

RETHINKING THE SPIRIT

My early Christian life was in the Pentecostal church. I was taught the classic Pentecostal doctrine on the baptism of the Spirit and was handed the typical proof texts from Acts to prove that speaking in tongues was the initial evidence of the baptism of the Spirit, and that it is a second-work of grace or subsequent to salvation (or words to that effect).

Admittedly, the Pentecostal line of argument is quite convincing and I purchased it. But that was before I learned to read the New Testament chronologically. And without a chronological understanding of the New Testament, well, you can prove almost anything by proof-texting.

Many years ago I became unconvinced of the Pentecostal viewpoint, while still holding to the belief—as well as experiencing it—that the Holy Spirit hasn't gone to sleep and all the gifts of the Spirit are still in operation today.

Two things caused me to begin doubting the Pentecostal version:

- 1) I witnessed firsthand many people who were strongly coached to speak in tongues. So much so that it was close to forcing them to do so. This was very different from how I envisioned it in Acts. I never saw any evidence that the apostles coached or forced people to speak in tongues. Rather, speaking in tongues always happened spontaneously in Acts without human intervention or facilitation, beyond the laying on of hands.
- 2) Some of the most powerful people in the Spirit that I've ever met or known never spoke in tongues. These people clearly had the power of God and were very effective in evangelism as well as possessing deep spiritual insight.

Many scholars have pointed out that the phrases “baptism in the Spirit,” “baptism with the Spirit,” and “baptism of the Spirit” are all synonyms in the New Testament. You can’t convincingly slice these up into different baptisms by using the Greek, and that’s why different translations use of/with/in for the same texts.

In addition, many Christians have bitterly divided over their understanding of the baptism of the Spirit. In some movements, the so-called “baptism of the Spirit” has become a gimmick, a product to sell, and an elite experience that has separated God’s people into the “have’s” and the “have-not’s.”

In other quarters, certain teachings on Spirit baptism have created counterfeit spiritual experiences, exaggerations, and many excesses which have hurt the body of Christ. (You can learn more about this by reading on the accounts of the Welsh Revival and the Azusa Street Revival. See Frank Bartleman’s book, *Another Wave Rolls In*, for the story of Azusa.)

In the following chapters, I’ll share some of the conclusions I’ve reached from my study of the New Testament, my observations, and my personal experience.

I’m monumentally disinterested in a windy debate over this subject. I realize that some people will disagree and that’s fine with me. I don’t get paid for convincing anyone. I’ve just been asked these questions dozens of times from readers and now I’m finally getting around to answering them.

If you happen to challenge what I write (which is fine), be prepared to get some push-back from me, especially if you’ve not done your homework. And realize that this is a series. So all of it will unfold in due course. Resist the temptation, therefore, to jump the gun too early.

At the same time, I could be completely wrong in my views. I claim no immaculate perception...and neither should you.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT

Consider the following historical points about the baptism of the Spirit:

- The idea that the baptism of the Spirit is a second work of grace seems to have been initially put forth by Wesley and his followers. They tied the experience to entire sanctification (holiness).
- R.A. Torrey was a great and dear servant of the Lord. He was a congregational minister who graduated from Yale and joined D.L. Moody in Chicago. He became the superintendent of the new bible school there. In 1895, he wrote a book that popularized the idea that the baptism of the Spirit is subsequent to regeneration (new birth). He taught that it gives a person power to witness and serve, it is received by prayer, renouncing sin, and exercising faith. (The book was called *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*.)
- The Welsh revival of 1904-1905 produced many miraculous signs and conversions (reportedly 100,000 conversions). But it deteriorated by counterfeit spiritual experiences.
- The Azusa street revival of 1906 in L.A., California gave birth to the Pentecostal movement. Pentecostalism brought a certain vitality back to the church with passionate praise, worship, and the anticipation for God to do supernatural things. But it was also born with certain birth defects. One of them is a tendency to exaggerate healings and miracles. Another is the pressure to keep the supernatural going, which tends to produce excesses and counterfeits (people start “faking it” to keep it going). Another is to put the Holy Spirit and His gifts on the throne and lose Jesus Christ in the temple. These defects came in at the very outset of the movement, and they have shaped the culture and DNA of Pentecostalism till this day. You can find documentation for all of this in Frank Bartleman’s book about Azusa.
- The early Pentecostals took Torrey’s teachings and asserted that tongues was the “initial evidence” of the baptism of the Spirit. This is the classic Pentecostal position. A case can be made for this by cutting and pasting certain verses together, but there are problems with it. The entire *story* of the New Testament church does not support it. It doesn’t hold up when we interpret the book of Acts in light of the Gospels and the Epistles as we should.
- Paul made clear that *not* all believers speak in tongues (1 Cor. 12:30-31). Pentecostals say this text is speaking of a different kind of tongues. But that’s special pleading as there’s no hard evidence to suggest this. In order for the Pentecostal view of the baptism of the Spirit to work, you have to create two different kinds of tongues. Without it, the doctrine falls apart.
- There is no indication that the 3,000 who were saved on the day of Pentecost spoke in tongues. Either *all or some* of the 120 did in the upper room; we cannot be sure how many, though.
- There is no indication that people normally spoke in tongues after they received the

Spirit in most of the cases throughout the book of Acts. Example: There's no record of it in the churches Paul planted throughout Galatia and Greece, both of which are recorded in Acts. There's no indication of it in the churches that the apostles raised up all throughout Palestine. Nor is there any mention of it in the church in Antioch, when it began.

- There are only THREE instances of people receiving the Spirit and then speaking in tongues: Acts 2 (some or all of the 120 in Jerusalem); Acts 10 (a small group in Caesarea made up of Cornelius, his close friends, and his relatives); Acts 19 (twelve men in Ephesus, though the text doesn't say that they all spoke in tongues. Some may have prophesied rather than spoken in tongues).

Take note: Only three (3) instances in the entire book of Acts. Some have assumed that the Samaritans spoke in tongues when the gospel reached them. This may be true. So we can add a fourth, based on this assumption. Taking the entire book of Acts as a whole, however, we can say that speaking in tongues when receiving the Spirit does not appear to be a normative experience as the Pentecostals claim.

Consider the following facts:

- The way the Spirit "fell" on the new converts in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and at Ephesus isn't like what the Pentecostals practice. In those three cases, the Spirit either fell on the people spontaneously and they spoke in tongues or prophesied *automatically* (Acts 2 & Acts 10). Either that, or hands were laid on them, and the Spirit fell on them and they spoke in tongues and/or

prophesied *automatically* (Acts 8 & Acts 19). In Pentecostal/charismatic circles, people are typically "coached" on how to speak in tongues. And sometimes they must "tarry" to receive this experience.

- The Pentecostal position cannot be sustained by experience. Many Christians who have had tremendous power with God never spoke in tongues. There is no evidence to suggest that Timothy or Titus spoke in tongues, for instance.
- According to Paul, tongues is a private prayer language; it is not speaking for God (1 Cor. 14:2, 13-14). Again, some Pentecostals will argue that this is a different kind of tongues than what we find in Acts. But this cannot be supported. The tongues in Acts 2 appears to be praise.
- According to Paul, tongues shouldn't be spoken in a corporate gathering unless there is an interpreter present to interpret the prayer. This limits its use severely. In the church meetings, Paul would rather have the church prophesy than speak in tongues. This is clear all throughout 1 Corinthians 14.
- According to Paul, tongues in a public meeting serves as a sign of judgment against unbelievers (namely, to Jews who know the prophecy in Isaiah 28:11-12). See 1 Cor. 14:21-22 and compare with Acts 2:13. Prophecy is for the believers, and it edifies the church (1 Cor. 14:22 and 14:1-4). Tongues only edifies the person who speaks in tongues. When interpreted, tongues serve as a sign of judgment to unbelievers.
- The New Testament doesn't explicitly encourage believers to seek tongues. Paul

says to not forbid tongues, but to seek to prophesy instead (see 1 Cor. 14). At the same time, there's nothing wrong with desiring the gift of tongues as Paul says to covet all the gifts.

