

Pneumatology

*The Accomplished and Applied
Work of the Holy Spirit*

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*Pneumatology: The Accomplished and Applied
Work of the Holy Spirit*

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Pneumatology

The Accomplished and Applied Work of the Holy Spirit

I. The Holy Spirit-Universal Orthodox Agreements

A. Deity

But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God” (Acts 5:3, 4).

B. Inspiration of Scriptures

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

C. Regeneration

Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no

one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3).

D. Sanctification

But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

The Holy Spirit is called “Holy”, it has been suggested, because He is making us holy.

II. Continuation and Cessation-A Fraternal Disagreement

A. Expect a Miracle?

I was a guest on a radio talk show. The subject was, “Are you disappointed in God?” The question we threw out to the listening audience was, “Has the Christian faith been presented to you in such a way as to make you think that you are not getting some things that the Bible promises you should get?” Two of our earliest callers were women who were blind. My question for them was, “When you became a Christian and started acquainting yourself with the gospels, noticing that nearly everybody was healed—including the blind—did you expect that this should happen to you?” They both answered, “No.”

Was that a faithless answer or a proper answer? When we read the pages of Scripture and see supernatural things take place, should we today expect those things to be happening in our lives? Should we, as the bumper sticker indicates, “Expect a Miracle”?

1. What’s a Miracle?

The issue before us can be classified as signs and wonders¹. We usually call them *miracles*. These are supernatural things. They are miraculous. We are not talking about amazing coincidences or the beauty of childbirth or something wondrous or astonishing. Charles Hodge defines a miracle as something that,

...take[s] place in the material world, i.e., in the sphere of observation of the senses...and...are

¹ The word *miracle* is not actually biblical.

produced or caused by the simple volition of God, without the intervention of any subordinate cause.²

In other words, the podium rises to the ceiling without strings or anything else helping it except the word of God Himself. Walking on water is done without skis, sufficient speed or any flotation device. Water becomes wine without the necessary interval of time or additives. People speak languages they were never taught. People heal others by the mere word of their mouth. People know things without having received the knowledge through ordinary means. And all of this can be observed by anyone with the required senses of observation—whether they have faith in the miracle worker or not.

B. Among Brothers

Allow me to state up front that my thesis for this message runs a head-on collision with what is generally called *Pentecostalism*—or the doctrine of the Charismatics. And it is not merely at odds with these forms of Christianity but with those who have been influenced by them; for their influence is strong and wide.

I would, therefore, like to preface this sermon (or sermons) with a couple of words on confrontation and debate. But even before that, I would like to put forth that, although I am in disagreement with Christians—commonly known as: Neo-Pentecostal, Full Gospel, Charismatic, or Second Blessing believers—it would be wrong, and uncharitable, to consign these people to the ash can of paganism.

An examination of the doctrines of the Assemblies of God, or many other Pentecostal denominations, shows much orthodoxy in their belief systems and understanding of

² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, (Eerdman, reprinted 1989), p. 618.

Christianity. Furthermore, I think the enthusiasm and energy many of our Charismatic brothers and sisters exude on behalf of the gospel is to be admired and emulated. I say this with all sincerity, and not merely as an obligatory prelude to my criticisms.

C. Error is Destructive

I must still insist, however, that the (what we will call) Charismatic view of the work the Holy Spirit is faulty. And because it is faulty it is destructive. I don't necessarily have to connect the dots as to why doctrinal error is destructive. As Christians, by faith, we know that it is. One need not look too far or too hard, though, to see the destructive nature of this approach to the faith.

As I was preparing for this series, I was sitting in my office and received a phone call. A man in his mid-fifties, dying of cancer, was on the other end of the line. One year earlier his wife had taken ill and died. He had a number of children, including a twelve-year-old daughter. He was raised in a Pentecostal church and believed in divine healing. His wife died and he was about to die. He conveyed to me that all he had been taught was a lie. He had departed from the faith and wasn't about to go back to church.

I sought to comfort him to the best of my ability. Not everything he was taught was a lie. I tried to explain to him that God doesn't promise to always heal. But He does promise that whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. As delicately as possible I explained God's divine justice and Christ's substitutionary atonement—i.e. the gospel. He wondered why he hadn't been taught these things as a child. I shared in his lament.

I bring this up to show one possible damaging effect of an improper understanding of what we should expect God to do—what God promises and what He doesn't promise. And although truth cannot be determined by anecdotes, even true anecdotes, we

must all agree that an unbiblical notion of Christianity, no matter how well-meaning, is destructive. I can bring up scores of examples (maybe not as intense as the one just mentioned) where an improper view of how God interacts with mankind has caused disruption in and alienation from the church.

D. A Spirit of Division

The Irony of the issue before us—the work of the Holy Spirit—is how it appears to do just the opposite of what the Holy Spirit promises to do, which is to bring unity to the church. But peace at all costs cannot be the marching song of the church. Sadly, peace at all costs has been the swan song of many churches. The apostle Paul did not hesitate to bring strong and, at times, harsh correction to churches in error. In His seven letters to the seven churches, Jesus constantly brings warnings to God’s people. In order for there to be genuine unity, there must be division. Otherwise the church merely becomes the church of the lowest common denominator.

Observe the words of Jesus to the church at Pergamum.

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth (Revelation 2:14- 16).

In light of these statements we must surmise that, although all churches have error, to persist in error is a dangerous course, a course which may finally bring a church to the point where it is no longer a church at all.

Along with this I might point out the remedial nature of thinking Christians ought not to argue. It is true that contentious and meaningless arguments are to be avoided (1 Timothy 1:4). There is no shortage, however, in the biblical record of Christians confronting other Christians due to life or doctrine (Galatians 2:11). It shouldn't be thought harmful to God's kingdom for an unbeliever to listen to Christians debate over critical issues; when doctors and lawyers debate it does not impugn law or medicine. When Christians debate it does not impugn God's kingdom. Let us pray, however, that the debates are scholarly.

Goals

Let us not lose sight of the goals of the task before us. It is not merely to be right; it certainly isn't to become puffed up with a sense of intellectual or doctrinal superiority.

E. Avoid Stratification

First, our goal is one of unity. This unity will be promoted by attacking a brand of theology that seeks to stratify the church between those who do, and do not, have the Spirit and access to these miraculous phenomena. Certainly in some senses the church is stratified. There are elders, deacons, and members. There are people who are more, or less, mature. There are people who are more, or less, knowledgeable, etc.

But what I wish to address is an approach to Christianity that creates tiered levels of Christians, not based on maturity, knowledge, wisdom, etc., but based instead upon those who have, or don't have, the Spirit—or, more specifically, the *baptism of the Holy Spirit*. I intend to show that there is no “second blessing” or subsequent baptism of the Holy Spirit which, according to the General Counsel of the Assemblies of God,

...is an empowering gift from God the Father that is promised to every believer (Matthew 3:11; Luke 11:13; 24:49; Acts 2:33, 38). It helps the Christian to live a holy life and also brings a new devotional attachment to Jesus Christ, making Him very real and precious. The primary purpose of the Baptism is to give greater power for witnessing (Acts 1:8). Other benefits include a greater joy in spiritual service, and a heightened sense of one's mission to the world.³

It is not because I want to hamshackle the Holy Spirit that I denounce this teaching. Holy living, power, joy and devotional attachment to Jesus Christ are certainly good things. I denounce the doctrine because I don't believe it is biblical. I denounce it also because I believe it presents a false view of the uniform, Scriptural expectation of the Christian experience.

Many believers are looking for the e-train of Christian experience. "If I could just find the ticket, I could get out of the streets and alley-ways of life and ride the monorail of victorious Christian living." We are asked if we have made the "wonderful discovery" of the Spirit-filled life. So, like Columbus or Magellan, we need to find this "new land" of Christian experience. And until we find it, we remain woefully on the lower tier of Christian experience. This teaching must be rebuffed.

F. The True Charismatic Life

In addition to avoiding this stratification, I wish to encourage Christians in the genuine, biblical, charismatic life. "Now that I believe in Jesus, what should my life feel like? What

³Assembly of God Web Page—Assemblies of God Beliefs. The General Council of the Assemblies of God.

should I expect? What is the genuine fruit of Christianity? How should I expect the gifts (charisma) to be functioning in my life—in my church?” It is not that I want us to become lackadaisically content.

I suspect most people who fall into charismatic churches do so because they desire to serve the Lord more fervently—or have access to greater power. But I also think it is a shame that so many are seeking to climb a ladder that leads nowhere. There is this false promise that at the top of the ladder is the super-Christian experience. I am going to argue that the normal Christian charismatic⁴ experience is both more difficult and more glorious.

G. Intelligible Christianity

Third, I will address the dangers of supposing the unintelligibility of the Christian faith. This is not to say that His ways are not above our ways. But there are aspects of the charismatic movement—specifically the modern notion of *tongues*—where the intellect is supposedly by-passed. There is a notion that there is this inner-spirit of man connecting with God in a way that is completely separate from the mind or soul. The faith then becomes very mystical and visceral.

I will argue that this, instead of being the leading of the Spirit, is the leading by various impulses (2 Timothy 3:6). The Christian faith is God’s message to the world. He has revealed it (infallibly and authoritatively) through His word—in writing. The writing consists of words, sentences, and paragraphs. There is syntax and structure. It is to be known through study.

I have been told that God is above logic, that seeking to understand logically what can be understood of God is thinking as man thinks. God is not above logic; logic is an expression of the character and nature of God. If I can’t trust that God is logical, how can I trust Him when I read, “whosoever shall call

⁴ The charismata merely means the gifts.

upon the name of the Lord will be saved”? What if I get to the tribunal of God and He says, “That’s not what you thought it meant”? Unintelligible Christianity is no Christianity at all.

H. *Sola Scriptura*

What is equally at stake is the foundational credo of *Sola Scriptura*. For, if God is still operating the way He did during the time of Jesus and the Apostles, then the canon⁵ is still open. The word of God is still (infallibly and authoritatively) being unveiled. Now, God confirmed the authority of His word through the signs and wonders of the people who delivered His word (Acts 14:3; Hebrews 2:3, 4). If the signs and wonders are still operating the same way today as they were during the age of the apostles, then the word is still coming as well. Benjamin B. Warfield writes of the supernatural gifts,

These gifts were not the possession of the primitive Christians as such; for that matter of the Apostolic Church or Apostolic age for themselves; they were distinctively the authentication of the Apostles. They were part of the credentials of the Apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the church. Their function thus confined them to distinctively the Apostolic Church, and they necessarily passed away with it.⁶

It is no wonder that nearly every cult has its prophet and its continuing revelation! This teaching continually pounds the walls of orthodoxy. This is yet one more effort at exposing it for what it is.

⁵ The number of books in the Bible.

⁶ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, (Charles Scribner’s Son, 1918), p. 6.

Method

The following will be the method by which I will approach the subject:

I. The Ultimate Authority

The first thing we must all recognize is that the Bible is the ultimate authority on any subject or any experience. You may have had an experience you've interpreted as the *second blessing* or *speaking in tongues* or *prophecy* or *divine healing* by a divine healer, etc.; but the primary experience of the Christian (in terms of knowledge of God) is the Scriptures. So, if the Scriptures indicate that what you experienced is not, in fact, that biblical phenomenon, then we must all be willing to subordinate whatever subsequent personal experiences we have had to the primary experience of acknowledging the truth of Scripture.

J. Continuation and Cessation

We must also acknowledge that at least *some* of the things that happened in the Bible are not still happening now. Jesus is not still walking around on the earth. There are no Apostles—the requirements for an Apostle (capital 'A') being one who had been with the Apostles the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among them, beginning from John's baptism until the time when Jesus was taken up from them.⁷ An Apostle had to be one who was able to give witness with the other Apostles of Christ's resurrection (Acts 1:21, 22). There were also *signs* of an Apostle, these being the ability to perform signs, wonders, and miracles (2 Corinthians 12:12).

⁷Except for the Apostle Paul who argues as "one being born out of time" (1 Corinthians 15:8).

We also must acknowledge that the canon of Scripture was not complete during the apostolic period. There is a clear precedent for some cessation of the activities we see on the pages of Scripture. The accomplished work of redemption, for example, is not something we should think would continue to extend into history. We don't believe Jesus is always being crucified on a hilltop in Jerusalem or that He is forever ascending to the right hand of the Father. It must be obvious to us all that our observation of what was happening during the time of Christ, in some respects, was historically unusual. The real question then is not *have certain things ceased*, but rather *how do we know what things have ceased?* In order to answer that question we need to find out why these things existed in the first place.

K. Examining Pentecostal Claims

We will also look at some of the claims deployed by the charismatic movement, and whether or not the Scriptures actually support these claims. Since I detest the idea of building and demolishing straw men, I will take the claims directly from the General Council of the Assemblies of God. The Assemblies of God are probably a good source since they are not, generally, extreme in their views. I would also like to examine how the influence of Pentecostalism is found in conservative Protestant churches.

III. Why a Miracle?

Then Moses answered and said, “But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, ‘The Lord has not appeared to you.’” So the Lord said to him, “What *is* that in your hand?” He said, “A rod.” And He said, “Cast it on the ground.” So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. Then the Lord said to Moses, “Reach out your hand and take *it* by the tail” (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), “that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.” Furthermore the Lord said to him, “Now put your hand in your bosom.” And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand *was* leprous, like snow. And He said, “Put your hand in your bosom again.” So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his *other* flesh. “Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign. And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour *it* on the dry *land*. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry *land*” (Exodus 4:1-9).

