

## ***127 Misusing God's power***

Having now reached the penultimate chapter of Greg Boyd's '*Cross Vision*', I've experienced yet another penny-drop moment – what a wonderful journey God has been gracious enough to bring me on, these past three years! We're all different, and so this might not be a problem to you, but it's been a struggle for me, on and off, for several years.

In my 'backstory' article, 'Full circle – Reflections on 50 years as a Christian' (mid 2017, article [0] on my web page), I explained how I ended up in what was effectively a small sect. 'Harry' was a work contact, whom I brought to an Alpha course at my church; I then 'discipled' him and his wife, as we read the Scriptures together, but it soon became clear to me that he had both healing and prophetic gifts. I (and others) received physical healing at his hands, more than once, and he was able to discern things about people, which I knew to be true, having previously been churchwarden, but other people didn't know. (It turns out that he's had these gifts since he was a child.)

Later, Harry attended a 'gifts discernment' course at church, at the end of which a church leader would say to you, "We've seen that God has given you such and such gifts, so now let's see how you can use those gifts within this church." That process didn't work. I felt sad and frustrated that the church didn't seem willing and/or able to accept Harry's broad giftings and allow him to exercise them. (I now realise that the leaders' discernment was better than mine!)

Harry started leading his own Bible study group, which I attended, but it was independent of the church's study group system. After a number of years, and without my realising it, his Bible teaching gradually moved and became more and more unorthodox, but I continued to think that his gifting validated his teaching. Thankfully, one day – nine years ago now – I 'woke up' and realised what had happened! I then wrote an apologetic farewell note to Harry and immediately pulled out. I was then left with a totally empty faith – but that's another story [0].

My struggle has been about whether Harry's gifts were God-given, or whether they were of the Evil One, because they caused so much damage in several people's lives. But they were certainly also used for good, of which I could give you a number of examples. However, there were several serious relationship issues around Harry, including broken marriages, which I won't go into. But at the time I stupidly couldn't see the damage that was being done!

Yesterday, I read chapter 16, where Greg Boyd explains his understanding, based on his cross-centred view of the Old Testament, that some people with clear God-given supernatural giftings, misused those gifts in a way that was contrary to God's will, and he gave specific examples in the lives of Moses, Elijah and Elisha. Nevertheless, God still used them, despite their obvious character flaws and the ways in which they went against God's leading. This caused God pain, but God was sacrificially willing to use those people, in order to forward his overall plan, looking towards the fulfilment of all things in Jesus.

This is the same fundamental point that GB makes over and over again in this book: by allowing people to go against God's will, some terrible things happened (e.g. many innocent people were killed) that obviously caused God pain. But the God of the cross was willing to endure that pain, in order to draw us, inch by painful inch, to the point where we could see and receive God's love.

But we now have the New Testament and, in Christ, we see what God is truly like, so do we use spiritual gifts rightly? Clearly not! I thought that if people saw the miracles that Harry was performing, they would come to faith. Thankfully, our gracious God is redeeming my mistakes and is using them to teach me.

Teach me what, exactly?! Lots of things, but I think the most important is that being right, and knowing I was right (which I did, of course!) isn't what really matters. Indeed, it can cause real damage, as it did to my relationship with Sue. Thankfully, she stuck with me, and that relationship is being rebuilt and restored, through God's grace.

How wonderful that God inspired and used those fallible OT characters, and how wonderful that God even uses us to continue that process of self-sacrificingly spreading the love of Jesus.

What a glorious God! What an inspiring Spirit! What a beautiful Saviour and Lord!

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