- Tongues always comes last in Paul's ordering of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12). Some scholars regard this as his way of saying that in the grand scheme of spiritual gifts, tongues is the least valuable gift. Possibly since Paul says that the person who speaks in tongues edifies himself, not the church (see 1 Cor. 14:4-5). It's valuable, but in the context of edifying the church, it's not as valuable as the other gifts.
- Prophecy is not defined as predicting the future. It is forth telling, not always foretelling. Though it can contain an element of seeing into the future. Prophecy is Spirit-inspired speech that reveals, exalts, and unveils Jesus Christ. The Old Testament prophets all spoke of Jesus when they prophesied. The book of Revelation states that the testimony of Jesus *is* the spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10). You can't say Jesus is Lord in faith without the Holy Spirit inspiring you to say it (1 Cor. 12:1-3). So prophecy is the speaking of Jesus Christ under the inspiration of the Spirit.

INVESTIGATING THE FOUR INSTANCES OF SPIRIT BAPTISM IN ACTS

What follows are the four occasions in the New Testament where the Spirit fell on new converts

in a dramatic way: Acts 2, Acts 8, Acts 10, and Acts 19.

People either spoke in tongues, prophesied, or exhibited some other dramatic gift.

The question is *why*?

The Pentecostal thesis says that it's because speaking in tongues is the normative experience or "sign" when people are baptized in the Spirit.

I find this unconvincing because of the reasons I sketched out in my last chapter. The math doesn't work. There are Scriptures that just won't fit the thesis without bending them.

Instead, I believe the reason why there was a dramatic expression of spiritual gifts (not just tongues) that accompanied these four specific occasions is because each situation was a *new transition* from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant when God's Spirit would dwell *in* and *upon* the new people of God and *through* them create a new body on the earth. The body of Jesus Christ.

Let's look at each case closely and see if the evidence supports my thesis:

Acts 2: This was the first time the Jews had received the Spirit and were plunged into the body of Christ. Tongues of fire rested upon their heads. This signified that the 120 were the new temple of God. Fire fell on the old temple at its dedication. Babel was being reversed (see Gen. 11). Instead of confusion, as at the tower of Babel when they spoke different languages and couldn't understand one another, there was now unity. Instead of not understanding one another, they were magnifying God with different languages. And their tongues were understood by the people.

So tongues in Acts 2 served as a dramatic sign that the 120 in Jerusalem were the new Israel, the new temple, the new body, and the reversal of Babel. The prophecy of Isaiah 28 that God will speak through other tongues was fulfilled. In addition, Acts 2:11 does not say that those who spoke in tongues shared the gospel with the Jews who were visiting from all over the Empire. Instead, it says that the visiting Jews heard them “speaking in our own tongues the great things of God.” This text possesses the language of praise which comports with the idea that tongues is a prayer language as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 14. They were praising God for His wonderful works in the languages of the people.

Acts 8: The Samaritans were half Jew, half Gentile. The Jews despised them. Peter and John laid hands on them to receive the Spirit and the Spirit fell on them in a dramatic way. (Tongues isn't mentioned, but the Spirit was evidenced in some visible way as indicated by Acts 8:18.)

Because the Spirit came on the Samaritans with the same drama that He had come upon the 120 Jews in Jerusalem, it erased all doubt of the reality of their incorporation into the body. It demonstrated clearly to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem that God had made the Samaritans part of the same body that they were in.

Acts 10: In Cornelius' house in Caesarea. This was a small group of Gentiles. The gospel was coming to the Gentiles for the first time in history. The Spirit fell on them while Peter preached (probably because Peter wouldn't have laid his hands on them otherwise, as it was improper and unclean for a Jew to touch a Gentile).

The Spirit fell on the Gentiles in the same dramatic way that He did at Pentecost. So it left no doubt to anyone that God had made the Gentiles

part of the same body as the Jews. (See Acts 11 for Peter's explanation to the other apostles where he makes this very point).

Acts 19: Paul met twelve men in Ephesus. They were disciples of John the Baptist. They knew the baptism of promise, but not the baptism of fulfillment (the baptism of Christ). When Paul asked them if they had received the Spirit since/when they believed, he was probably asking: “Were you baptized into Christ, which endows you with the Holy Spirit? Or were you baptized only in John's baptism?” They answered that they had only been baptized with the baptism of John...which looks forward, but doesn't impart anything.

When Paul found this out, he baptized them in water in Jesus' name, laid hands on them, and the Spirit fell on them. They spoke in tongues and prophesied. This dramatic sign made clear that the transition from the era of promise to the era of fulfillment...from John's baptism to baptism into Christ...from the Old Covenant (symbolized by John the Baptist) to the New Covenant... was now complete. Again: these men were followers of John the Baptist, who had taught about the baptism to come (Luke 3:16). They had been baptized under John in a baptism of anticipation (looking to the Messiah), not of fulfillment.

So the Spirit falling on them served as a dramatic sign that the age of fulfillment that John prophesied had indeed come and now baptism into Christ was the point where one receives the Holy Spirit. The disciples of John the Baptist were constituted into the one body in Christ with the Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. The transition was now complete.

So the pattern is consistent.

The four examples I've listed show that the Spirit fell on new converts in a dramatic way because it marked a transition that the New Covenant was breaking in and had been extended to Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and "the old guard" (the followers of John the Baptist).

Again, we don't see the Spirit coming on any of the new converts in the book of Acts the same way as the above four cases because these were four transitional situations (e.g. in Acts 9, Ananias ministers the Spirit to Paul and Paul is "filled with the Spirit." But there is no mention of tongues or any other gift, just a healing of his blindness. I give other examples in Part II).

Each of the four instances above left no doubt that God had plunged Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and the disciples of John the Baptist all into the same body of Jesus Christ. The dramatic expressions of gifts visibly demonstrated that the Old Covenant had come to an end and the New Covenant had begun.

To my mind, this explanation fits the evidence the best. And it doesn't force one to twist the Scriptures, bend them, or ignore others to fit a certain doctrine.

In addition, I've been to scores of meetings where brand new converts were baptized in water in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and hands were laid on them to receive the Spirit (something I endorse). And in most of those cases, there was no dramatic gift that was made visible.

Later, however, there was clear evidence that the Spirit had been given to them. Some of them spoke in tongues, but most of them did not. Yet all of them exhibited the Spirit's fruits and His other giftings, demonstrating what Paul made

plain in Romans 8:9, "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."

A person who holds to the classic Pentecostal doctrine would say, "That person needs to be filled with the Spirit. He/she needs to be baptized in the Spirit" (or "Holy Ghost," as it's often put).

My answer...*they already were.*

WHAT IS THE BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT?

So what is the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Answer: I believe it is the act of the exalted Christ in which He plunges the believers into the Holy Spirit where He comes in and upon them, affording them with His power and life, and incorporating them as members into the very body of Jesus Christ.

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13)

God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. (Acts 2:32-33)

He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:38-39)

That is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know

Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. (John 14:17)

“For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (See also Acts 11:16 and Luke 3:16). (Acts 1:5)

AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY [Gentiles], AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR [Jews]; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. (Ephesians 2:17-18)

When were *you* baptized in the Spirit?

Answer: 2,000 years ago, when the Jews and Gentiles were plunged into the body of Christ. When you came to Jesus Christ, you received His life by the Spirit. The Spirit came in and upon you. He filled you with His life and He clothed you with His power. And you were made part of the same body of Jesus that came into being 2,000 years ago. God in Christ dwells in you by the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-11). And you're a member of His body. That is true for every Christian.

- While every believer has received the baptism of the Spirit 2,000 years ago when Jew and Gentile were plunged into Christ (Acts 2 & Acts 10), that baptism is now passed on to new converts. The laying on of hands is the outward sign that a person has been incorporated into the body and endued with the Spirit.
- When someone repents and submits to Jesus Christ, we should take them to water, encourage them to make a public and verbal confession of faith in Christ, immerse them in water in the name of the Lord Jesus, then lay hands on them signifying

that they are made one with the body and plunged into the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit are also imparted via the laying on of hands (2 Tim. 1:6).