Why Signs and Wonders?

What is, or was, the purpose for miracles? Jesus would walk through towns, the sick would be laid in the marketplace, and as many as would touch the hem of his garment were healed (Mark 6:54-56). Groups of people were healed by Peter’s shadow (Acts 5:15), and by Paul’s aprons and handkerchiefs (Acts 19:12). Paul had the ability to raise Eutychus from the dead (Acts 20:9), and Peter could supernaturally execute church

discipline on Ananias and Sapphira without a trial or any due process (Acts 5).

How are we to view these miracles? It didn't seem as if the people being healed had any special faith or ability. Some had no faith at all, such as the lame man at the temple (Acts 3) or the blind man in John 9. Some were dead. I have spoken to more than one Christian today whose desire is that their shadow would heal people. Is this a realistic expectation? Is it a realistic expectation that mobs of people should be miraculously healed today the way they were during the time of Christ? It certainly doesn't seem to be taking place, so *what's wrong?*

Some argue that this is happening in Africa or the darkest places in South America. But in the Scriptures we see this happening in the bosom of the church. A common accusation is the lack of faith of the people. That's quite an indictment against the vast majority of Christendom in history—including martyrs who were burned at the stake while their families watched. Is it reasonable that one who is faithful enough to die for his faith wouldn't be faithful enough to exercise the miracles of the first century church? Again, it didn't seem as if great faith was necessary to be involved in the miraculous.

The Goal

It is not my desire to rob people of the hope of being healed of a sickness or delivered from some trial in life. I certainly would not seek to limit the power of God in any respect whatsoever. God is perfectly able to heal and deliver at He sees fit.

But what is at stake is the very foundation of the Christian faith—the apostles and the prophets (Ephesians 2:20)—the word of God. The foundation has been laid by the apostles (1 Corinthians 3:10), and we are not to add to that foundation but rather build on it. The types of miracles we read of in the Bible were unique in that they were not necessarily answers to prayer as much as they were authoritative actions performed by specific

people for a specific purpose. And if we believe those types of faith-healers and miracle workers still operate today in the same manner as the apostle Paul, then we must bow before the message they give as absolute! It is just this type of mystical miracle pursuit we see in Roman Catholicism—the face of Jesus or Mary appearing someplace or a bleeding statue or wine turning to blood, etc. Romanists realize this is necessary for them to claim that the authority of the Pope and church are equal to Scripture. This is no small matter. If there is no agreement as to sole ultimate authority, i.e. the Scriptures, then there is no hope for the church.

Add to this how easily church members can be victimized by modern false apostles. Peace with God is no longer a result of the wonderful promises of Scripture but rather one's own ability to experience sufficient wonders to justify the legitimacy of their faith. How many sad souls, under this spiritual tyranny, have had to face their toil with the increased indictment of faithlessness!

Preview

What I intend to show is: 1) Miracles were designed to confirm the authority of the message of the person performing the sign; 2) these miracles were done (in the New Testament) initially by Jesus; 3) Jesus conferred this power to His apostles to confirm the authority of their message—thus completing the canon of Scripture; 4) false miracles have as their design a false message; 5) the miracles in the New Testament ushered in the turning point of history and should not be the expectation of the uniform and perpetual Christian experience.

A. Confirmation of the Message—Initially by Jesus

What we must realize is that miracles were not done willy-nilly or vagrantly. There was a specific purpose and design for signs and wonders: to confirm the message of the one performing the sign. There is no shortage of passages that

convey this idea. Let us begin to make our biblical argument with a very well-known miracle performed by Jesus:

1. The Paralytic

So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.” And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, “This Man blasphemes!” But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk’? *But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins*”—then He said to the paralytic, “Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” And he arose and departed to his house (Matthew 9:1-7, Italics mine).

Jesus confirmed the authority of His teaching by the power of His actions. Next, observe how Jesus authenticates Himself to John the Baptist.

2. John the Baptist

And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell *John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are*

cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.” (Matthew 11:2-5, Italics mine).

Jesus confirmed His Christ-hood by His supernatural actions; He tells the two disciples to tell John what they saw: miracles. This proved that Jesus was the Christ.

This was obvious to Nicodemus.

3. Nicodemus

This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that *You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him*” (John 3:2 Italics mine).

Nicodemus recognized that the miraculous signs established Jesus as a teacher from God.

Jesus gives explanation for the purpose for miracles.

4. Jesus

But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me (John 5:36).

The supernatural works of Jesus bore witness that the Father sent Him. In the many records of Jesus’ miracles we often miss the reason given for the miracle; for example the feeding of the five thousand.

5. The Five Thousand

Therefore they gathered *them* up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Then those men, *when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world”* (John 6:13, Italics mine).

The sign—the feeding of the five thousand—confirmed Jesus’ office as Prophet. There was a common and legitimate expectation regarding a person with divine authority.

6. What Sign?

Therefore they said to Him, “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?” (John 6:30).

The request assumes that the legitimate Messiah would have the ability to do miraculous things. This is stated multiple times.

7. More Signs

But many of the multitude believed in Him; and they were saying, “When the Christ shall come, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?” (John 7:31 NASB).

Another well-known miracle, the raising of Lazarus, had a specific goal.

8. Lazarus

Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up *His* eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, *but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.*” Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “*Lazarus, come forth!*” *And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go” (John 11:40-44, Italics mine).*

The raising of Lazarus was done in order that those standing by might believe Jesus had come from the Father.

The chief priests understood the threat of a miracle-worker.

9. The Chief Priests and Pharisees

Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, “What shall we do? For this Man *works many signs.* If we let Him alone like this, *everyone will believe in Him,* and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation” (John 11:47, 48, Italics mine).

The chief priests and Pharisees feared that people would believe because of the signs. The signs and wonders of Christ were a two-edged sword.

10. Two-Edged Sword

If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father. But *this happened* that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, '*They hated Me without a cause.*' (John 15:24, 25).

The signs Jesus performed so confirmed His message that they left His detractors with greater accountability. Peter explicitly states the reason for signs and wonders.

11. Attested by God

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know...(Acts 2:22).

Jesus was attested (*to affirm to be genuine*) by God through miracles. But of course Jesus wasn't the only miracle worker. But the reason for the miracles remained the same—to confirm the authority of the messenger.

B. Conferred to the Apostles

The ministry of Christ would continue through His apostles. One might argue that His ministry continues throughout history. This is true. But there is a specific aspect of His ministry that did *not* continue throughout history—the compilation of the books and letters we refer to as the Bible. *Sola Scriptura* is the (epistemological⁸) foundation of the Christian faith. Let us keep in mind Jesus' words to His apostles:

1. The Helper

These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you (John 14:25, 26).

But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning (John 15:26).

The Apostles would be endowed with a Spirit-given knowledge of all the things Jesus said to them. If this weren't such a misused passage I wouldn't find it necessary to point out that no one living today has ever been in the physical and audible presence of Jesus' instruction, nor have we been with Christ from the beginning.

The work of redemption wouldn't be fully accomplished until Christ ascended and sent His Spirit to secure the message of

⁸ Epistemology is the theory of knowledge—how we know what we know.

His victory. Again, we call this message *the Bible*. Along with the apostles' supernatural prophetic knowledge came the supernatural signs to confirm the knowledge. Speaking to the eleven apostles (not all His followers; and not including Judas, who betrayed Him) Jesus promises to confer supernatural power to them—and that for a specific reason—to confirm their message.

2. Confirming the Word

Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. *And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.*” So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. *And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen* (Mark 16:14-20, Italics mine).

Tongues, immunity to serpents and poison, and healing by the laying on of hands were all signs that confirmed the message. In Acts, we see examples of miracles following those who

believe. Again, this would confirm the authority of the apostles as the mouthpieces of Christ.

In the second chapter of Acts we read of the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to the apostles.

3. Signs and Wonders

And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles (Acts 2:40-43).

They continued in the Apostle's doctrine, and signs and wonders are done through the Apostles. Again, we see the signs confirming the doctrine.

4. Boldness to Speak

Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus" (Acts 4:29, 30).

Peter recognized that his own authority and boldness of speech was dependent upon God's confirmation through miraculous signs. His prayer was answered.

5. All Were Healed

And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed (Acts 5:12-16).

No one dared join them—words for the modern faith healer. Of Paul and Barnabas we read:

6. God Bearing Witness (Paul and Barnabas)

Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. Therefore they stayed there a long time, *speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands* (Acts 14:1-3, Italics mine).

The Lord was bearing witness of their authority through signs and wonders. Notice what always goes hand-in-hand in Paul's writings.

7. Signs of an Apostle

For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient—in *mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ* (Romans 15:18, 19, Italics mine).

I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds (2 Corinthians 12:11, 12).

Signs and wonders accompanied the preaching of the gospel! See again how God bears witness of His word.

8. God Bearing Witness

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the *first began to be*

spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? (Hebrews 2:1-4, Italics mine).

God bore witness of what was first spoken by the Lord, then by those who heard Him (Apostles) with signs and wonders.

Signs and wonders, as we read of them in Scripture, had a specific purpose. They confirmed the absolute authoritative message of the miracle worker. For those who believe in *Sola Scriptura*, miracles have served their purpose. The message of God has been sufficiently and *once for all* delivered to the church. The quest for miracles has been more of a burden than a blessing to the church and those who claim access to this power are to be cautioned against.

Again, this is not to say that God cannot or does not supernaturally heal or deliver from toil, or respond to prayer. The distinction we make is the power and authority of the human instrument, i.e. apostle or prophet. When Moses threw his staff down he wasn't praying God would turn it into a serpent. The miracle was absolute as was Moses' word as a prophet of God.

C. False Signs

Since it was common knowledge that the message of Christ would be confirmed through signs and wonders, it follows that those who sought to put forth a false message would seek to confirm their message through lying signs and wonders.

1. False Signs Deceive

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, He is there!’ do not

believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand (Mark 13:21-23).

2. Lying Wonders

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them a strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12).

It is not beyond the realm of a Christian worldview to recognize that supernatural things might be done through evil. In the following passage we see it as a test.

3. God is Testing

If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—‘and let us serve them,’

you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deuteronomy 13:1-4).

Here we read of an apparent miracle. But the table is turned a bit. The legitimacy of the miracle worker is tested by his doctrine. Similarly the Apostle Paul warns the New Testament church at Corinth.

4. What Paul Wrote...

If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:37).

The authority of the Apostles is ultimate. Praise God He has preserved their message on the pages of Scripture!

D. Non-Apostolic Miracles?

We will read of non-apostles doing miraculous things, but what is conspicuously present in these accounts is the laying on of the hands of the Apostles. B.B. Warfield points out:

1. Warfield

...in the entire New Testament we meet with no instance of the gifts showing themselves—after the initial instances of Pentecost and

Cornelius—where an Apostle had not conveyed them.⁹

Of course all the Apostles were at Pentecost, and in Acts 10 we clearly see Peter superintending all that took place with Cornelius and his household. Unless we are to maintain that the Apostle's presence (and laying on of hands) is merely coincidental, rather than causal—and since, as we have earlier established, there are no longer Apostles, it seems that these are not repeatable events.

2. Turning Point in History

The supernatural phenomena we read of in the New Testament were signs of the turning point in history—the coming, and work, of Christ. The new covenant (especially in terms of the revelation of the work of Christ and its international beginnings) was kicked off, as it were, at Pentecost. These were signs of a fulfillment of a promise made by God. This is why Peter (regarding the events of Pentecost) taught,

But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: *'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood,*

⁹ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, (Charles Scribner's Son, 1918), p. 23.

before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. *And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2:16-21).*

The coming of Christ ushered in both deliverance and judgment. The changing of the covenants—the turning point in history—was in the moving from B. C. to A.D. All this would be accompanied by wonders and prophecy. These wonders would start with Jesus. Then we would see them done by the apostles and through the direct contact of the apostles. The modern fascination with miracles and miracle workers has become a blight to the church. Instead of immersing ourselves in the sin-bearing glory of the miracle worker, we ask for a sign. The sign has been given; let us trust in its attending message.

IV. The Second Blessing?

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).

Introduction

Among the signs and wonders which accompanied the coming of Christ (the new covenant) were the abilities to heal the sick by the laying on of hands, raise the dead, speak in foreign tongues, prophecy, etc. Outside of the actual physical presence of Jesus, these events seemed to be unavailable to Christians apart from the special work of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

The assertion among Pentecostals today is that the Holy Spirit will grant believers the same abilities as we read of in the book of Acts in the Bible—hence the name Pentecostals—referring to Pentecost (Acts 2).

A. Accomplished Versus Applied

We now question whether or not this subsequent pouring out of the Holy Spirit (whereby miracles are granted) should be expected as the uniform Christian experience throughout history. Is Pentecost part of the *accomplished work of redemption* (like the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ) and should

thus not be expected to be repeated, or is Pentecost part of the *applied work of redemption* (like the preaching of the gospel or baptism of the Lord's Supper), which extends throughout history?

