimes fall into such legalism.

And then finally, it tells us of the danger of a reactive theology, right? Listen, the Montanists had errors, there's no doubt about it, and I don't doubt for a minute that in some of their meetings, if not many of them, they went off into Pentecostal excesses, right? You might walk into a Montanist meeting and say, good heavens, you know, they're swinging from the chandeliers, so to speak, you know, as people would talk about an excessively Pentecostal meeting where there's no biblical balance or guards on how the gifts are exercised. Nevertheless, the answer to being out of balance with excess with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the answer is not to react and to prohibit the gifts of the Spirit. The answer is to find the biblical balance where the gifts are practiced and indeed even biblically promoted within the biblical framework given to us.

So you have to watch about this whenever there is a theological danger, right? Some people worry today about the church being too relevant, right? You know, oh, they're selling out the church because they want to be relevant to the present age and such I understand that and that's a legitimate danger and a legitimate concern to talk about, right? Selling out the church for the sake of being relevant to today. But at the same time, we don't stand back and say, I'm going to do everything I can to be irrelevant to today, to show just how, you know, irrelevant I am and to show that I'm not one of those super relevant guys. No, no, no.

What do we say? We say, no, Lord, I'm not going to have a reactive theology. If somebody's erring on one side of an extreme, I'm not going to swing over to the other side of the pendulum extreme. I'm going to find the biblical balance and stick with that.

In the case for the church being relevant, what would we say? We would say, Lord, help me to find that balance to be in the world, but not of the world, right? That's what we're looking for. And so this teaches us, the whole Montanist movement teaches us the dangers of a reactive theology. What you can see from this lecture, I think, why I find the Montanist movement personally compelling from a historical framework, but also very instructive for us here in the 21st century and that we can learn a lot from it.

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