- Immediately *and/or* afterwards, the Holy Spirit will begin operating in the new convert's life in many different ways (see “50 Things the Holy Spirit Does”). They may or may not speak in tongues, prophesy, or exhibit any dramatic manifestation when hands are laid on them. But the Spirit *will* begin to work in their lives. Again, we should never think that the details of the four incidents we've looked at in a previous chapter are normative for every Christian today. What is normative is that the Spirit will come on and into the person and they will be membered to the body of Christ. And the fruits and various gifts will begin to manifest in their lives at the time of conversion *and/or* afterwards.
- There is never a reason to be jealous with how the Spirit works in someone else's life. Or what gifts they may have. Or what experiences they may come into (see Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 12 about this). The Spirit is like the wind: unpredictable and unseen (John 3:8). The Spirit knows what each of us needs according to our personality, our past experiences, and what we will go through in the future.
- Like water baptism, the baptism of the Spirit is largely a corporate experience. It is NOT simply an individual experience. The power of the Spirit of God resides *on the body*. When we are connected to the body in a living and practical way...not as an

isolated, independent member...the power of God is available to us when we need it.

- People who try to operate in God's power outside of a practical expression of the body of Christ usually end up being destroyed by God's power. They go off the beam theologically, they become shipwrecked in their faith, or they can't handle the power so they move into the flesh. The power of God was never designed to be wielded by unbroken people who are isolated from the body. Countless examples through history attest to this fact.
- Knowing the cross, knowing the Lord deeply, and being a functioning part of a local body of believers (a shared-life community) serve as a safeguard in making believers safe to the kingdom of God. Seek Christ...for all gifts, power, insight, virtue, and wisdom are in Him. *In fact, He embodies all of these things.* In other words, seek the face of God rather than His hand. Jesus is the human face of God.
- Every genuine believer has been baptized in the Spirit and thus we have all been filled with the Spirit (He dwells in us). You can't be a Christian and *not* be filled with the Spirit (see Romans 8:9). But once the Spirit initially fills us, we can be filled with the Spirit over and over again (more on that later). To be filled with the Spirit means that He is taking over more areas of our lives. Those who are filled again and again and who are walking in the Spirit are said to be "full of the Spirit."
- Some people have dramatic experiences of the Spirit that they link to the time in which they were "baptized in the Spirit."

Some claim to have a new-found power to evangelize. Others claim to speak in tongues or enter into some other supernatural experience. My contention is that these instances are simply the "activation" of being baptized in the Spirit. They are new "fillings of the Spirit." Not everyone experiences the same kind of encounter or manifestation when being filled with the Spirit or when the baptism of the Spirit is "activated." For some, the Spirit is a quiet stream. For others, He's a rushing mighty wind. If you're seeking more of the Lord, you need not worry about having a particular kind of experience or manifestation. Leave that to God.

BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

You will often hear Pentecostal people say things like, "John is a great guy, but he's not filled with the Spirit." By that they mean that John hasn't spoken in tongues, which for them means he's not been "baptized in the Holy Spirit."

In the previous chapters, I've refuted this way of thinking.

One of the things that's fascinating to me is that a person who is baptized in the Spirit (which I've argued has happened to all believers) can be filled and re-filled with the Spirit. For example...

- Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people..." (Peter had already been filled with the Spirit in Acts 2 at Pentecost—Acts 4:8.)

- And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. (The church here had already been filled with the Spirit in Acts 2 at Pentecost—Acts 4:31.)
- And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:52)
- And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit. (The Greek here carries the idea of being continuously filled—Ephesians 5:18.)

Texts describing people who were full of the Spirit:

The phrase “full of the Spirit” indicates a person who has allowed the Holy Spirit to take over a significant part of their life to where they have a walk in the Spirit that is evident. It doesn’t indicate perfection or the inability to make mistakes. It rather has in view the overall pattern of a person’s walk.

It’s another way of saying that a person is consumed with Christ and they are spiritually mature. (Spiritual maturity DOES NOT correspond to how long you’ve been a believer. I’ve met many Christians who have been in the Lord for 30+ years and they are not terribly mature.)

- Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. (Stephen was one of them—Acts 6:3.)

- But being full of the Holy Spirit, he [Stephen] gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (Acts 7:55)
- For he [Barnabas] was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. (Acts 11:24)
- And Jesus being full of the Holy Spirit returned from Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Luke 4:1)

The marks of a person who is “full of the Spirit”

- They are obsessed with Jesus. The Spirit speaks of and glorifies Christ (John 15:26; 16:14).
- Their life and speech get people excited about the Lord Jesus and inspire them to follow Him more fully. (In some translations of Acts 18:25, Apollos is “aglow/ excited with the Spirit.”)
- They walk in love; they aren’t selfish. The Spirit has shed God’s love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5; 1 Pet. 1:22).
- Their speech is edifying and it builds up the brethren; it does not tear down the saints. Tearing down others, gossip, putting others in a negative light, and slander all grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:3, 29-30). These sins match the nature of the “slanderer” (the meaning of the word “devil”) and are against the nature of the Holy Spirit.
- They don’t draw attention to themselves or their gifts. They draw attention to the Lord

Jesus Christ and they speak well of others (Phil. 2).

- Their lives and speech bring unity rather than division among God's people (Eph. 2:14-18; 4:3).
- The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) is a sure token of the Holy Spirit's presence and operation in their lives. Spiritual gifts can be counterfeited, but fruit cannot.

In the New Testament the Holy Spirit is called:

- The Spirit of God
- The Spirit of Christ
- The Spirit of the Father
- The Spirit of the Lord
- The Spirit of truth
- The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus
- The Spirit of holiness
- The Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead
- The Spirit of the living God
- The Spirit of His Son
- The Spirit of Jesus Christ
- The Spirit of grace
- The Spirit of glory
- The Spirit of life
- The Comforter (which means Advocate, Counselor, or Helper)

Summary on the Baptism of the Spirit

We have established that the idea that the gifts of the Spirit have ceased and tongues isn't for today cannot be sustained by Scripture. God still gives tongues to some of His children, but it's largely a prayer language for private use. If tongues are prayed in public, they should be interpreted (so says Paul).

We have established that the idea that the baptism of the Spirit is a separate and subsequent experience from conversion-initiation cannot be sustained by Scripture. We've established this in previous chapters.

We have established that the idea that there is a normative second-work of the Spirit after conversion cannot be sustained by Scripture. The Holy Spirit comes into all believers at conversion. But His work will vary in the lives of each person and at different seasons of their lives.

We have established that the idea that a person can be filled with the Spirit only once is incorrect. People can be filled with the Spirit many times throughout their lives.

We have established that the idea that the baptism of the Spirit is always evidenced by speaking in tongues cannot be sustained by Scripture.

We have established that the idea that some Christians have received the Holy Spirit, or have been "filled with the Spirit," while others have not cannot be sustained by Scripture. In Romans 8, Paul makes clear that a person who doesn't have the Spirit doesn't belong to Christ.

We have established that to separate the baptism of the Spirit from conversion, regeneration, and being membered to the body of Christ cannot be

sustained by Scripture. All three of these things are joined together in Acts and in the Epistles.

We have established that the idea that all Christians speak in tongues cannot be sustained by Scripture.

We have established that our chief calling is to seek, love, glorify, and follow Jesus Christ and to edify His church.

Therefore...

May the Lord deliver you from the need for tarrying for the Spirit. If you follow Jesus Christ, you already have Him.

May the Lord deliver you from the need of a second blessing. “You have *been given* [past tense] all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3).

May the Lord deliver you from needing something else from what you’ve already been given in Christ. For all things are in Christ, and you are *complete in Him* (Col. 2:9-10). You have been given the privilege of all the riches that dwell in Him. (Refer to my audio series on Colossians for details.)

May the Lord deliver you into a full and complete revelation of what is yours in Christ and into the full experience of it.

In short: pursue, follow, seek, love, and know the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit will be active in your life in various and sundry ways. The Spirit’s work is all toward the goal of conforming you into the glorious image of Jesus.

RETHINKING THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

In 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, Paul discusses the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, saying,

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.

As the name implies, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit is given by God to *manifest*—to make known or display—the presence of Jesus Christ to and through His church.