It will be my argument that Pentecost is part of the *accomplished* work of redemption: It is that aspect of Christ's work where He pours out His Spirit to bring to remembrance, to His apostles, all that He taught (John 14:25). The message, as we learned last time, was confirmed by their ability to perform signs and wonders. When God had determined the message complete, the canon of Scripture was closed and the accomplished work of redemption was, in fact, *accomplished*.

B. Scripture or Sentiment

I will, no doubt, once again be accused of being divisive by attacking a brand of Christianity that is embraced by millions. It is not part of my thesis that these people are not genuine believers. It is, however, part of my thesis that they do not understand the Scriptures correctly. It is part of my thesis that this improper understanding is harmful. I have little doubt that, in time, similar to Roman Catholicism, this form of Christianity will bring these churches and their members to disregard the authoritative uniqueness of the Bible and thus the gospel will be dispensed with—for, as we learned last week, it was these signs and wonders which confirmed the authoritative message of the miracle-workers.

We already live in an age in Protestantism where the Scriptures are being supplanted by human sentiment. The recent Episcopalian decision to ordain a homosexual pastor was accompanied by an Episcopalian representative publicly stating that the Bible is not their sole infallible authority; they have a community of believers filled with the Holy Spirit. On national television the mic was lifted to the mouth of one woman who uttered (in support of the homosexual pastor), "I ask only one question—what would Jesus do?" Clearly the means by which she determines what Jesus would do is not the Scriptures.

C. Stratifying Assertions

All this aside, I intend to show that the Pentecostal view of the second blessing (the Holy Spirit falling upon believers subsequent to their initial faith in Christ) causes an unhealthy and unbiblical stratification in the church. We have millions of Christian on what amounts to be a spiritual wild goose chase. Signs are the rage, and the quest to be miracle workers have supplanted true and persevering faithfulness in Christ. Everybody wants *power-religion* and quite frankly nobody's getting it. "Go out for a pass," says the boy with the football in his hands to his unsuspecting victim, "Further, further, further!" But, alas, the ball is never thrown.

Examining the Stratifying Assertions

Let's take a quick look at some of the assertions of Pentecostalism that, arguably, stratify the church, bringing great insecurity and frustration to its victims. The following are statements taken from the General Council of the Assemblies of God (abbreviated *AOG*).

1. Not Outpouring of the Spirit

AOG...one of the greatest outpourings of the Spirit began early in the 20th century. Several small holiness groups whose members were seeking a fuller experience with God witnessed a renewal of the Holy Spirit's gifts. In their meetings they saw miracles similar to those recorded in the Book of Acts. Those who experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit spoke in tongues, gave prophecies, prayed for the sick with miraculous results, and began a

new surge of missionary ministry that soon reached around the world.¹⁰

If the Pentecostals are correct then I will be the first to say, in all sincerity, we should all repent. But if they are wrong, the church is not merely categorized by denominational distinctions, but becomes stratified between those who have (and those who *don't* have) the outpouring of the Spirit of God Himself. I can view my Baptist brothers as vital contributors to the Great Commission, though I think they err in their view of the sign of the covenant; but how can any Christian, or Christian church, be vital in their contribution to the Great Commission, or any other work of God, without the Spirit?

Notice the emphasis on “experience.” It will be a recurring theme. Those who experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit evidenced it by speaking in tongues, prophecy, and other miracles. This is not merely a disagreement on the interpretation of a passage in Scripture—it is the assertion that there are churches (specifically, professing Christian people) who have access to the mind of God (prophecy) versus those who do not. According to this view, there are people who believe in the risen Savior and seek to obey Him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, yet must view themselves as missing the fuller experience with God.

2. Selective Wind of the Spirit

AOG: Then in the 1960s another wave of revival spread the blessings of Pentecost. Many Lutherans began speaking in tongues and praying for the sick. Many Roman Catholics raised their hands in worship and prayed in the

¹⁰Assembly of God Web Page—Assemblies of God Beliefs. The General Council of the Assemblies of God.

Spirit. Upon Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Brethren, Disciples of Christ -- the wind of the Spirit was blowing across the entire spectrum of the Church.¹¹

The wind of the Spirit was blowing across the entire spectrum of the church—Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, etc. But the wind was obviously missing some Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Baptists, etc. Let us compare this to the biblical account of Pentecost.

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).

This passage teaches that the tongues of fire sat upon *each of them*, and they were *all* filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues. If Pentecost is a model for every age of the church, what are we to make of those Methodists who did not speak in tongues? They must belong to that class of people who were outside of the church and therefore needed to be baptized into the church (Acts 2:37-39) or else they were among the mockers (Acts 2:13).

We see that the stratification becomes even wider. It is not merely a matter of the more powerful Christian versus the less powerful Christian; it is a sign of those *in* the church against those *outside* of the church. To their credit, the Assemblies of

¹¹Ibid.

God do not push their exegesis to its logical conclusion; but some Pentecostals do—if you don't speak in tongues, some say, you're evidencing that you're not saved.

3. Serious Christians

AOG: Today believers from all fellowships who are serious about their faith are looking again at the "promise of the Father." This experience, distinct from and following salvation, brings the believer into the richness of the Spirit-filled life.¹²

The church is now stratified between those who are, and are not, serious about their faith—those who have a richer Spirit-filled life and those who do not. It is not enough to place all your hope in Christ as Savior and all your trust in Him as Lord. There is an experience, distinct from and following salvation, which must be sought. Just what is this experience and how do we determine the legitimacy of it?

4. Warming the Heart

The General Council of the Assemblies of God advises,

AOG: Questions are best answered and controversies settled by allowing the Spirit to warm the heart and draw the soul into intimate fellowship with God.¹³

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

This sounds strangely similar to the Mormon's appeal to the burning of the bosom. Woven into this very pious appeal is a foot-in-the-door sales tactic—as soon as I warm my heart to this notion, it's halfway in. Is it true that the warming of the heart and the drawing of the soul is the best way to answer questions? How warm must the heart be before we can be confident that the answer is correct?

5. Doctrinal Stratification

Even the Assemblies of God Council recognizes this as a flawed method; therefore, their next paragraph reads,

AOG: However, there are misunderstandings concerning the doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit that are hindering many sincere believers from entering into this blessed experience. There are legitimate questions that call for answers. Against the foregoing historical backdrop, let us consider some of these questions and seek for biblical answers.¹⁴

As noble as this statement seems to be, it leaves us with the sense that a grasp of proper doctrine is necessary for the “blessed experience”. Now the church is stratified between those who have strong enough doctrine for the blessed experience and those who don't. But is this in harmony with Scripture? Peter was in the middle of a sermon to the gentiles in Acts 10...

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with

¹⁴ Ibid.

Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured (*perfect passive*) out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God (Acts 10:44-46).

Amazing, is it not, that the doctrinal short-comings of great theologians such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Benjamin B. Warfield, et al, disqualified them from the blessed experience—but all these fledgling gentiles (not to mentioned the aforementioned Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, etc.) had the Holy Spirit poured out on them! Clearly, it is virtually impossible to make the argument that misunderstandings concerning doctrine would hinder the work of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, it is the Holy Spirit, by the word of God, who grants sound doctrine.

6. Stratification Reviewed

In review, we see dramatic stratification. Some believe tongues is the necessary fruit of salvation; this stratification is *Christian versus non-Christian* (this being the logical necessity of Pentecostal exegesis—since all believers at Pentecost, at some level, participated in speaking in tongues).

There is a less dramatic stratification according to the Assemblies of God. This is observed by: 1) those who have the Spirit and therefore a supernatural access to the mind of God (with gifts of prophecy and tongues) versus those who do not; 2) those who are serious about their faith versus those who are not; 3) those who have a warm heart versus those who do not; 4) those who are doctrinally sound enough to receive the blessed experience versus those who do not; and so on.

There is an even less dramatic distinction among those who, though perhaps not claiming to have any sign gifts per se, live under the impression that they have intimate access to God that is either unavailable to, or less efficient in, others. These are people who, aside from the Scriptures and revealed providence,

view their own wisdom and discernment (though these might truly be gifts from God) as direct information from God. It is one thing to be gifted by God with compassion and easily discern a brother in toil; it is quite another thing to interpret that gift as prophetic information from God.

D. Baptism of the Holy Spirit

How are we, therefore to understand the biblical instances of the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

1. A Subsequent Experience

According to The General Council of the Assemblies of God, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is an experience subsequent to salvation. In their question and answer section we read,

AOG: Do Christians receive the Holy Spirit when they are saved? If so, how is this experience different from the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

AOG: Yes, when persons accept Christ, the Holy Spirit begins a great work in their lives. The Spirit convicts them of sin, convinces them of righteousness, and dwells within them (John 6:44; 14:17; Roman 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13). No one becomes a Christian without this gracious work of the Holy Spirit.

AOG: However, there is an additional and distinct ministry of the Holy Spirit called the baptism in the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

According to the Council, this second blessing is something **"all believers are entitled to, should ardently expect, and earnestly seek."**¹⁶

In defense of Pentecostalism there is undeniable, biblical evidence of an experience of the Holy Spirit subsequent to salvation. Passages to support this include,

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17).

And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism." Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

him, that is, on Christ Jesus.” When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all (Acts 19:1-7).

I am not sure where we get the idea that all Christians are entitled to, should ardently expect, and earnestly seek what seemed to supernaturally fall, or come upon them.¹⁷ But setting that aside for now, how are we to understand the record of these ‘second’ experiences in Scripture? What is conspicuously present in both of these accounts is the laying on of the hands of the Apostles. Warfield points out,

Warfield:

...in the entire New Testament we meet with no instance of the gifts showing themselves—after the initial instances of Pentecost and Cornelius—where an Apostle had not conveyed them.¹⁸

As discussed earlier all the Apostles were at Pentecost, and in Acts 10 we clearly see Peter superintending all that took place with Cornelius and his household. Again, unless we are to maintain that the Apostle’s presence (and laying on of hands) is merely coincidental, rather than causal—and since, as we have

¹⁷ All seven accounts of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; Acts 11:16; 1 Corinthians) are *indicative* not *imperative*. This is to say there is no exhortation to be baptized by the Holy Spirit, rather there is an indication of what would, or did happen.

¹⁸ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, (Charles Scribner’s Son, 1918), p. 23.

earlier established, there are no longer Apostles—it seems that these are not repeatable events.

2. Applied Versus Accomplished

How should we understand the pouring out of the Spirit in the early church? First, let us review the distinction between the accomplished work of redemption and the applied work of redemption. The accomplished work of redemption is not to be repeated; the applied work of redemption extends into history

The accomplished work of redemption, for the most part, is easily recognized. It includes the life, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. We should not expect these things to be repeatable events. But there is one more aspect of the accomplished work of redemption. It involves the terminating of the Old Covenant and the establishing of the New Covenant—a single event not to be repeated. It also involves the securing of the message of salvation in the Scriptures with Apostolic authority—a single event not to be repeated. This event (a baptism of revelation) is inextricably attached to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

3. A Baptism of Revelation

In the midst of the gospel of John, Jesus says something that's quite hard to grasp.

a. The Spirit Not Given?

He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*,

**because Jesus was not yet glorified
(John 7:38, 39).**

This can be very confusing. If the Holy Spirit had not yet been given, how were the saints of the Old Testament saved? Certainly they weren't saved by works or pure intestinal fortitude! For that matter, what of the Apostles before Pentecost?

**And they worshiped Him, and
returned to Jerusalem with great
joy, and were continually in the
temple praising and blessing God.
Amen (Luke 24:52, 53).**

Realizing the dangers at the temple for a Christian, this certainly doesn't appear to be the behavior of men devoid of the Spirit of God!

4. Why Had the Spirit Not Been Given?

So we must understand that it was merely in a certain sense that the Holy Spirit had not yet been given. Why hadn't the Holy Spirit been given? He hadn't been given because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:39). The glorification of Jesus would be the penultimate (second to last) accomplished act of redemption (the giving of His Spirit being the ultimate or final act). If the job of the Holy Spirit was to give witness of Christ (at least in the sense of the full expression of Christ in the new covenant), it wouldn't make sense that the Holy Spirit would be given before Christ had completed His redemptive work.

In short, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit would happen after the glorification of Christ. And it would be done after the glorification of Christ to give an accurate record of what Christ had accomplished.

After the washing of the disciple's feet and the last supper and announcement of the betrayer, Jesus taught of the coming of the Holy Spirit:

a. All Things

These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you (John 14:25).

The coming of the Holy Spirit was a matter of revelation. The Holy Spirit would teach them "all" things and bring to the Apostle's remembrance "all" the things Jesus had said to them. Hopefully we're beginning to see that this is not a repeatable event. Certainly we are not going to claim that the extent of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives is this full and infallible! The Apostles would become the authoritative message bearers for Christ. They are therefore referred to as the *foundation of the church* (Ephesians 2:20). Very few Pentecostals will assume this level of responsibility.

Jesus appeared in the midst of the eleven (Luke 24:33) and gave this message regarding the Promise of the Father.

b. The Promise

Then He said to them, "These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me." And He

opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:44-49).

c. From the Beginning

But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning (John 15:26).

Again, the message to the Apostles is revelatory. He would open their understanding to have, arguably, infallible understanding of the Scriptures. Again, a claim very few are willing to make today. Hints that this is not a repeatable event but rather part of the accomplished work of redemption are: 1) they are told to tarry in the city of Jerusalem until the power comes (certainly this isn't a command given to all Christians throughout history); 2) that the witness-bearing is unique to those who had been with Christ from the beginning.

5. Baptism Promise Fulfilled

Having seen all the preparatory remarks for the coming of the Spirit, we now look at the event itself.

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” *He said*, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:1-8).

Examining the opening words of Luke we see, again, specificity in who is being addressed. Jesus had given a commandment through the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, to whom He had presented Himself after His suffering by infallible proofs. He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the Promise of the Father at which time they would receive

power and be His witnesses in Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

This passage is often thought to be applied to the power expected by every Christian as they seek to fulfill the Great Commission. And in one sense I would agree. To the extent that the Christian is presenting a gospel consistent with the Apostles, the power is there. But we make a critical hermeneutical¹⁹ error when we assign to *ourselves* that which was unique to the Apostles. And arguably, at least in some sense, they were actual witnesses to the ends of the earth.

**And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews,
devout men, from every nation under heaven
(Acts 2:5).**

6. A Historically Unique Subsequent Experience

Let us go back to our goal of understanding the subsequent experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. With all this information as our backdrop, we can understand this baptism as part of the accomplished work of redemption—namely, a revelatory aspect of redemption. The accomplished work of Christ would not be much help to His church without their knowing about it—without the Scriptures.

In a very intimate setting the Apostles received the Holy Spirit when Jesus breathed on them (John 20:22). In a more public, and international, setting the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, producing the miraculous ability to proclaim a message in foreign languages (more on this later).

But it did not end there. Continual affirmation of apostolic authority took place as the Apostles went out from Pentecost and laid their hands on others who were not present at Pentecost. The promise was made to the Apostles, the power was

¹⁹ Hermeneutics are the principles of how to interpret the Scriptures.

given to the Apostles, and during the apostolic age there was the subsequent pouring out of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the Apostles' hands. In an undiminished capacity (in terms of signs, wonders, and message), the power and authority of Christ was conferred to His Apostles.

E. Answering Assertions

Let us now seek to answer some of the assertions made by The General Council of the Assemblies of God.

1. Tarrying

AOG: It is quite in order, assuming the presence of proper understanding, to lead a new convert into the baptism in the Holy Spirit. While "tarrying" (waiting on God in prayer) is often necessary for heart preparation and understanding, it is not improper for new believers to move quickly into the fullness of the Spirit.²⁰

There is no indication that "tarrying" in anticipation was anything but being at Jerusalem (Luke 24:49). To suggest it means waiting on God in prayer is a fabrication.

2. Proof of Outpouring?

AOG: Is there proof that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit experienced today is genuinely biblical?

²⁰ Ibid.

AOG: The proof is the same proof that supported the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. On that occasion the apostle Peter stood up and defended the outpouring by showing that it was a fulfillment of Scripture. He began his explanation by saying, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). What we are experiencing in our day is that which was prophesied by Joel and which began to be fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost.

AOG: A comparison of the Book of Acts with what is happening in the modern outpouring of the Spirit reveals striking similarities in pattern and purpose. The impact of the early church, newly equipped by the power of the Holy Spirit, changed the world of that day. Similar changes are being made in human lives today through Spirit-filled servants of God. Christ is preached. Sinners are saved. The sick are healed. The kingdom of God is greatly increased. We can say, with Peter, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel," though we have not yet seen the full extent of the spiritual awakening for which we are praying²¹.

But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall

²¹ Ibid.

dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved' (Acts 2:16-21).

As discussed earlier, the proof offered in Acts was signs and wonders done by the hands of the Apostles. There are very few genuine similarities between what was happening in Acts and what is happening in today's Pentecostal churches when you consider the raising of the dead and establishment of the canon of Scripture. The fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel was a *once-for-all* fulfillment. It is exegetically questionable to extend a singular historically fulfilled prophecy into history. And since Joel's prophecy included revelation, *Sola Scriptura* is lost.

3. A Promise for Every Believer?

AOG: When the believers were assembled in prayer on the Day of Pentecost, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4). Not one was left out. It was not just the apostles who were filled, but all the men and all the women in that company of 120 persons. Then the apostle Peter addressed the onlookers and told them that they should be filled. He said, "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off -- for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39).

As Peter said, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is for every believer in every generation. It is an all-inclusive promise of universal dimension. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is promised to every Christian believer.²²

Where does Peter say that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is for every believer in every generation? If it is indeed promised to every Christian believer (remembering that it is always in the indicative and not in the imperative), why does not every believer have it (at least according to the Pentecostal view of it)?

4. Immediately or Waiting?

AOG: Why are some people baptized in the Spirit immediately, while other seek so long without receiving the experience?

AOG: Just prior to His ascension, Jesus told His disciples, "In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). Some 20 days later they were filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4). Earlier the Lord had said, "I am going to send you what my Father promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). No doubt the disciples obeyed this directive; they remained in Jerusalem and spent much time in prayer. There was a "waiting" for the Spirit to come. However, once the Spirit had fallen there was no further incident of "waiting" or "tarrying." Today there is no longer any reason for waiting, except as "waiting" may relate to

²² Ibid.

the preparation of the heart for the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

AOG: Some believers have received the Baptism almost immediately; others have waited for various periods of time. Why? (1) Because the Holy Spirit is sovereign, He will move and work only as He chooses. (2) Because the Holy Spirit does not impose himself on any believer, some will require a period of waiting before they are prepared to yield themselves fully to His divine control. (3) Because "filling" may involve a process, there are some believers with an authentic baptism in the Spirit which may have been preceded by wonderful and meaningful times of waiting in God's presence. Seekers should realize that any period of "waiting" only brings them closer to the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon their lives.²³

All these answer are foreign to the accounts of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. Granted, He (the Holy Spirit) will move and work as He chooses. But this seems inconsistent with their explanation that the person has not yet fully yielded himself to His divine control. Who has ever done this? That is quite a high standard! Of course the Holy Spirit certainly *did* impose Himself on those who were under the preaching of Peter and Paul.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word (Acts 10:44).

²³ Ibid.

When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:5).

The Council continues,

5. Quicken the Infilling

AOG: When an individual is seeking the baptism in the Holy Spirit, can anything be done to prepare his life or environment that will quicken the infilling?

AOG: The question is often asked: "What can I do to claim the promise of the baptism in the Holy Spirit for my life?" One thing the believer should do is to seek the Baptizer rather than the Baptism. It is Jesus who baptizes believers in the Holy Spirit. Seekers should focus their attention on Him rather than on an experience. There are other steps that, if taken, will assist seekers. (1) Understand that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a gift from God. It should be received with gratitude and giving of thanks to the Giver. It cannot be earned or merited. It can only be accepted with an open and willing heart.

But did we not just learn that the failure to yield oneself fully to His divine control will inhibit the process? Is this not a system of merit?

AOG: (2) Be fully persuaded that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is both biblical and doctrinally correct.

Is not this a bit manipulative? Doctrinal accuracy was *never* a prerequisite for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

AOG: (3) Confess any known sins in your life and resolve to live a righteous life with God's help.

I thought this was what you had to do at *conversion!* Confession of sin and personal righteousness was never a prerequisite for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. When the people were greatly amazed at Peter's power,

Peter saw *it*, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk (Acts 3:12)?

AOG: (4) Begin to worship the Lord with expressions of praise and adoration.

Is this not a *result* of the filling of the Spirit rather than a means to acquire it?

AOG: (5) Express to the Lord, who is the Baptizer, a desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit for His glory.

Never in the Scriptures are we called to do this.

AOG: (6) Yield to any deep "welling up" within your spirit and allow that inner surge to break through in expressions of worship, praise, and adoration in a language unknown to you but meaningful to God.²⁴

This is perhaps the most dangerous aspect of Pentecostalism: the dispensing with rational thought and succumbing to the inner surge. This sounds strangely similar to Paul's warning to Timothy where there will be false teachers taking advantage of those led by various impulses (2 Timothy 3:6).

For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses (2 Timothy 3:6).

Conclusion

The baptism of the Holy Spirit (as seen at Pentecost) was a unique historical event. Its design was to confirm the *once-for-all* message of the gospel and should *not* be sought as the normal Christian experience throughout history. The shoddy exegesis utilized to make this system work should stand as a warning to Christians. Unfortunately we live in a day and age of irrationalism and anti-intellectualism in the church. What we have left to guide us are inner surges and various impulses.

²⁴ Ibid.

Justification by faith, the blood of Christ, the cross of Christ, divine satisfaction (glorious concepts!) have been lost. May we repent of this neglect, and bring the glory of the cross back into His church.

V. Review

Let us do a quick review so as to not lose the big picture.

A. Expectations

First, it is my initial assertion that Christians should not today expect miracles—at least in the way we saw them performed by Jesus or the apostles.

I am not suggesting that God doesn't heal in a response to prayer. But recognize that He may not heal. When Peter, however, was confronted by the lame man at the temple asking for alms, Peter did not pray for his healing and wait for a (possibly negative) response from God. He simply declared, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" and *immediately* the man was healed (Acts 3:1-11). There was no way that man was not going to be healed.

B. A Miracle Defined

A miracle is something supernatural. We are not talking about amazing coincidences or the beauty of childbirth or something wondrous or astonishing. Hodge defines a miracle as something that

...take[s] place in the material world, i.e., in the sphere of observation of the senses...and...are produced or caused by the simple volition of God, without the intervention of any subordinate cause.²⁵

²⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Volume I*, (Eerdman, reprinted 1989), p. 618.

In other words, the podium rises to the ceiling without strings or anything else helping it except the word of God Himself. Walking on water is done without skis, sufficient speed or any flotation device. Water becomes wine without the necessary interval of time or additives. People speak languages they were never taught. People heal others by the mere word of their mouth. People know things without having received the knowledge through ordinary means. And all of this can be observed by anyone with the required senses of observation—whether or not they have any faith in the miracle worker.

C. Confirming the Message

We discussed why there were miracles performed in the Scriptures—they confirmed the authoritative message of the miracle worker. So if we're going to believe in the perpetuity of miracles we also must believe that the canon of Scripture is still open.

D. Cessation/Continuation, Accomplished/Applied

We briefly discussed the principles for cessation—the ceasing of certain types of events or actions we see in Scripture. There is the accomplished work of redemption and the applied work of redemption. Those things that relate to the accomplished work of redemption should not be thought of as normative for the history of the church. These things include the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and pouring out of the Spirit of Christ. The applied work of redemption would include preaching, sacraments, church discipline, non-miraculous gifts, etc.

E. Second Blessing

We are currently addressing the error of believing in the second blessing of the Holy Spirit or subsequent baptism of the

Holy Spirit—which was accompanied by miraculous things. Our argument is that this is to be included in the accomplished work of redemption.

F. Goals

Let us also remember our goals in this study.

1. Unity:

It is a goal of unity that can only come when there is a common source of knowledge and authority. I cannot possibly have unity with someone who is receiving their own secret messages from God to which I have no access.

2. Avoiding Stratification

We have a goal of avoiding the stratification which necessarily follows a view of Christianity that has spiritual and carnal Christians. But worse than it being a fool's errand, it brings an unhealthy and unbiblical stratification to the church that causes great insecurity and frustration to its victims. The levels of stratification, having examined the General Council of the Assemblies of God, were numerous:

Some believe (not the Assemblies of God) that tongues is the necessary fruit of salvation; this stratification is Christian versus non-Christian (this being the logical necessity of Pentecostal exegesis—since all believers at Pentecost, at some level, participated in speaking in tongues).

The less dramatic stratification, according to the Assemblies of God, is observed by: 1) those who have the Spirit and therefore a supernatural access to the mind of God (with gifts of prophecy and tongues) versus those who do not; 2) those who are serious about their faith versus those who are not; 3) those who have a warm heart versus those who do not; 4) those who

are doctrinally sound enough to receive the blessed experience versus those who do not; and so on.

There is an even less dramatic distinction among those who, though perhaps not claiming to have any sign gifts per se, live under the impression that they have intimate access to God that is either unavailable to, or less efficient in, others. These are people who, aside from the Scriptures and revealed providence, view their own wisdom and discernment (though these might be gifts from God) as direct information from God. It is one thing to be gifted by God with compassion and easily discern a brother in toil; it is quite another thing to interpret that gift as prophetic information from God.

3. Unintelligible Faith

We have a goal of avoiding the dangers of unintelligible Christianity. The claim that the mind can be by-passed in our communications with God is a very dangerous pursuit. There is no better way to defeat an enemy than to get them to quit thinking.

4. Sola Scriptura

In short, what's at stake here is *sola scriptura*. Let us not underestimate what a glorious gift God has given us in the Scriptures. In them, and in them alone, we have access to the mind of God. The propositions are clear and authoritative above all authorities. And since *sola scriptura* is at stake, the unhealthy (if not the even malevolent) manipulation of God's people is at stake as well. For God's people find themselves (as in Roman Catholicism) in confusion, and sometimes at odds, with their spiritual leaders who claim apostolic authority.

God rescued His people from this oppression during the Reformation but, like the Israelites, we find ourselves disobediently crying out for a king.