Since the Holy Spirit’s job is to glorify and reveal Christ (John 16:13-14), the manifestation of the Spirit is designed to unveil Christ. Spiritual manifestations are given by God’s grace; consequently, Paul calls them “spiritual gifts” (*charismata* in the Greek, 1 Cor. 12:4, 30, 31).

All nine gifts that Paul lists in the above text are miraculous in nature. That is, they display Christ in a supernatural way. Throughout the NT, Paul makes a healthy distinction between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit displays the *character* of God’s life in the believer. The manifestation of the Spirit displays the *power* of God’s life through the believer. The fruit of the Spirit relates to our walk. The manifestation of the Spirit relates to our service. Fruit deals with the character of Jesus. Gifts deal with the ministry of Jesus.

Spiritual manifestations have been a sore spot for the Lord's people for centuries. Some have embraced the notion that those gifts are no longer present in the church.

Such folks are called "cessationists," for they believe that spiritual gifts have ceased to exist. But there is no biblical merit for the "cessationist" idea. The testimony of Scripture as well as church history demonstrates that the gifts of the Spirit have been operative in the church since they were given on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30.

Nevertheless, among those who accept the perpetuity—or continuation—of spiritual manifestations, there have been two predominant schools of thought:

- 1) Spiritual gifts should be sought after and encouraged, for they are the zenith of spirituality.
- 2) Spiritual gifts should be hindered and discouraged, for they are easily abused and often cause division, confusion, and hurt.

We will call the first view the *charismaniac* position and the second view the *charisphobic* position. I submit that both positions are imbalanced.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS VS. SPIRITUAL LIFE

A cardinal mistake that many believers make is to confuse spiritual gifts with spiritual life. God's highest aim for His children is that they grow and develop in spiritual life (1 Pet. 2:1-2). As we grow in the life of Christ, we move closer to realizing the divine purpose of being conformed to

the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:28-29; 2 Cor. 3:18). We also begin to function in ministry. And effective functioning requires the exercise of spiritual gifts.

Stated simply, spiritual gifts are the tools by which we express spiritual life and spiritual power. Put another way, gifts are the utensils by which we supply spiritual food to others.

Now I ask you, which is more important—gift or life? Obviously, life is more important than gift, for food is more important than the utensil. Would it really matter if you were served a piece of steak with a spoon rather than a fork? Although it is easier to serve steak with a fork, the substance of what one is served is of greater significance than the utensil by which it is served.

While it is tragic to stress spiritual gifts over spiritual life, it is a grave mistake to stress spiritual life at the expense of spiritual gifts. Due to the over-emphasis that some have placed on spiritual gifts and the abuses that have followed, some have opted to down-play and even ignore the role of spiritual gifts in the life of the church.

While spiritual gifts are certainly not a measure of spirituality, they are essential to the full expression of spiritual power and indispensable in spiritual service. To use a metaphor, we should not let the sloppy table-manners of some prevent us from using the sanctified utensils that God makes available to us at His table.

Although the food may be more important than the utensil, it is a mistake to toss the utensils. Note Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians to exercise spiritual gifts:

But COVET EARNESTLY the best gifts...
(1 Cor. 12:31)...DESIRE spiritual gifts, but
rather that you may prophesy (1 Cor. 14:1)...

Forasmuch as you are ZEALOUS of spiritual gifts, SEEK that you may excel to the edifying of the church (1 Cor. 14:12)...How is it then, brethren? When you gather together, every one of you has a psalm, has a doctrine, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation...(1 Cor. 14:26)...COVET to prophesy, and FORBID NOT to speak with tongues. (1 Cor. 14:39)

Although the Corinthians were guilty of abusing spiritual gifts, Paul never told them to stop exercising them. Quite the contrary. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their excesses. But he followed that rebuke with solid instruction on the proper use of the gifts. Paul's central point was that spiritual life (which is expressed through love) is to be held preeminent over spiritual gifts (see 1 Cor. 13:1-8).

According to Paul, spiritual gifts ought always to be used for the sole purpose of edifying the body of Christ rather than ourselves. This is why Paul discusses the centrality and supremacy of love in 1 Corinthians 13 in the midst of his discourse on spiritual gifts in chapters 12 and 14. Gifts are to be governed by love for our brothers and sisters. They are to be used to build up the body in spiritual life.

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SPIRIT

I want to briefly examine how I understand the spiritual manifestations of 1 Corinthians 12 in light of their usefulness. It seems to me that these manifestations can be divided into three categories: The revelatory gifts, the inspirational gifts, and the power gifts.

Note that these manifestations are different from other "gifts lists" in the New Testament (e.g., Romans 12) in that they are all supernatural in nature. To my mind, any supernatural act exhibited through humans in the New Testament can be ascribed to one of these nine manifestations.

The Revelatory Gifts: Manifestations of Disclosure

The Word of Knowledge. The word of knowledge is a word from the Lord to the believer revealing past or present facts in the mind of God. It is called "a word" of knowledge because it is simply a "part" or a "fragment" of the fullness of God's mind (1 Cor. 13:9).

Peter demonstrated the word of knowledge when he supernaturally knew that Ananias and Sapphira had kept back part of the price of their land (Acts 5:3). Peter also received a word of knowledge concerning the three men from Caesarea who sought for him while he was praying upon the housetop (Acts 10:9). Another example of this gift was when Ananias of Damascus received supernatural knowledge that Saul had been converted (Acts 9:10-15).

The word of knowledge is helpful in counseling others. Through this gift, the Holy Spirit may show a person the spiritual condition of an individual and the means by which to help him or her. Further, the word of knowledge is extremely helpful in prayer.

Through it, the Spirit of God may reveal things to us that we could have never known through natural means, enabling us to pray more effectively. Just as the Spirit of God revealed the battle plans of the king of Syria to the prophet Elijah, so the Lord can reveal the strategy of the enemy

through this gift (2 Kings 6:9-12). *So just because God gives someone a word of knowledge doesn't mean that they are supposed to share it with others.*

And as I pointed out in *Revise Us Again*, it's unnecessary and often counterproductive to use this gift by saying, "The Lord told me" or "God showed me" in front of it. It's often much wiser to just make use of the knowledge to help someone with a problem. When Peter used it in Acts 5, for instance, he didn't preface it by saying, "God told me."

The Word of Wisdom. The word of wisdom is a word revealing God's purpose for the future (Luke 11:49). Agabus demonstrated the word of wisdom when he foresaw a famine coming upon the whole world and when he foretold Paul's persecution at Jerusalem (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11). God also revealed to Ananias the calling of Paul through this gift, showing him that Paul was to "suffer great things" for the Lord's sake in the future (Acts 9:15-16).

The word of wisdom is helpful in revealing the Lord's mind concerning His plan and purpose for the church as well as for the individual believer. Through the word of wisdom, the Spirit of God often prepares and warns the saints of impending danger, a coming attack of the enemy, or an upcoming move of God. Such knowledge is helpful in preparing us for the future and brings great glory to the Lord when such words are fulfilled. Again, it's not necessary to say "God showed me" or "the Lord told me" when operating in this gift.

The Discerning of Spirits. The discerning—or distinguishing—of spirits enables one to perceive the spirit world. It may enable one to perceive demons, angels, or God's hand upon an individual. Paul exercised this gift when he perceived that a damsel was possessed with an evil spirit

(Acts 16:16-18). Paul also exercised this gift when he perceived the Lord's hand of judgment upon Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:11). This is a valuable gift when ministering to others in a spiritual way.

The Inspirational Gifts: Manifestations of Utterance

Prophecy. To prophesy is to speak forth the present mind of the Lord. When people prophesy, they are speaking from a present burden granted to them by the Spirit of God. Prophecy may contain a word of wisdom or a word of knowledge. It always contains revelation or spiritual insight—which are part of this spiritual gift. Revelation or spiritual insight is the "input" side of this gift. Prophecy is the "out" side of it.

The word "revelation" is spooky to some people. It simply means an unveiling or an uncovering. When the Holy Spirit reveals truth to a person, the New Testament calls it "revelation."

Prophecy may be lengthy or short. It may be given to an assembly or to an individual (i.e., "personal" prophecy). It may be expressed through the language of Scripture (Luke 1:67-79), it may be delivered through an analogy (Acts 21:11), or a direct message (Acts 21:4).