G. Pouring of the Spirit

Currently we are examining whether or not Christians should expect the same subsequent pouring out of the Holy Spirit (whereby which miracles are granted) as the uniform Christian experience throughout history. Is Pentecost part of the accomplished work of redemption (like the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ) not expected to be repeated or is Pentecost part of the applied work of redemption (like the preaching of the gospel or baptism of the Lord's Supper), which extends throughout history?

I've been arguing that Pentecost is part of the accomplished work of redemption. It is that aspect of Christ's work where He pours out His Spirit to bring to remembrance to His apostles all that He taught (John 14:25). The message, as we learned last time, was confirmed by their ability to perform signs and wonders. When God had determined the message complete, the canon of Scripture was closed and the accomplished work of redemption was *accomplished*. The pursuit of this second blessing, therefore (and at very least), is a fool's errand.

1. All Seven Accounts are Indicative, not Imperative

We discussed the biblical instances of the subsequent baptism of the Holy Spirit: how all seven accounts of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; Acts 11:16; 1 Corinthians) are *indicative* not *imperative*. This is to say, there is no exhortation to be baptized by the Holy Spirit, rather there is an indication of what *would*, or *did*, happen. So, seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit (an idea very prominent in Pentecostalism) is foreign to Scripture.

2. Superintended by an Apostle

We learned that the subsequent baptism of the Holy Spirit was always superintended by the Apostles. We learned that the baptism of the Holy Spirit involved the securing of the message of salvation in the Scriptures with Apostolic authority—a single event not to be repeated. This event (a baptism of revelation) is inextricably attached to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

3. Fully Glorified/Fully Revealed

We learned that when Jesus was fully glorified (John 7:38, 39) He would pour out His Spirit to remind the Apostles of all He taught them with infallible accuracy. He would also grant them to perform signs and wonders to confirm the message.

VI. 1 Corinthians 12-14, A Survey

A. Introduction

1. A Survey

We will finish our discussion on modern-day miracles with a look at the flagship chapters utilized by Pentecostals to argue for the continuation of miracles—especially revelatory miracles, e.g. tongues, prophecy, word of knowledge. I have not planned to do an overly detailed study of these three chapters. That is, I don't intend to define every gift mentioned or do word studies on Paul's definition of love, etc. I have a two-fold goal in this portion of our study.

2. The Apostle's Motif

Secondly, I would like us to absorb the Apostle Paul's motif throughout these chapters, i.e. the purpose of and disposition we should have toward gifts and orderliness in the church. It is my prayer that we will be greatly ministered to by Paul's encouragements and admonitions contained on these pages. Paul's exhortations to foster unity are unsurpassed in his metaphorical description of the church as a body. His definition of love and gentle rebuke of exercising gifts apart from love should challenge us all. And his call to orderliness in the church will be very illuminating and undress improper dispositions we have toward approaching God.

3. Cessation or Continuation

Thirdly, I would like to pause and reflect upon certain passages in terms of how they speak to the continuation of sign-

gifts. Since it is not the Apostle's purpose to argue for the continuation or cessation of gifts in these chapters, what we learn regarding the continuation or cessation of miraculous gifts will be by inference or implication.

For example, Paul lists all sorts of gifts, including miraculous gifts, for what appears to be the common use in the church at Corinth. Does this imply that these gifts are available in their totality to churches today? We will learn also that all Christians are baptized in the Holy Spirit. How does this fit with the Pentecostal notion of a subsequence baptism of the Holy Spirit? In short, we will evaluate whether or not these chapters argue more strongly for or against the continuation of sign-gifts.

Without further delay, let us launch into a prayerful and meaningful pursuit of understanding God's word.

B. Dumb Idols

Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1-3).

Paul is about to instruct on spiritual gifts. It is important that the Corinthians are not ignorant (verse 1), then he mentions their past (formerly carried away to dumb idols). He is not merely trying to be insulting here. It is very likely that he mentions this because of their propensity to fall back into that similar practice. Mystical pagans have a habit of becoming mystical Christians.

God calls us to be mature in our understanding (1 Corinthians 14:20). Perhaps the improper use of spiritual gifts had so run amuck in Corinth that those claiming these spiritual

gifts were actually calling Jesus accursed; a caution to us all regarding the general acceptance of those claiming Christian leadership. Paul's desire is to protect the church from its own various impulses.

That this church is receiving a letter from Paul is one of the first arguments for the cessation of sign-gifts. If a twenty-first century church were to run amuck (as some have) with the improper use of sign-gifts (or any error), they should not expect to get a letter from an apostle. Continuous Pauline epistles are not normative for the applied work of redemption. If you disagree with me, you must make your argument from the canon of Scripture. You can't write a letter to the apostle Paul and stick him on me.

It would be short-sighted here to think that Paul is addressing mere verbalization—certainly Satan can mouth “Jesus is Lord”. Jesus makes this point quite clear when He says,

These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me (Matthew 15:8).

Paul's initial point is the control and power of the Holy Spirit over the theology and faith of men. Implicit in “no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit,” is that no one can *believe* in Jesus as Lord except by the Holy Spirit. This passage, and hundreds like it, obliterate the notion that belief, or faith, originates in man. God is to be praised for the very faith by which man is saved.

C. Unity and Mutual Edification

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all

in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

1. Differential Distribution

I will not, at this point, discuss all the details of these gifts listed above. We stipulate that in the first century church all gifts were in use; it's a given. Paul is emphasizing what we might call the differential distribution of gifts by the Spirit. He has, at least, two reasons for making this point.

2. One Source

Secondly, Paul is emphasizing unity—“**Same Lord, Same God, Same Spirit**”. He will pursue this more fully in the words to follow. Here he teaches that gifts, though diverse, flow from one source: the Spirit of God.

3. Profit of All

Thirdly, Paul gives the reason for the manifestation or gift. The manifestation “**is given to each for the profit of all**” (verse 7). This must be highlighted in our minds. The mutual edification of the church is the purpose of spiritual gifts. This

will run head on with the proposition of the gift of a private prayer language, but more on that later.

D. All Had Been Spirit-Baptized

1. One Body

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many (1 Corinthians 12:12-14).

Paul now begins his “body” illustration, but not until he makes a critical point—that by one Spirit all the members of the church have been baptized into one body. To suggest that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a subsequent experience is to tear Paul’s unity argument asunder. There is no notion allowed in Paul’s argument that some had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and others hadn’t. The glue for Paul’s argument is the assertion that **“by one Spirit (they) were all baptized into one body”**. And, as verse thirty will indicate, not all spoke in tongues; but more on that later.

2. A Baptized Body

It would be best to understand the baptism of the Holy Spirit as something poured out on the church as an organism—a body. And when we, by the grace of God, become part of that organism we are made to drink into that one Spirit. So it is not *me* on an island (or tarrying in prayer), waiting to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. When God grants me faith and I am brought into

the church of Christ—the body of Christ—I become part of a baptized body.

This may be illustrated by thinking of people in a pool (the church) and others outside the pool (the unconverted). The pool is the baptized organism. The people outside the pool don't make their own pools or seek to splash water on themselves. When, by the grace of God, they enter the pool, they enter a baptized body and enjoy all its graces.

E. All Have, and Should Exercise, Gifts

If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body *were* an eye, where *would be* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *would be* the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they *were* all one member, where *would* the body *be*? But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty, but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer

with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it* (1 Corinthians 12:15-26).

1. Not Availing Ourselves

Paul now fully expresses the “body” illustration. Again, let us not miss these ministering words of Paul. We are all part of one body and we are in need of one another. Church members who live their lives detached from the body are remiss in two ways: They are not availing themselves of God’s provision for themselves, and they are failing to aid those in need.

2. Not Providing a Gift

They are a finger, as it were, detached from the hand, arm and body and therefore extremely limited regarding any genuine profitable contribution to God’s kingdom. In addition to this, they are the missing finger in God’s church which leaves a deed undone. The body and the finger both suffer (verse 26). We should be so attached to the local church that its suffering is ours and vice-versa. If such is not the case with you, you are overly disenfranchised.

3. Not an Exhaustive List

I might point out that since the lists of gifts vary in letters to different churches these lists are not meant to be exhaustive. Hence I don’t think it is even necessary to classify your gift, which is so popular today. The fact is, you have something to offer God’s people and should have your eyes, ears and heart open to being a participating member in Christ’s local church. This may be formal or descript, such as a deacon, elder, worship leader, Sunday school teacher, etc. or it may be very informal or

in-descript, such the offering of kind words, prayer, inviting someone to dinner, helping when a need arises and so on.

4. Body Benefits/Suffers

If too much time goes by and you find that you have contributed nothing and have received nothing from your church, look first to whether or not you have estranged yourself from the body of Christ.

5. Prestige

Paul also makes the point that those with the (seemingly) more impressive gifts should not belittle those with the (seemingly) less impressive ones, or vice-versa. Suffering and honor should be viewed as belonging to the entire body. An overly-developed sense of self-honor or prestige has always plagued Christ's church.

6. No Sub-Section

How does this passage address the topic at hand (sign gifts)? It must be stated that even when the sign (or miraculous) gifts were clearly present in the church there was no indication of a sub-section of *unbaptized-by-the-Spirit* Christians. What part of the body would they be? At very best, they would be a paralyzed limb. Paul's description allows for no such thinking.

F. Not All Speak in Tongues and There Are No More Apostles

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets,

third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:27-31).

Though we are part of a body, we do maintain our individuality (verse 1). Paul then lists some gifts of a more spectacular nature, his point being that even during the apostolic era not everyone had, nor should they expect to have, these gifts. The implied answers to these rhetorical questions are “no”. This is to say that not all Spirit-baptized Christians (verse 13) spoke in tongues (verse 30). There is a stark contrast between Paul’s teaching and the articles of faith taught by the General Council of the Assemblies of God which states,

- 1. AOG: Tongues is the same evidence today when believers are baptized in the Spirit. *All believers, when they are baptized in the Spirit, will speak in tongues.***
- 2. AOG: There are those who give testimony to a dynamic and life-changing encounter with the Holy Spirit who have never spoken in tongues. Nevertheless it cannot be said that they are filled with the Spirit in the New Testament sense of the term. There is an essential link between that experience and speaking in other tongues....**

3. Apostles?

Yet another argument for cessation comes when we notice that Paul has *apostles* on his list (verse 28). Unless we are going to reduce the term apostle to the level of comparative meaninglessness, we must understand it in its unique sense²⁶. Paul opens every epistle (with the exception of 1 & 2 Thessalonians) by announcing his God-given office of apostle. It is his declaration of this office that demands the recipients of the letters respect his writings as the word of God. Unless we are going to argue for the continuation of this office (an argument very few are willing to even attempt) we must acknowledge a precedent for cessation.

Though we will stop here, it is readily apparent that this entire chapter is preparatory for chapter thirteen, the “love chapter”—the “**more excellent way**”.

G. Review

1. A Doctrinal Error

Before we pursue chapter thirteen, let us recognize that a misunderstanding and improper use of spiritual gifts, as with all doctrines that go astray, impugn the character of God. God is the one who grants faith (1 Corinthians 12:3); true saving faith produces unity and mutual edification (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

²⁶ Meeting the requirements pronounced by Peter when Judas was replaced by Matthias: “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection (Acts 1:21, 22).

2. A Baptized Body

Unity and mutual edification flows from a baptized church which is the very body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13, 14), a body of which we are all integral members (1 Corinthians 12:15-26).

3. Already Accomplished

If we, as Christ's body, are to suitably extol our Creator and Redeemer, we must seek to properly acknowledge what He has already accomplished in our lives (He has baptized us by/in His Spirit, and granted with that baptism all its attending graces and gifts). We must also appropriate that which He has provided (i.e., operate as a gifted member). This brings benefit to God's people and glory to His Name. This will be more fully pursued in the next chapter.

H. A More Excellent Way

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

1. Introduction-Presentation

It has been said that presentation is everything. In a fancy restaurant they don't merely pour the chocolate sauce on the dessert, they zigzag it on. While it may not be true that

presentation *actually is* everything (if the chef accidentally uses salt instead of sugar, the beauty of the presentation will be short-lived), it certainly is *something*. Dismissing the message because of the messenger is something people tend to do with great ease. If your speech is gruff or coarse people will generally have little interest in what you might have to say.

I remember gravitating toward those who gave me winsome smiles and could convey the genuine impression that they truly cared for me. Over the years I have grown to have a bit of distrust and even disdain for those who have mastered the art of the compassionate veneer. Not that there is anything necessarily foul about a charitable facade, but it is so often displayed at the expense of true content. When it comes to matters of faith I've come to appreciate prophets over pals.

Nonetheless, both content and presentation have their place in Christian fellowship. Paul exhorts us, not merely to speak, but to speak *the truth in love* (Ephesians 4:15).

Often quoted at weddings, this “love” chapter actually has, as its context, the proper use of spiritual gifts. This chapter has little to say regarding continuation or cessation of the supernatural gifts (our larger topic), but we would be remiss in our study of these gifts if we omitted the chapter designed to govern our disposition in the use of them.

The apostle Paul began his discussion of spiritual gifts in chapter twelve of First Corinthians. He ended that chapter promising to show us a “more excellent way.” It is a more excellent way for Christians to interact, edify, challenge and nurture one another. And because the body of Christ more properly functions when this excellence is pursued, God is more properly glorified.