The content of prophecy is always Jesus Christ. Authentic prophecy always brings Christ into view (Rev. 19:10), for Jesus is the Truth and He is God's revelation. So when a person prophesies, they are unveiling Christ. Prophecy, therefore, often occurs when a person preaches. If the individual is revealing Jesus Christ through their preaching and God is anointing it, they are prophesying.

The difference between teaching and prophecy can be summed up thusly: Through teaching,

the believer expounds, interprets, and applies Scripture. Through prophecy, the believer reveals God's will for the present moment. This, of course, can include predictions about the future, but such foreknowledge is always meant to prepare believers for the present hour.

Prophecy, then, is intensely present. It conveys God's present burden for His people. Christ is unveiled in the present tense and there's a present word of application attached to it.

Furthermore, prophecy is usually designed to recover God's perfect will when it has been lost sight of. This was largely the function of the Old Testament prophets. They brought back God's mind when it had been lost. When prophesying, one may or may not appeal to the text of Scripture (albeit, a true prophetic word will always harmonize with the principles of Scripture).

Teaching is acquired mainly through study, while prophecy is acquired mainly through revelation. Teaching ministers to one's spirit, primarily through the intellect. Prophecy ministers to one's spirit primarily through the heart. Oftentimes, a believer may prophesy while she or he teaches. A good example of this is to be found in some of Paul's letters where he expounds the Scriptures as well as prophesies God's present word to the churches.

Through prophecy, the present mind of the Spirit is uttered, ministering exhortation, edification, and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3). Sometimes prophecy is given to an individual, making known his or her gifts and calling (1 Tim. 4:14) or by disclosing the secrets of their heart through a word of knowledge.

1 Corinthians 14:24-25 says, "But if all prophesy, and there comes in one that believes not, or one

unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth." Because prophecy is such a valuable gift in edifying the church, Paul spills a good deal of ink discussing it.

Different Kinds of Tongues. Different (various) kinds of tongues is a supernatural utterance in unknown languages. These languages have never been learned by the speaker, nor are they understood by her or him (1 Cor. 14:14). Some tongues are foreign earthly languages. Others are angelic languages (1 Cor. 13:1). This gift has a dual-role. First, tongues can be exercised for personal edification, whereby one privately communicates with God in the spirit (1 Cor. 14:2, 4, 14, 28).

Second, in its public use, tongues are to be accompanied with interpretation for the edification of the believers so they can understand what has been prayed (1 Cor. 14:27-28). Tongues is essentially a prayer language.

The Interpretation of Tongues. The interpretation of tongues is the supernatural gift that enables one to interpret (not translate) an utterance given in other tongues. Through this gift, one may interpret her or his own tongues (1 Cor. 14:13-18) or the tongues of another (1 Cor. 14:27). The purpose of this gift is to bring understanding and edification to the minds of those hearing the tongues (1 Cor. 14:2-5). Therefore, if tongues is spoken in a church meeting, the interpretation of tongues should accompany it, else the church will be unedified (1 Cor. 14:28).

Since tongues is prayer, the interpretation will also be a prayer. Since tongues is often confused in certain denominational churches, people will

sometimes pray in tongues, then another person will follow it by prophesying. People will wrongly assume the tongues were interpreted.

According to Paul, the gifts of tongues and interpretation in the public meetings of the church served as a sign of judgment against unbelieving Jews in the first century (1 Cor. 14:21-22; Isa. 28:9-13; Acts 2:11-13). Even so, Paul makes clear that prophecy is superior to tongues and interpretation (1 Cor. 14:5).

The Power Gifts: Manifestations of the Miraculous

The Working of Miracles. The working of miracles is the supernatural ability to effect miracles. A miracle is a divine intervention in the normal order of things. It circumvents natural law. Miracles confirm the gospel message and display God's power to deliver fallen humanity from the old creation. This gift was exemplified when Peter's shadow healed the multitudes and when Paul was unharmed by the venom of a poisonous snake (Acts 5:15; 28:3-6).

The working of miracles was also displayed when Paul raised Eutychus from the dead (Acts 20:9-12) and when Paul and Silas were supernaturally delivered from prison (Acts 16:25-26). Today, miracles continue to confirm the truth of the gospel, as well as destroy the works of the devil (Mark 16:15-20), especially in superstitious nations where the culture believes in and is swayed by miraculous signs. The casting out of demons is also an example of this gift.

Gifts of Healing. This gift effects divine healing in a person's body. The fact that this manifestation is called "gifts" of healing suggests that those

who possess this gift may have special graces to pray for different types of sicknesses. There are abundant examples of this gift operative in the book of Acts (Acts 3:7; 5:16; 8:7; 14:9-10; 28:8-9). Today, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Great Physician, still manifests Himself through this gift for His glory and honor (James 5:15; Mark 16:18). He is still "healing all who have been oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:38).

The Gift of Faith. The gift of faith is a special kind of faith that produces and receives the working of miracles (Gal. 3:5). It is distinct from saving faith and from ordinary faith. Through the gift of faith, the believer may raise the dead, heal the sick, cast out demons, or accomplish some other miraculous work through the power of the Holy Spirit. In short, the gift of faith appropriates the miraculous power of God.

Scripture teaches that faith is required to work miracles (Matt. 17:20; 21:21; Mark 11:22-24; Acts 3:12, 16; Gal. 3:5), and in most cases, to receive them (Matt. 9:20-22; 13:58; Mark 2:1-12; 5:21-43; 10:46-52; Acts 14:9).

While all of these gifts are supernatural, they can be exhibited in a non-flashy, non-attention grabbing way. I've watched these gifts operate in such a manner that they didn't draw attention to the individual using them. In fact, in some cases, many people who witnessed the gift in operation didn't even realize that a supernatural gift was at work. This is because the person operating in it used it in a "normal" and "ordinary" manner...very different from the supercilious pomp and bluster that shrouds them in some movements.

THE EXERCISE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

How does a believer rightly exercise spiritual gifts in a local assembly? The answer to this question depends on whether or not you belong to a church that allows every believer to function and minister in the gatherings (see *Reimagining Church* for details).

If you do not belong to such a church, there will be limited opportunities for you to exercise such gifts. But assuming that you belong to such a church, or will belong to one, the following can be said.

The Bible says that “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every person for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7). That means that the gifts are available to the entire body of Christ. Paul’s exhortation to Corinth was to “eagerly desire the greater gifts” and to “eagerly desire spiritual gifts” so as to edify the church (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1, 39). To eagerly desire the best gifts means to desire those gifts that best edify the church, such as prophecy.

The exercise of spiritual gifts begins with a desire to build up the church. It begins with observing what is most needed in your present fellowship. If some are sick among you, then healing is needed. If the church lacks perceiving God’s present mind or it needs a deeper revelation of Christ, prophecy is needed. If there is a lack of purpose, wisdom is needed. The church is a living organism. It will produce spiritual manifestations by sheer instinct if it is allowed to and if the Spirit’s manifestations are not suppressed or discouraged. This is why Paul exhorts, “Quench not the Spirit” in 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

The exercise of spiritual gifts requires faith (Rom. 12:6). If you are seeking the Lord’s glory, you are looking to edify your brothers and sisters, and you are open to correction (if you make a mistake), you have nothing to fear. Those who hide their talents because of fear will never advance in spiritual service (Matt. 25:25-29). It is more honorable to step out of the boat and sink a few times than to never leave it at all.

At the same time, it is hazardous to imitate the poor examples that have been set before us with respect to how spiritual gifts function. Shouting at the devil at high volume, saying “El Shundai” before a prophetic word, using King James English when speaking in the Lord’s name, telling a person to move to another city for a different job because “The Lord told you,” and pushing people down on the floor are just a few examples that should not be imitated. These are some of the harmful wrappings that have shrouded the true gifts of the Spirit, causing them to appear repulsive.

Such wrappings should be discarded, but the gift that lies underneath them should be accepted.

In short, the manifestation of the Spirit is designed to display the presence of Jesus Christ in the believing community. Through spiritual gifts, spiritual life is supplied to the church and spiritual power is released to accomplish God’s intentions.

Spiritual gifts are the means by which we supply life to one another. To stress gifts over life is to breed confusion and division. But to stress life at the expense of gifts is to suffer loss. We should accept both 2 Corinthians 4 (which emphasizes life) and 1 Corinthians 12-14 (which emphasizes gifts), for both are necessary for expressing the fullness of Christ.

The *charismaniac* over-emphasis on spiritual gifts is one that will detract from Jesus Christ. At the same time, the *charisphobic* position of suppressing them will do the same. Jesus Christ embodies all spiritual things...including spiritual manifestations.

When Jesus is free to express Himself completely and totally...without set prescriptions or restrictions... the manifestations of the Spirit will appear. And the Lord will use them to reveal and impart His unfathomable riches to His people.

COUNTERFEIT SPIRITUALITY

In this chapter, I want to briefly address the problem of counterfeit spirituality. Martin Luther rightly said, “When God builds His house, the devil builds a chapel.”

When God is operating powerfully in a person or group, counterfeit spiritual manifestations will sometimes surface in the group or through people attacking the person or group whom God is using. This has been true historically.

For example, the Welsh Revival of the early 20th century is one of a number of authentic moves of God that was destroyed because people started to accept counterfeit spiritual manifestations.

Consequently, how do you know when the Holy Spirit is operating through someone or what they say is inspired by the Lord? Here are a few guidelines.

When a gift is from the Holy Spirit...

- It points people to Jesus. It glorifies and lifts up Christ. It puts the spotlight on Jesus and causes people to be more excited about Him. The fruit is that they want to follow and love Him more.
- It brings unity and a sense of oneness among true Jesus-followers.
- It causes love for the brethren to rise up and be awakened in the hearts of God’s people.
- It may cause true conviction and repentance if there is a present sin happening (repentance means to stop the sin).
- The person who is walking in the Spirit doesn’t attack those who attack them nor are they defensive under fire.

When a gift is not from the Holy Spirit, but is a counterfeit...

- It will invariably end up producing division and discord among God’s people. “*Things the Lord hates...a false witness that speaks lies, and he who sows discord among brethren* (Prov. 6:19). See my series on Sowing Seeds of Discord to see how this plays out on the ground. Unfortunately, some Christians lack the discernment to recognize when seeds of discord are being sown right in front of them. Dividing a body of believers is like taking a butcher knife to Jesus Christ and cutting Him up into pieces. *It’s very serious*. Paul gives us this image in 1 Corinthians 1.
- It produces confusion, and God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33).
- It is often associated with gossip and slander. The word “devil” means “slanderer.”

Scripture calls him “the accuser of the brethren,” which is a description of his nature. Slandering or accusing a person of things you subjectively “sense” or “feel,” without hard evidence to support it, is sinful. The gift of discerning spirits and the word of knowledge are *not the same* as judging someone’s motives and shouldn’t be confused with it. The latter is sin. Gossip is especially dangerous when cloaked with spiritual language. Such as, “the Lord showed me thus and such about Sally...or John.” According to Proverbs, gossip destroys trust and “separates friends.” This is one of the reasons why God hates it so much.

- It doesn’t put Christ in the spotlight; it rather puts a person or a person’s alleged gift in the spotlight. People who lift themselves up while tearing others down are not operating in a true spiritual gift. They are in the flesh and are operating in a counterfeit.
- It’s not easily entreated, but comes through in a dominating, over-confident, and strong-willed manner. It cannot be questioned or challenged. The person using the “gift” cannot hear correction, even from multiple and credible voices.
- It’s usually motivated by jealousy of others and the desire to be recognized and honored. James makes this quite clear:

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which

comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable [easy to be entreated/ yielding], full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (James 3:13-18)

The common denominator of every church split I have ever seen is a lack of spiritual discernment, judgment, and wisdom in the group.

Specifically: The flesh is at work (1 Cor. 1-3) but some people are calling the work of the flesh the work of the Spirit. And some are calling the work of the Spirit the work of the flesh.

Phil. 1:9-10 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ.

With respect to a local church, if someone speaks with authority (confidence) regarding a decision, the rest of the body has a spiritual obligation to judge it. We are *not* under obligation to follow someone’s opinion. We are under obligation to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. So any statements of direction—whether in the negative or affirmative—given with authority/confidence should be weighed by the rest of the church. Especially if someone feels led to do something, and another says it’s a wrong decision. The New Testament helps us here:

1 Cor. 14:29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.

1 Thess. 5:20-22 Do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.

Heb. 5:14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (The same Greek word that's used for discerning of spirits is used here.)

John 7:24 Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.

1 Cor. 6:5 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide or discern between his brethren.

Phil. 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.

James 4:11 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.

THE ISSUE OF LIFE

God's highest purpose for His people is that they be built together into Christ's image. In an effort to reach this all-inclusive goal, God employs two means: Spiritual life and spiritual gifts.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul makes a useful distinction between life and gift. The main difference between the two lies here: Gifts are used to minister. Life is that which is ministered. Stated simply, gifts are the tools; life is the content. Gifts

are the utensils; life is the substance. Gifts are the instruments; life is the essence.

New Testament ministry is merely the release of Christ's life from one person to another. Each believer has been given a ministry, and each ministry contributes something of Christ to His church and the world. It is for this reason that Paul likens ministry to a function of the physical body—some are eyes, others are hands, others are feet, etc. These different functions in the body of Christ do not represent gifts. They instead represent ministries.

While two believers might operate in the same gift (say prophecy), their ministries may differ (one may be a hand and the other may be an eye). The hand might use the gift of prophecy to emphasize God's eternal purpose. The eye might use the gift of prophecy to reveal something God will do in the coming year. The gift may be the same, while the ministry is different.

Our ministry is that which is unique to us. It constitutes that which we have received specially from the Lord. Ministry rests upon a specific apprehension, or insight, of Jesus Christ that we have received from God. And it is that unique insight that God calls us to contribute to His body and the world.

In the area of New Testament ministry, gifts are simply tools. We use them to impart to others the Christ whom we know. Without Christ, gifts are empty. Still worse, without Christ, gifts are deceptive and misleading. What really matters to the body is not our gifts, but the life of Christ that we convey through them. Again, it is not the gift that counts so much before God, but the thing which is ministered through it.

Regarding spiritual gifts, the two crucial questions that should be asked are, “What knowledge is being conveyed through the gift, and what kind of practical fruit is it bearing?” Good fruit is the fruit of love—which is treating others the way we want to be treated in the same situation. Good fruit is loving Jesus more and loving our fellow brethren more (see 1 John). Good fruit is becoming more like Jesus, the Lamb who was silent under persecution and attack.

These are the core questions we ought to be concerned with whenever we see a gift in operation—whether it be teaching, exhortation, prophecy, preaching, etc. When it comes to spiritual gifts, it is not the noise that matters, but the revelation of Christ that is given and the fruit that is produced.

It is all too common to discover that in groups where “gifts” abound, there is often spiritual immaturity among the saints and little to no unveiling of the Lord Jesus. This is the unfortunate consequence when Christians extol gifts above life. It is the consequence of seeking the Lord’s gifts instead of the Lord Himself. This was the peril of the church in Corinth. That church was rich in gifts, but woefully lacking in spiritual life and maturity.

Therefore, the health and increase of the body of Christ can only come through a ministry of life, not through gifts alone. This is not to suggest that gifts are not needed, for they have their rightful place. But gifts ought never replace or usurp Christ Himself. Moreover, they are never to distract us from Him.

Instead, the true function of spiritual gifts is to make Jesus Christ preeminent and central. Therefore, instead of seeking gifts, it is better to seek the Giver.

Be not deceived. You can only supply to others that which you yourself have received from God (Matt. 10:8; Acts 3:6). When spiritual gifts become the central focus of our attention, Christ takes the backseat.