This more excellent way is not actually a gift per se, but a virtue that is to be present in the exercise of all gifts. The more excellent way is, of course, love. Does anybody mind if we speak of love for a bit? It is quite startling it is how high this virtue ranks.

2. If I Have Not Love

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Christians are to exercise the gifts given to them by God in a loving manner. So what does it mean to love? Do I get to define it myself? Some pit love against truth. They say, “Give me love and the truth will come.” After all, love, as we shall see, is greater than faith and hope! Would you rather live in a church, home or nation full of love or full of truth? Most people would say ‘love’—dangerous answer.

So far from being mutually exclusive, love and truth are interdependent. In other words, without truth, love becomes indiscernible and is generally reduced to passion. It is not uncommon for the concept of love to be thrown around by those who desire sexual promiscuity. Is that true love? Apart from knowing the truth about love how can we question this?

True love flows from genuine, biblical truth. Since the presentation of the true gospel is the power of salvation (Romans 1:16) we can conclude that truth doesn’t merely define love, it is the means by which true love is produced. An undefined false love produces mere chaos and licentiousness. The apostle Paul, realizing this, puts forth his doctrine (truth) of love.

3. Love Is...

Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

It would be overly ambitious at this point to pursue an exhaustive study of love. The nuts and bolts of loving God and loving our neighbor are found in summary in the Ten Commandments²⁷; what we have before us is the lubricant. Love most assuredly consists of outward duties, but it also has an inward temperament.

There will be a repetitive theme of love's *patience*—it “suffers long”. It's defined by Vine's as “a quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish; it is the opposite of anger, and is associated with mercy.”²⁸ James puts it nicely:

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God (James 1:19, 20).

I personally have a forty-eight hour rule. If I find myself offended I (if possible) give it two days (a time when I pray, calm

²⁷ This is not to say that the Ten Commandments do not include the inward temperament. But the inward temperament seems to be Paul's main emphasis.

²⁸ Vine, W. 1981; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *Vine's Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words*. Revell: Old Tappan NJ

down and seek counsel) before responding. Some may need only a few minutes, others weeks.

Love is not passionately reactionary, but rather it is *kind*. That is to say that genuine love should have a *mildness* to it. This, of course, naturally flows from patience or long-suffering.

Love does not *envy*. Joseph's brothers envied his father's love for him, leading them into great evil (Acts 7:9). A lack of godly contentment inhibits true love. When our friends have good fortune, we should rejoice with them and resist becoming bitter because we feel short-changed.

Love does not *parade itself* or put itself forward or vaunt its works. In other words, a person who is acting in true love doesn't put a shingle on his forehead announcing his great love. It's not a show. This becomes especially difficult when you've been making the silent effort of loving and are accused of neglect. Don't be tempted to hang the shingle. If you don't resist this temptation you will violate the next law of love, which is to avoid being *puffed up* or arrogant. In modern terms, avoid being full of yourself.

Love does *not behave rudely*, shamefully or unbecomingly. A loving person is circumspect. He is aware of his surroundings and considers those surroundings in his speech and manners. There was a woman who used to openly criticize her spouse in public venues. Her criticisms may or may not have been valid, but her lack of propriety was rude and not an act of love toward her husband.

Love does *not seek its own*. In other words, genuine love is not searching for reciprocation. The reason we fail in every aspect of love leading up to this (patience, envy, parading oneself, being puffed up, and rudeness) is because we have a secret agenda of reception. And when due time has gone by and our ship has not come in, our paltry love is revealed for what it is.

It is this type of false love that is *easily provoked*. If I am not concerned with what I get in return, I am not tempted to rage when it doesn't come. It is also this type of false love that *thinks evil*. The New American Standard translates this, "does not take

into account a wrong *suffered*” and cleverly rendered by one theologian “it meditateth no mischief.” In other words, true love does not keep a ledger for retaliation. As the man said, “When my wife gets mad she doesn’t get hysterical, she gets historical.”

True love does *not rejoice in iniquity*. I should not be happy when I find my suspicions about my acquaintances were true and indeed they were evil. We are to lament at evil and rejoice when truth prevails.

What does it mean that love *bears, believes, hopes and endures all things*? Does this mean love is not wise? That it does not discriminate? Certainly not! That *love bears all things* mirrors that long-suffering of which we already spoke; that love *believes all things* does not mean love believes contradictions, but that love is not overly suspicious. Calvin wrote,

...that a Christian man will reckon it better to be imposed upon by his own kindness and easy temper, than to wrong his brother by an unfriendly suspicion.²⁹

To *hope all things* is the kind of love that recognizes God’s power to change lives and grant repentance. Matthew Henry explains,

And when, in spite of inclination, it cannot believe well of others, it will yet hope well, and continue to hope as long as there is any ground for it.³⁰

²⁹Calvin, J. 1998. *Calvin's Commentaries: 1 Corinthians* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries (1 Co 13:7). Ages Software: Albany, OR

³⁰Henry, M. 1996, c1991. *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* (1 Co 13:4). Hendrickson: Peabody

And yet a third time Paul puts forth the notion of patience. True *love endures*. It is this emphasis which leads into Paul's next point.

4. Love Never Fails

Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love (1 Corinthians 13:8-13).

There is some debate as to what Paul means by “when that which is perfect has come.” It very likely refers to the Second Coming. There is no strength in using this passage as an argument for the cessation or continuation of gifts so I will not pursue that here. Paul's point is the transitory³¹ and inferior nature of gifts compared to faith, hope and love.

There appears to be an accusation in the tone of Paul's writing that they are treating their gifts like children. It is truly awkward and sometimes disheartening when we buy a nice gift for our children only to find them arguing about who gets to play in the box. Paul's point seems to be that they are viewing the

³¹ This also refutes that notion that the immutability of God requires the immutability of gifts.

gifts as an end in themselves and that these wonderful gifts they prize so highly will one day evaporate. It is a childish endeavor to exercise the gifts of God in such a way as to forget the love of God.

Faith is the knowledge of God and His divine will. Hope is the perseverance in that faith. These both, of course, will no longer be necessary in glory. Love, however, is eternal. A loving use of gifts facilitates faith, hope and love as well. Let us prayerfully consider whether or not this is the actual case in our lives.

And it we may oil the gears of our love even further to ponder the words of Jesus,

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another (John 13:34).

I was doing a radio broadcast on the five points of Calvinism³² when a caller sought to gently chastise me. “When are we going to quit discussing ‘isms’ and talk about love?” I could almost here the grumblings of the entire radio audience give their hearty *amen!* But is it not obvious that we cannot begin to know how to love others until we begin to understand how Christ loves us? We need to know what (and Who) we are imitating.

A love which has the imitation of Christ at its heart will truly be an enduring love—a true love—a more excellent way.

³² That man is totally depraved, dead in his sins, and can offer nothing to God, not even his own faith; that God’s love and election for us was without condition—He doesn’t love or choose us because of some quality or attribute He saw in us; that the atoning work of Christ on the cross was effective to save those who were the objects of God’s love and election; that the love of God, by His Spirit, would irresistibly overcome our rebellion; and that God’s love is so enduring that His true children would persevere in this grace unto glory.

I. Order in the Church

1. Introduction

We will finish up our ‘How Come I Never See a Miracle’ section by studying 1 Corinthians 14. It seems that Paul’s primary goal in this chapter was that there be order in the church—especially as it related to supernatural, revelatory/prophetic gifts. This is the flagship chapter used by Pentecostals to argue for the continuation of miraculous sign-gifts. Since it is not Paul’s goal to argue for the cessation or continuation of miraculous gifts, in this chapter what we learn will be by inference or implication.

We will find that much of what is happening in the church today *a la* sign gifts is in violation of this chapter. We will also find that the very nature of the chapter will militate *against* the continuation of sign-gifts since sign-gifts were a sign of a historically unique event that has already taken place—the transfer of the kingdom from the nation of Israel to the church (Matthew 21:43).

There is one other major issue we should keep in mind as we study the details of this chapter—that tongues, prophecy, word of knowledge were ‘word’ gifts which revealed the mind of God. If we believe in the continuation of these gifts we, of necessity, do not believe the Bible to be the sole, infallible and authoritative message of God to mankind. This is an inescapable dilemma for those who believe in continuation but proclaim *sola scriptura*.

Preview

When portions of the chapter address the continuation or cessation of sign-gifts, we will address them. In the meantime we will prayerfully seek to observe and apply the clear instruction of the text.

The following are topics addressed in verses 1-19 of this chapter: 1) true spirituality requires understanding. No less than seven times in this chapter Paul will harp on the necessity of understanding. Any worldview or form of religion that seeks to dump the mind is to be avoided. 2) The notion of a private prayer language? 3) Tongues and interpretation? 4) Praying in the Spirit versus praying with understanding? 5) How God is to be approached in worship.

2. Prophecy is Superior—True Spirituality Requires Understanding

Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy. For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands *him*; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies *is* greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification (1 Corinthians 14:1-5).

a. The Mind of God

Common in many religions (including large portions of Christianity) is the pursuit of a relationship with God based upon mysticism, passions, sentiment and various forms of anti-rationalism. It is proposed that God is so big that He cannot be known the way we know other things. We, therefore, seek to engage in communion with God in a manner completely foreign to all other relationships.

It is a mistake, however, to think that since God is incomprehensible in a quantitative sense (for example, He has infinite knowledge) that He must be incomprehensible in a qualitative sense (His knowledge is of a different kind). I may not know everything about baseball (quantitative), but that doesn't mean I don't know *anything* about baseball (qualitative). The umpire may know all the rules, but everyone in the stands knows a home run when they see it. Passions and sentiment may have their place—but, as we shall soon see, they must play second fiddle to proper understanding.

With a brief reminder of chapter thirteen (pursue love—verse 1) Paul continues his instruction regarding spiritual gifts. At the top of the list is prophecy. There is nothing more important to the church (and to mankind) than to know the mind of God—prophecy. Through prophecy God graciously unveils His Fatherliness, His holiness, His righteousness, His mercy, etc. When we know these things we know the mind of God and we know He is worthy of all glory and honor and praise. Knowledge of these things also edifies, exhorts and comforts His children (verse 3).

As Christians we can grow frustrated when we see the world's lack of understanding (a lack of understanding which flows from rebellion—Romans 1:21; Ephesians 4:18) the mind of God resulting in things like abortion, homosexuality, pornography, etc. Dispensing with the mind of God regarding these issues has proven to be devastating.

Paul's initial point is that prophecy is superior to tongues. Why is prophecy superior? *Because it can be understood*. Paul will continually emphasize the value of *understanding*. He will also expose the folly of thinking there is any value in engaging in so-called spiritual exercises that by-pass the human mind.

b. Tongues Defined

Before us are the most detailed instructions regarding tongues found in the Bible. A couple of points bear mentioning.

Tongues, in terms of what they actually were, are only defined one place in Scripture. At Pentecost the gift of tongues was the supernatural ability to speak a foreign language. There is no good reason to think it is anything but that in this passage we are discussing. Paul never says, “Now concerning the special or different or unique gift of tongues...”

Paul is not denouncing the use of tongues for the first century church, but clearly places prophecy as a greater gift—unless the tongue is interpreted—indicating that tongues is uninterpreted prophecy. We will learn that if tongues (even when it was still extant) are not interpreted, they are useless.

c. Private Prayer Language?

Some use this passage as an argument for yet another kind of tongue—the private prayer language. This is inconsistent with what we have already learned—that gifts are for the mutual edification of the body (1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:12). The Apostle Paul is known to use sarcasm as an instructive tool—especially with the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:10). I believe he is doing that here. I don’t believe Paul is condoning some private prayer language, but is rather ridiculing those aiming for personal exaltation and using God’s gift for themselves rather than for others, which is its expressed design. John Calvin states,

But whatever is done in the Church, ought to be for the common benefit. Away, then, with that misdirected ambition, which gives occasion for the advantage of the people generally being hindered! Besides, Paul speaks by way of concession: for when ambition makes use of such empty vauntings, there is inwardly no desire of doing good; but Paul does, in effect, order away from the common society of

believers those men of mere show, who look only to themselves.³³

When Paul speaks of mysteries and then says, **“He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself,”** he is speaking by way of chastisement. He is not giving the prescription for some new sub or supra-intellectual form of prayer. Nor, I would argue, is he actually encouraging tongue-speakers to go speak in tongues at home or privately. Suppose someone was improperly utilizing the gift of hospitality and Paul said, “Go home and be hospitable to yourself”, the sarcasm would be much more easily seen. Insert other gifts such as exhorting, showing mercy, etc. and you come up with the same result.

When I was about seven years old I, apparently, kept asking my dad for money. One day, in order to teach me a lesson, he handed me a \$10 bill (a lot of money in those days) and said, “Go ahead, spend it.” He hoped that I would get the picture, be shamed and hand him back the cash. I didn’t. I spent it all! Again, we are to quit thinking like children.

3. An Uncertain Sound

But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle (1 Corinthians 14:6-8)?

³³ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XX* (Baker Book House, reprint 1993), p. 436.

If there was ever an argument against the modern view of tongues (that being incoherent gibberish³⁴) it is found in these words. Paul's point is that if you can't understand what is being said, it is of no profit. The bugler must play a discernable tune in order for the troops to have direction. Even when the gift of tongues existed they were without profit unless there was something revealed, known, prophesied or taught.

4. Speaking Into the Air

So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance. Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks *will be* a foreigner to me. Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual *gifts*, *let it be* for the edification of the church *that* you seek to excel (1 Corinthians 14:9-12).

This exhortation of Paul is not merely understandable but easy to understand: If people don't understand what you're saying you are speaking into the air and your words have no value.

There is no language that is without significance (verse 10). Arguably, the ability to discern the meaning of uttered sounds is what makes it a language. In this chapter, Paul seems to be addressing what amounted to be mass confusion generated

³⁴ The more scholarly Pentecostals believe that gibberish is proper (where we would hold that tongues is not gibberish but a foreign language) but that it must be interpreted along Paul's guidelines given in this chapter.

by Christians improperly speaking, not gibberish, but numerous discernible languages at the same time.

a. Pandemonium at Church

So what was actually going on at the church of Corinth with its tongue-speakers and interpreters? It is not uncommon today to see preaching in a church communicated to the deaf through someone up front doing sign-language. Since it is silent it is not very distracting.

Corinth was a multi-cultural port where many languages were spoken. At the church in Corinth there might have been a dozen members with the gift of tongues speaking the various languages all at the same time. If such was the case, there would have been others with the gift of interpretation seeking to interpret whatever languages were being spoken into the language of their particular audience seated in various places in the congregation. This would result in pandemonium.

Paul's instruction would be to limit the number of tongues-speakers and -interpreters to facilitate order. So you might have three people speaking in tongues to a congregation that had six different languages represented. Then you might have three interpreters translating the tongues for the benefit of all. For example (using language we're familiar with), the three tongue-speakers might be speaking Greek, French and Spanish. But the congregation also had people who only spoke German, Italian and English. The interpreters would interpret the Greek into German, the French into Italian and the Spanish into English. Then everyone would understand (which was Paul's major concern).

We see again in verse twelve that gifts are for the edification of the church. God grants gifts to be used for the benefit of others. When little children go to a birthday party and mom gives them a gift to give to their friend, it is a difficult lesson for them to learn that the gift is not for them. The

headlong pursuit of using gifts for oneself rather than for others is the childish notion Paul is seeking to correct.

5. Praying in the Spirit? How Can I Say “Amen”?

Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is *the conclusion* then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified (1 Corinthians 14:13-17).

a. Two Kinds of Prayer?

Is Paul making an argument for two kinds of prayer—with the spirit and with the understanding? Not at all! He is asserting just the opposite.

In the present passage the person who is praying (likely public prayer) in the spirit is exercising the supernatural gift of tongues (verse 14). If he is Greek and is speaking Spanish, he may not even understand what he is saying and it is, therefore, unfruitful to him (verse 14). He should, therefore, pray that he may interpret so he can pray with his understanding also. Paul is not arguing for two kinds of praying here. He is pointing out the incomplete nature of seeking to utilize a spiritual gift (whether prayer, singing, instruction, etc.) apart from understanding.

You may walk into a religious service that appears to be very Christian. But Paul’s point here is that if you can’t

understand what is being said, you cannot give a genuine “Amen”. For all you know you may have walked into a cult.

6. Five Against Ten Thousand

I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue (1 Corinthians 14:18, 19).

Paul now drives the point home. He is not forbidding speaking in tongues (at least not for this first century church). He speaks in tongues himself (no doubt submitting himself to the same guidelines he lays down for others)³⁵. But, again, if there is no understanding it is worthless. When Paul says he would rather speak five words with understanding versus ten thousand words in a tongue, he is not saying tongues are 1/2000 as valuable as words of understanding. He is saying that words you can't understand have no value at all. The spirit of Paul's instruction should inform all who seek to speak in gibberish in any age of the church.

An old '60s love song said, “We tried to talk it over but the words got in the way.” This is how tongues are viewed by many in the church today. God gave us tongues, it is postulated, because of our limitations of intellect, vocabulary or the ability to express concerns and feelings. There is no biblical warrant for holding that view. There are times when I can't think of the next line to write in a sermon. Occasionally I will just pound the keys...ajklsdaljk;kldfjas (like that). It feels good. It may be psychologically purging. But there is nothing spiritual about it.

³⁵ Some argue that Paul is referring to his own use of a private prayer language here. As if he were saying “I pray my private prayer language at home but at church I would rather teach.” But home and church aren't the only options. Paul may have spoken in tongues evangelistically in his missionary journeys.

Paul's entire point is that a lack of understanding renders tongues useless. You will be speaking into the air.

7. Government and Liturgy

It has been said that,

a. Church government is the best security for Christian liberty.³⁶

Many Christians today would scoff at such a proposition. Government is cold, rigid and bureaucratic; it is unwieldy and inflexible in its administration. This is unlike our relationship with God, which is alive and fluid—unhindered by boards and councils.

But it is the church government (hopefully, with Scriptures in hand) that determines the liturgies and doctrines of the church. And as un-tethered as we all fantasize ourselves being from the influence of men—even godly men—things we understand to be the truth about God are primarily influenced, not by our personal Bible reading, but by those who have ascended to levels of theological influence.

This can easily be seen by the vast numbers of today's media-driven Christians who hold views they believe to be biblical but lack warranted scriptural precedent, e.g. asking Jesus into your heart, baptism as a sign of my decision to believe in Jesus, the law is not for today's Christian, it is God's plan that the world must get worse, it is God's will that everyone be healed, and on and on. My inspiration for this current series was the recognition that most of what I was taught, and believed, as a young Christian was incorrect.

³⁶Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. 1997. *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (1 Co 14:40). Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA

The majority of these types of errors in Christendom are doctrines people believe to be truly scriptural. They believe this because those in authority in the church have presented these notions as if they were clear teachings in the Bible. And since it is the very nature of error (especially misrepresentations about God) to cause turmoil and bondage, the above quote proves quite true.

The Apostle Paul is addressing a church that had lost control of itself. Things were hopping down at the Christian center in Corinth. God was alive and at work. They inventoried themselves as very spiritual, but Paul's letter was designed to illumine them that they were missing the mark. Spontaneity and hoopla do not equal spirituality, even in true churches where the true Spirit of God is truly operating. Things must be done decently and in order. What's at stake here is not merely my Sunday morning experience but my entire view of God, His world and my place in it.

8. The Power of God's Word in the Church

Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature. In the law it is written: "*With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,*" says the Lord. Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those who are* uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his

heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you (1 Corinthians 14:20-25).

a. An Immature Church

Once again Paul condescendingly rebukes the church at Corinth. Numerous were their errors: unnecessary factions (chapters 1-3), unchecked gross immorality in the church (chapter 5), frivolous lawsuits (chapter 6), marital problems (chapter 7), insensitively eating food sacrificed to idols (chapters 8, 10), stinginess in giving (chapter 9), abusing the Lord's Supper (chapter 11), and finally the issue before us—the improper and infantile brandishing of the Spiritual gifts.

Paul exhorts them to be mature in their understanding but childlike regarding malice—they were just the opposite. Mature Christian knowledge was expendable and as a result the church was descending to the Lord of the Flies (governed by malevolent children). And such will always be the case when the church is committed to ignorance.

b. Tongues-A Sign

Light is shined on the reason for tongues—a light all but ignored by many popular expositors and Pentecostals. **“With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people...”** is a quote from Isaiah 28. It is a passage where God is declaring His judgment upon Israel by a foreign nation. They would not heed God's call to repent and, therefore, would hear from God by way of alien oppressors.

Tongues were a sign, a sign of impending judgment not for the believer but the unbeliever—not for the one who would willingly repent but for the one who bulled his neck against God's goodness. In the same way the parables hid the kingdom of God from the hardened hearts of apostate Israel, tongues hid the gospel from apostate Israel. We see this foretold in the initial

sermons of John the Baptist and also with the statement made by Simeon regarding Jesus:

Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34).

There is little doubt that many Jews came to faith as a result of this prophetic sign, but others fell. The destruction of the temple and the siege of Jerusalem by Rome in A.D. 70 were utterly devastating to Jews who had rejected Christ (Matthew 24). Paul is reminding them of one of the dramatic purposes for tongues. Sobering it should have been for them to recognize their gift was a sign of judgment.

And it is strained exegesis to argue that practicing the sign of judgment (a judgment that already happened) should be the normal observation throughout the history of the church. In other words, if tongues were a sign of the judgment of Israel, and Israel was in fact judged, there is no longer any need for the sign. Signs point to things. And the thing to which tongues pointed has already taken place. In short, tongues was a sign that B.C. was about to end and A.D. was about to begin.

Paul’s point in the passage above is that the confusion of not understanding tongues is for the hardened unbeliever and that understanding is for the believer (or potential convert), hence the superiority of prophecy (or interpreted tongues). If a person, by the grace of God, enters the church, they should be able to understand what is being said. The uninformed hearing the very word of God (see Hebrews 4:12) becomes convinced, convicted and falls on his face before God. He will also be able to give a report that God is truly in that place. Paul never strays too far from the power of the propositions of God.

9. Edifying Words

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret (1 Corinthians 14:26, 27).*

Since we already discussed this, I will not go into detail here. Paul's main point is that the church service operates in such a way that everyone should be edified by understanding what is being said. You may wonder why the church throughout history never adopted the above model for its order of worship. And the few churches that have attempted to imitate Corinth have ended in deplorable theological failure. The answer relates to our topic of our series—the cessation of supernatural gifts.

We must be aware of the fact that the New Testament had not yet been completed. So, the means of revelation was quite unique and not what one should expect once the canon of Scripture was complete. Today we are not receiving prophecy beyond what is written because we have the full and sufficient prophetic word of God contained in the Scriptures.

We might initially lament at this. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be continually receiving these prophetic insights? But as the church has grown to be an international force, we recognize that it is actually to the church's advantage not to have a multitude of prophets since a multitude of prophets would also burgeon a multitude of false prophets. God has so protected His church that we can easily know someone to be a false prophet simply by their claiming to be a prophet at all. The church has one glorious prophetic source which is sufficient to meet all genuine spiritual needs—the *Bible*.

10. Keep Silent

But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God (1 Corinthians 14:28).

This is another verse often used to advocate a private prayer language. But since tongues is actually an act of speaking and Paul's exhortation here is to keep silent, one can hardly understand this to mean any type of verbal utterance. Paul is simply instructing a person who has the gift of tongues not to use that gift if there is no interpreter. He is to remain silent and engage in silent prayer.

11. The Spirits of the Prophets

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not *the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints* (1 Corinthians 14:29-33).

a. Control the Manner of Prophecy

It shouldn't take too much deciphering to conclude that this type of worship simply could not be the norm for the perpetuity of the church. Prophets were speaking the word of God in the church, but since false prophets were a possibility they needed to be ferreted out through the judgment of others. When one considers the poor spiritual climate of this church we can

surmise that this was not always done at an efficient level. Praise God for the closed canon of Scripture!

Be that as it may, Paul's instruction was one prophet speak at a time that all may learn (again, the importance of understanding) and be encouraged. When Paul tells them "**the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets**" he is not saying that the prophets have authority over the content of what they say. The context informs us that Paul is telling the prophets that they have control over the manner in which they utilize their gift. Simply because it was the actual prophetic gift does not mean they had to bark out their prophecy at the moment they received it. To do so would result in confusion.

12. Women in the Church

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church (1 Corinthians 14:34, 35).

The context of this very controversial passage is the exercise of prophetic gifts in the church. There were women prophets (Acts 2:17; 21:19), but they, apparently, were not to exercise that gift in the context of the church. Adding to the pandemonium at Corinth was women asking questions during church. Paul instructs them to do this at home with their husbands.

Implied here is a propriety in the church service. People talking or interacting, or children crying at a level which is so distracting that it hinders the order of the service should be avoided. For this reason churches have implemented extensions of the sanctuary like cry-rooms or toddler training rooms—we can probably add cell phones, video games and beepers to the list.

13. You Think You're Spiritual

Or did the word of God come *originally* from you? Or *was it* you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order (14:36-40).

There is a bit of sarcasm in Paul's tone when he asks if the word of God originated with them; are they supposing that they were the beginning of all truth? Even when prophetic gifts were extant the prophets had to acknowledge that the word of God did not originate in them but was rather a gift given to them.

The apostle Paul, because of the greatness of the revelations given to him, was given a thorn in the flesh that he might not exalt himself. There is a temptation for those who represent God to get too big for their britches. Heaven forbid that men who handle the word of God forget where it ends and they begin.

a. What Paul Wrote...

Paul appeals to his apostolic authority in addressing the order of worship. This is yet another argument for cessation. Paul is not available today to address the specific errors of so-called prophetic utterances. It is supposed that we can distinguish today between true and false prophets by checking them against the Scriptures. But this is a short-sighted remedy. If it is already in the Scriptures, why do I need the prophet? And if it is so specific that the Scriptures don't address it, how can I check it? If the modern day prophet says you should quit lying,

all he has done is quote the Scriptures. If he says you should move to Orange County, how can you check that against the Scriptures?