This has been the tragedy of many assemblies that have emphasized gifts over life. Among such groups, there is an abundance of soulish excitement coupled with an absence of the self-emptying experience of the cross. In this regard, Frank Bartelman, reporter and eyewitness of the Azusa Street Revival of 1907, solemnly warned the church of this danger saying,

The temptation seems to be toward empty manifestations. This does not require any particular cross or death to the self-life. Hence, it is always popular. We may not put power, gifts, the Holy Ghost, or in fact anything ahead of Jesus. Any mission that exalts even the Holy Ghost above the Lord Jesus Christ is bound for the rocks of error and fanaticism. There seems to be a great danger of losing sight of the fact that Jesus is ‘all in all.’ The work of Calvary, atonement, must be the center of our consideration. The Holy Ghost will never draw our attention from Christ to Himself, but rather reveal Christ in a fuller way.

We are in danger of slighting Jesus—getting Him “lost in the Temple,” by the exaltation of the Holy Ghost and of the gifts of the Spirit. Jesus must be the center of everything. The Lord Jesus becomes a stranger among His own people when they give the Holy Spirit preeminence over Him, when they praise Him but will not fellowship with Him, and when they seek His power rather than Him who embodies all spiritual things. Put another way, the upper room should never overshadow the cross or the empty tomb.

In short, the giftings of the Holy Spirit are to do away with self and bring the Lord Jesus into

greater view. If they are not doing that, then there is good reason to question their source. Note that the Spirit does not speak of Himself. Instead, He always speaks of and glorifies Christ (John 15:26; 16:13-14). Thus a person who is filled with the Spirit will be consumed with Jesus.

What, then, is God's way for His people to minister to the body and the world? The answer is simple. First by life, then by gift. New Testament ministry does not lie in seeking gifts, techniques, or methods. The way to ministry lies in seeking Christ. It rests upon receiving a new and fresh revelation of Him to our hearts. Our special knowledge of the Lord Jesus is what constitutes a ministry, and it is through the trial of our faith that we come into this knowledge. When we are tested and tried, when we encounter obstacles and pressures, it is there that we learn something more of our Lord's fullness.

Of course, this will never happen if we resist suffering and always seek to escape it rather than to learn more of Christ through it (see 2 Cor. 12:9-10; 4:7-12). In this connection, Paul writes, "... but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience works experience" (Rom. 5:3-4).

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul compares and contrasts love with spiritual gifts. Love is the nature of spiritual life—it is the governing motive and disposition of God's life. *According to Jesus, love is treating others the same way you want to be treated in every situation.* This "fulfills the Law and the prophets."

Interestingly, when Paul discusses love in connection with gifts, he draws attention to their comparative endurance. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul's stress is on love, not gifts. He points out that it is love that God has bestowed for the

lasting edification of His body. Gifts are the Holy Spirit's *outward expression* in works and words. Love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit's *inward working* in our lives through God's dealings.

Gifts are temporary; love is permanent. To paraphrase Paul, "When all else fails, love remains" (1 Cor. 13:8).

God often employs the wide use of power gifts to begin a new work. But He then expects that new work to grow into something deeper, greater, and richer. This does not mean that the gifts disappear, but they take a less prominent role as the people involved mature from babyhood to adulthood.

The church in Corinth had many gifts, but little spiritual maturity. By contrast, Paul's letter to the Ephesians contains his highest and deepest revelation. In that letter, it is the "gifted men" themselves and not "the gifts" that are his focus. A major difference, then, between spiritual gifts and spiritual life is that of endurance. Gifts may increase or decrease depending on the context and the need. But spiritual life and its outstanding hallmark—love—are to continue throughout eternity.

THE STRANGE FUNCTION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

As I've established, spiritual manifestations are real, important, and they should function in the body today. But they must be held in proper balance.

Interestingly, spiritual gifts operate non-personally. This means that they function regardless of the spiritual stature of the person who functions in them. Gifts can be thought of as an outside

power that God places upon an individual for a specific task.

Accordingly, the Bible gives us many instances where newborn babes and even carnal Christians functioned in powerful gifts (Acts 19:1-6; 1 Cor. 3, 14). God's ultimate purpose, however, is intensely personal. It is not outward, but inward. God's highest aim for His children is the inward formation of Christ within them. It is not the outward manifestation of the Spirit that temporarily abides upon them.

The essence of the gospel is conformity to Christ. The abiding purpose of God is that Christ be formed in us (Rom. 8:28-29; Gal. 4:19). Gifts are called "spiritual" simply because they come from the Holy Spirit, not because the recipients are spiritual people. As I've put it elsewhere, the closer a person is to Jesus, the less self-righteous, the less judgmental, the less harsh, and the less self-absorbed he or she will be.

Samson was one of the most gifted individuals in history (his power was virtually unlimited). Yet Samson was found lacking in character and spiritual understanding. Due to his foolishness, he was of little account to the Lord. He was raised up and gifted to fulfill an immediate purpose and nothing more.

Samson (the judge), Saul (the king), and Balaam (the prophet) are summary witnesses to the fact that the possession of impressive gifts does not insure spiritual maturity. The gifts of God can never be revoked. So a person can live ungodly and still have a power gift operating in their life.

This has been the cause of untold confusion in the church. It is hard to understand how a person can operate in the most extraordinary gifts, yet practice flagrant sin. Such people are eventually

shelved, even though their gifts remain. I've seen this happen to several people over the years. Samson, Saul, and Balaam were eventually put out of commission because of their deficit in spiritual life and character.

So it's a grave mistake to gauge the spirituality of a person by the presence or absence of spiritual gifts. In themselves, gifts are a flimsy basis for a person's usefulness to God. While they do have their value, there is something in God's heart that is far greater—the formation of Christ within one's character. How do they react under attack and persecution? Do they attack back or do they bear the cross and take on the spirit of the Lamb, trusting God to vindicate? Do they believe the worst of others or the best? Are they merciful or self-righteous? Do they lift others up or do they lift themselves up constantly?

A person can be tremendously gifted and still fail here. God's goal is to have Christ's character wrought in us...which is found in the fruit of the Spirit...treating others the way we want to be treated in every situation.

While some people are in love with "spiritual work," God is more interested in what we are than in what we do. He is more concerned with our being rather than in our doing. This does not imply that we are to be quietists and pacifists. It rather means that a person can be busily engaged in spiritual works and in the exercise of spiritual gifts, yet be lacking in any real value to God due to a dearth in spiritual life. In the words of T. Austin-Sparks,

There is a difference between spiritual gifts and spiritual persons. The gifts—what are they? The result of the Spirit coming upon a person. The spiritual person—what is he? He is spiritual as a result of the Spirit forming within. There is a

lot of difference between inward formation and merely outward action.

As the Lord Himself becomes more precious to us, all other things—even spiritual “things” like gifts—become less important as things in themselves. We begin to seek the Lord’s face rather than His hand. And we realize that He is the incarnation of all gifts and graces.

It is interesting to note a significant shift of emphasis in Paul’s letters to the Corinthian church. In 1 Corinthians, Paul lays emphasis on gifts. In 2 Corinthians, he lays emphasis on life. In 1 Corinthians, Paul mentions many gifts and discusses their relative value to the church. But in 2 Corinthians, he is occupied with the subject of ministry and is concerned with the inward formation of Christ.

The “treasure (Christ) in the earthen vessel” is the basis of Paul’s incredibly fruitful ministry and the theme that runs through 2 Corinthians. In Paul’s thought, life is what serves the church and is the very basis of all true ministry. But life can only come out of death (2 Cor. 4:10-12).

The church increases because some are willing to suffer. By allowing God to work through our trials and tribulations—in humble submission to His will—God’s people make it possible for Him to supply His life to others. Paul was intimately acquainted with suffering—especially personal attacks from “false brethren” who were jealous of him.

While gifts are good, they can never make up for the deficiencies that we have as servants of God. Let me give an illustration. Suppose there is a brother and a sister in Christ who equally love the Lord. The brother is a gifted teacher, while the sister displays no particular gift at all. The brother is able to understand and expound the

Scriptures, to express himself clearly, and to communicate wonderful illustrations.

As great as his gift is, however, he does not impart life to his hearers. Instead, he leaves them empty and cold. On the other hand, the sister, although outwardly ungifted, leaves a permanent and lasting impression on all who come in contact with her. When she shares with others freely out of her heart, the Holy Spirit breathes His life into them. She leaves them refreshed, enlightened, and encouraged. When people listen to her, they meet life. They touch Christ. What is the difference? The difference lies with the inward formation of life rather than with outward gifts.