If people wished to willfully ignore Paul's writing, so be it—Paul writes, **“Let him be ignorant.”** But he shouldn't delude himself into thinking he is being spiritual. Certainly, Paul allowed prophesy and tongues at the church at Corinth. All must stipulate to this. But, again, that does not address the continuation or cessation of those gifts throughout history.

14. Review

- a. Christians should avoid using the same methods governing the church that they used to govern their lives as unbelievers (12:1-3).
- b. Differential distribution and mutual edification are essential to understand the gifts. The church is a body with multiple gifts (12:4-11).
- c. The entire church has been baptized into one “body” even though not all speak in tongues (12:13, 14, 30).
- d. There is no biblical reason to think there are multiple types of tongues.
- e. Love must be the controlling disposition in the use of gifts (chapter 13).
- f. Prophecy is superior to tongues because it can be understood (chapter 14).
- g. Interpreted tongues are prophecy (14:5).

- h. Language needs to be understood in order to be valuable (14:6-8). Understanding was necessary even in the first century (14:14-16).
- i. Tongues were a sign of judgment (14:20-25).
- j. A church service should be orderly and well-understood (14:26-40).

It has been the headlong pursuit of the enemies of Christ's church to quell, pervert or eliminate altogether the glorious message that there is a good, holy God who saves sinners by grace through faith. It is the zenith of human endeavors to apprehend the depth of such glorious news. Let it continually be our pursuit. Herein lies the heart of the Apostle's prayer for us:

...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come (Ephesians 1:17-21).

VII. Ecclesiology

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

A. The Marks of the Church

Not long ago I ran into an old volleyball friend. He was part of that old school, earthy, sixties beach volleyball culture—a bit of (what we once called) a hippie. We caught up with each other’s lives a bit, then I took the opportunity to invite him to church. He paused, gave me a smile (as if seeking to find a reason to say ‘no’) then, looking at the ocean, replied, “This is my church.” Clearly he had a fundamental misunderstanding of what a church is.

A great 20th century irony is how so many organizations and functions have hijacked the word ‘church’ to define who or what they are (whether the church is the beach or a church of religious science or even an informal Bible study) and how many churches have chosen to abandon the name, preferring titles such as ‘Christian fellowship’ or ‘Christian center’. Be that as it may, the word ‘church’ has become a very liquid and undefined term. This is not a new problem.

Shortly after the Reformation of the 16th century, when many Christians felt liberated from the constraints of the Roman

Catholic Church, there was a sort of ecclesiastical pandemonium taking place. It became like a religious Spring Break for many professing believers who recklessly organized churches which didn't (in the eyes of many learned believers) appear to be true churches at all. This was something that many Roman Catholics feared would happen, and they were correct. Even Martin Luther was horrified at what was taking place in these neo-religious communities. The issue had to be addressed post haste.

What makes a church a church? One of the earliest Protestant Confessions (even before the Westminster Confession) took to the task. The Belgic Confession offered a definition of the defining marks of a true church that has remained the gold standard definition for centuries. Article 29 (paragraph three) states:

The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks: The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practices church discipline for correcting faults. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head. By these marks one can be assured of recognizing the true church-- and no one ought to be separated from it.

In short, a true church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments, and church discipline. If these three things are not happening, one should not think they are attending a church. One might ask, "What about prayer, singing in worship, fellowship, love, giving, acts of service and mercy and the many other attributes and activities that should be found in the gathering of the saints?"

Prayer, singing, fellowship, love, giving, acts of service and mercy and so forth are not restricted to that organism called the church (an organism with pastors, elders, and deacons). Believers can and are encouraged to pursue those attributes and activities both publicly and privately. But it is the church (as a defined entity) that has been given the responsibility to exercise discipline, to administer the sacraments and to preach the gospel—recognizing that it is the elders who take responsibility for that which is preached from the pulpit.

Those other necessary elements (prayer, song, love, service, mercy and so forth) are the Spirit-generated fruit of a church that remains committed to its prime directive of word, sacrament and discipline.

Everything that is authentic, truly profound and worthwhile proceeds from Christ who is presented by word and sacrament—the purity of which is protected by discipline. And it is from that fountain that fervent prayer, dynamic worship, brotherly love, heartfelt service and mercy begins to weave the brethren to Christ and together to form a single unit, a single body, **“For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one” (Ephesians 2:14).**

B. Ruling and Giving an Account

1. Priesthood of Believers

To whom is the responsibility of “pure preaching, pure administration of the sacraments” and “church discipline” given? What we will see is that the responsibility in a very broad sense is given to the entire church. There is a “priesthood” of all believers (1 Peter 2:5, 9). We will take a closer look at this broad responsibility shortly, but in terms of a more direct responsibility—this falls on the shoulders of the elders.

2. Elders

‘Elder’ is a specific office in the church. And it is always a plurality of elders. In the sixty plus times ‘elder’ is mentioned in the New Testament it is always in the plural except when John is referring to himself as the author of his second and third general epistles—all this to say, an individual elder does not have authority as an individual but only as he contributes to the corporate conscience of the board.

The board of elders has the daunting yet glorious task of shepherding and ruling in the church. Peter writes:

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Peter 5:1-5).

This shepherding, or oversight, should not be done begrudgingly or for some dishonest gain—whether the gain is financial, social or seeking prestige. The elders are not to domineer but to lead by example. The primary consideration/responsibility for the elder revolves around an accurate presentation of the Law and Gospel of Christ.

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17).

The elder must be willing to engage and able to teach the things of God. He also has the difficult task of knowing when the correcting of his opponents has descended to **“foolish, ignorant controversies.”** He **“must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil”** (2 Timothy 2:23, 24).

3. Submission and Accountability

Shepherding, oversight and instruction involves a great many things. He must be willing to pray, visit the sick, care for the indigent, widows, orphans, bereaved, and so much more. The elders are the primary earthly party responsible to God for the condition of the bride of Christ—the church. And they will give an account to God.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (Hebrews 13:17).

It is no small thing to open your mouth and suppose to speak for God. It would appear that God detests being misrepresented above almost anything. When Moses, in anger, struck the rock with his staff, he misrepresented God who told him merely to speak to the rock (Numbers 20:8, 11), a misrepresentation that kept him from entering the land (Deuteronomy 32:51, 52). The most vehement diatribes by Jesus in all of Scripture are directed toward those who were unfaithful in their directive to lead God’s people (Matthew 23).

In the above passage (Hebrews 13:17) you see a defined relationship between the elders and the congregation. This is

why a church is to have a defined membership. We see a disposition that people should seek—they should seek to make the elder’s task a joyful one. And we see that the elders are accountable to God for the proper functioning of the church, which, at its heart, presents Christ through word and sacrament—the purity of which is preserved through discipline.

4. An Elder Must Be...

It is little wonder that God is quite particular about the qualities necessary to this “**noble task**” (1 Timothy 3:1). I am not under the impression that the attributes given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 (and elsewhere) provide an exhaustive list (since different lists are given in different places). But it would be worthwhile to take a look at some of the traits requisite to the office. In the passage we opened with (1 Timothy 3:1-7) we see the list begin:

“**Above reproach**”—*anepilempton*. He is to be unimpeachable or blameless. This does not mean he is perfect or sinless. Nor does it mean he has never been accused, for even our Savior was accused. There are no legitimate, severe accusations present.

“**One wife**”—*heis gynaikos*—or ‘one woman’. This may mean (especially based upon the time it was written) the man was not a polygamist. Others would add that he should not be one who had an illegitimate divorce and then remarried.

“**Sober-minded**”—*nephalion*. This is a person who is level-headed. This is closely related to the next attribute.

“**Self-controlled**”—*sophrona*. An elder must be prudent, thoughtful and in control of himself.

“Respectable”—*kosmion*. This word carries the idea of being appropriate. An elder should be circumspect, and behave and speak in a manner fitting to the occasion.

“Hospitable”—*philoxenon*. Literally, this word means ‘a lover of strangers’. An elder should be willing to greet new people and invite people into their home.

“Able to Teach”—*didaktikon*. An elder should be able to articulate what his church believes and, more broadly, what Christians believe.

“Not a Drunkard”—*paronoin*. Just what it says...not someone who can’t hold their liquor.

“Not Violent”—*plekten*. The word describes a bully—someone just looking for a fight or seeking to win by intimidation.

“Gentle”—*epieike*. The elder should be able to teach and hold their ground and not compromise. But they must, at the same time, exude a yielding, gentle, kind and courteous way.

“Not Quarrelsome”—*amachon*. You don’t want an elder who argues for the sake of arguing and fails to realize the importance to peace among the brethren. This is a subtle breaking of the 3rd Commandment.

“Not a Lover of Money”—*philargyron*. This has hit epidemic proportions in western evangelicalism.

“Manage His Own Household”—*proiostamenon*. He has to rule and direct his own house well. An elder must manage his

own home well and continue to make his home a priority even as he serves as an elder.

“Not a Recent Convert”—*neophyton*. The enemy will set his sights on the leaders of the church in many ways—not the least of which being conceit and prestige. An elder should be a seasoned Christian.

“Well Thought Of”—*martyrian kalos*. I have always found this a bit paradoxical. Jesus teaches that the world will hate us (Matthew 5:11, 12), but here the elder is to be well thought of by outsiders. The answer is: it all depends. If they are not well thought of because of their witness for Christ that would certainly be an exception. But if it is a result of legitimate character flaws, that is another matter. We can easily go deeper and wider in our study of the proper traits (Titus 1:5-9; 2 Timothy 2:14-26; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:28).

5. Three Forms of Government

Time doesn't allow a full-orbed presentation of the various methods of ecclesiology (the study of church governance), but this has not been a matter of small controversy over the ages—especially with the challenging of apostolic succession presented in Roman Catholicism. And I must say that in my 30+ years of ministry the primary reason people have come to our church disgruntled with their former church relates in some way to church government—how decisions in the church are made.

In short, there are three basic forms of church government that have emerged over church history: Episcopalianism, Congregationalism and Presbyterianism.

a. Episcopalianism

Episcopalianism is a top-down methodology, a primary example seen with the Pope in Roman Catholicism. The Pope, through various monarchical bishops (and other hierarchy), appoints leaders in churches with no, or little, say by members of the congregation. This form of government worked when the church viewed itself as equal in authority to the Scriptures, but you don't see this as often among Protestants.

b. Congregationalism

Congregationalism (or *independency*) is just the opposite of Episcopalianism (although it *de facto* ends up being very similar). It is a bottom-up form of government where (technically) all members of the church have the same authority. This form of government ends up *de facto* Episcopalian since it is usually the strongest personalities in the congregation that sway decisions. It also tends to ignore the unique authority given to the elders.

c. Presbyterianism

Presbyterianism is the rule of the church by a plurality of elders (not one man, nor the whole congregation). These elders are chosen (or, more accurately, nominated) by the people from among themselves but are examined and confirmed by the present board of elders. They are then presented to the congregation for affirmation, then ordained by the elders. In the history of Christianity, Presbyterianism is the most dominant form of government agreed upon by the Protestant scholars.

6. Choosing Elders

In quick review: a true church exercises word, sacrament and discipline; the primary earthly responsible party for the proper administration of these things is the elders; the character traits for an elder are spelled out in Scripture. The question remains, *how are elders chosen?* In the Scriptures we see Jesus picking apostles and apostles appointing elders. Jesus remains the head of the church, but He is risen and the apostles are now in glory. What is the means by which this continues?

Again, time does not allow a thorough presentation as to why this is the most biblical method of church government. In short, when the early church was faced with the need for additional church officers, they did not unilaterally appoint such men but instructed the congregation to...

- a. **...pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty (Acts 6:3).**

Afterward, the congregation did not ordain the men but set them...

...before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6:6).

So we see here a precedent for the selecting of church officers. Of course these were deacons, what of other offices? We see a similar pattern with Matthias (who replaced Judas).

- b. **“They”** that is, the congregation of 120 persons (Acts 1:15), **“put forward two,**

Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias” (Acts 1:23).

The Lord chose Matthias. The congregation recognizes the giftedness of the candidate and submits the candidate to the leadership to be vetted and ordained.

Here we see, as indicated earlier, the priesthood of all believers. All the church takes responsibility for the church. With certain significant distinctions, we see a somewhat similar form of government in our nation (modeled after Presbyterianism). We have a representative form of government where the people nominate and elect others, who are skilled and trustworthy, to represent them.

c. Appoint

The argument is also made that when Paul and Barnabas “**appointed**” elders in Lystris, Iconium and Antioch (Acts 14:21-23), the word “appointed” *cheirotoneantes* literally means to stretch out one’s hand. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament* defines *cheirotoneo*:

To elect to an office by lifting up the hand; to choose, vote (2 Cor. 8:19); to appoint to an office (Acts 14:23).³⁷

Like many doctrines, good, godly, spirit-filled Christian theologians have differing views on how these passages are to be understood. It might also be observed that the congregation will choose their leaders (if not by this form of government) by the exhortation all members have to “**test everything; hold fast to what is good**” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). We also read of Paul

³⁷ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

warning Timothy that there will be those **“having the appearance of godliness but denying its power. Avoid such people” (2 Timothy 3:5).**

This is not to say that those who hold to conflicting forms of government are not Christians or evil people. It is generally accepted reformed conviction that Presbyterianism is the form of government that most closely comports with Scripture.