God builds His church by gifts and life. Gifts are the tools, life is the substance. Consequently, gifts are not to be parted with. But to consider them to be the height of spirituality is to think as a child in spiritual things (1 Cor. 13:11). What is most prized in God’s estimate is the inward knowledge of His Son. And it is through His sovereign dealings with us that we acquire this inward knowledge. The knowledge of the risen Christ is the basis of all productive functioning in the body of Christ and in the world.

Gifts are necessary, but they are not a mark of maturity. And they are never to be an occasion for boasting. When gifts are displayed properly, they establish faith. But as we mature spiritually, our dependence upon them for faith decreases.

THE PROBLEM WITH LABELS

Over the last four decades, a heated controversy has raged in the church over the question

of spiritual gifts. It has been my experience that much of the disagreement among believers regarding spiritual gifts often finds its basis in a conflicting conversational style. That is to say, two believers may actually have similar beliefs and experiences regarding the gifts, but because they use different theological jargon, they mistakenly conclude that their beliefs and experiences are worlds apart. I liken this phenomenon to that of medicine and medicine labels.

Suppose, for example, that your doctor prescribes a certain medicine for a stomach disorder from which you suffer. Through a careless mistake, the medicine is labeled improperly. Instead of labeling it “Senna,” as it should be, the medicine bottle is mislabeled “Sopor.” Not knowing the difference, you take the medicine and it aids in your recovery. Yet when you tell others how this medicine (Sopor) has helped you, they are dumfounded because Sopor does not relieve stomach problems.

Now shift the scenario. Suppose that your doctor tells you that you need to begin taking Valium. When you receive the prescription, you are given the wrong medicine—it’s actually Ritalin. Regrettably, the label reads “Valium.” The consequences would be disastrous. You, in effect, would be deceived by the label, thinking you were ingesting a certain medication when in fact you were taking something else.

This analogy is an apt metaphor for the conversational barriers that often bring confusion to discussions about spiritual gifts. The medicine is analogous to the gifts, while the label is analogous to how we describe and define them.

Oftentimes, Christians will actually have tasted the same medicine. But because one is using a Pentecostal label and the other is using a Reformed

label to describe their experience, confusion and marginalization over the issue are the net effects. At the same time, just because a person may use biblical language to describe his or her experience does not insure that the experience is valid. The label can be correct and the medicine wrong. Let me pose an example to illustrate how this fleshes out. Suppose Pete and Roger are carrying on a dialogue about the gift of prophecy. Pete is a Pentecostal. Roger is Reformed.

Pete believes the gift of prophecy exists today and claims to have it. Pete describes his gift with a Pentecostal label. Thus his explanation of the gift is punctuated with expressions like “revelation,” “thus saith the Lord,” “God told me,” “I felt led,” “God showed me,” etc. Roger believes that “divine revelation” is no longer given to the church and that the gift of prophecy ceased with the closing of the New Testament canon. Pete shares with Roger that he has given people “personal prophecies.”

In describing these experiences, Pete uses the King James expression “thus saith the Lord.” When Roger asks Pete about the content of these “prophecies,” he discovers that they were mainly general exhortations and had no real impact on the people Pete delivered them to.

Roger is both skeptical and turned-off by this. You see, Roger rejects Pentecostal theology. And he does not employ standard charismatic jargon to describe his experiences. But he does have a vital relationship with God. In addition, Roger often receives “thoughts” and “burdens” to exhort, challenge, and direct others in their walk with God. He also senses things about people that go beyond his natural reasoning powers.

In one instance, Roger was awakened from sleep one night to write a letter to a friend who had left

the Lord. After prayerfully writing the letter, he mailed it the next day. When his friend received the letter, he notified Roger and told him that it was exactly what he needed to hear. As a result, Roger's friend was restored to the Lord.

Roger was exercising the genuine gift of prophecy through his letter (1 Cor. 14:3, 24-25), but he feels uncomfortable using the word "prophecy" to describe it. Because Roger fails to describe the letter with the charismatic accents that mark Pete's description of prophecy, it never occurs to Pete that Roger has in fact prophesied by the Spirit of God.

The fact of the matter is that Roger has operated in the gift of prophecy. But because of his Reformed doctrine concerning the gifts, Roger fails to call it by that label.

On the other hand, while Pete may use the correct label when describing the gift (prophecy), he does not own the true medicine himself. Instead, Pete appears to have substituted his own good intentions, ideas, and zeal with the genuine gift of prophecy. In a word, Roger has tasted the correct medicine, but he has used the wrong label. Pete has tasted the wrong medicine, but has used the right label.

This illustration demonstrates how disagreements over the miraculous gifts of the Spirit are often rooted in varying conversational styles. The principle of the medicine and the medicine label lies at the root of many other controversies regarding Christian experience. Such divergent labels that are commonplace are as follows:

"The baptism of the Holy Ghost" vs. "the fullness or empowering of the Spirit." "Illumination" or "spiritual insight" vs. "revelation." "Faith healing" vs. "divine healing." "Delivering a message"

vs. "bringing a word from the Lord." Feeling "burdened" or "exercised" vs. being "led." "Following a spiritual instinct" vs. "following the Spirit." Having an "unction" vs. having "an anointing." "Ministering life" vs. "giving Christ" or "bringing the Lord."

These are some of the semantic differences that Christians have when describing spiritual experiences. The common mistake of confusing the label with the medicine ought to urge us to re-evaluate the language we use when discussing supernatural phenomena and spiritual experiences. Rather than hone in on the specific rhetoric that one employs, it's wiser to seek to hear and understand the reality of another's experience—realizing that the person may describe it in a way that is foreign (and sometimes irritating) to our ears. As we seek to do this, we can better learn Jesus Christ from one another.

Note: I sketch out the three major spiritual conversational styles that Christians use in *Revise Us Again*.

POST-CHARISMATIC

I am often asked what I believe about "the gifts of the Spirit." My typical answer is that I believe in them...all of them. However, I believe in and practice them without the classic charismatic packages and Pentecostal wrappings.

To put it another way, I'm a charismatic who bowls with the guard rails down! When it comes to the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, I'm a bumper bowler. (The guard rails, of course, are the Scriptures.)

A large chunk of my life in the institutional church was spent in charismatic circles. About sixteen years ago, however, I came into an experience of the Spirit's work and power that looked nothing like what I had seen in any charismatic or Pentecostal church to which I belonged or visited. For me, it was a new experience of the Spirit. One that was less artificial, less contrived, and less centered on the Spirit Himself. Rather, it was an experience that was authentic, pure, and centered on the Lord Jesus Christ.

For this reason, I am neither a cessationist (those who believe that some spiritual gifts have ceased) nor a charismatic (those who emphasize spiritual gifts). Instead, I consider myself to be a *post-charismatic*.

I believe John Wimber was the first to use this term. Lee Grady, editor of Charisma magazine, estimated that in 1990 there were as many as 92 million people who described themselves as post-charismatic. In more recent times, Rob McAlpine has been writing thoughtfully on the subject. I owe parts of my definition of "post-charismatic" to him and Wimber.

When I say that I'm a post-charismatic (or neo-charismatic), I mean the following:

I believe that the authentic gifts of the Holy Spirit are still operative in the church today. Not only do I believe in them, but I've experienced them. However, I also believe that the artificial wrappings that have been attached to them should be discarded. For they distract us from Christ.

I believe that being "Spirit-filled" cannot be narrowly defined to refer exclusively to those people who have demonstrated one particular spiritual gift at some particular point in their life. On that score, I had a particular experience with the Holy Spirit in

1983. Some would say that I was "filled with the Spirit" because of it. However, I would argue that I was filled with the Spirit before then as well as many times afterward (see Acts 2:4, 8, 4:31; Acts 9:17; 13:9, 52; Ephesians 5:18-20).

I've grown tired of the excesses and abuses that many modern charismatics have fallen prey to in both practice and teaching. These excesses and abuses go way back to when the movement was spawned. It's one of the birth defects that Pentecostalism was born with.

I'm against humanly-engineered hype and pulpit showmanship and calling it "the moving of the Spirit." Perhaps you've seen this before. You pour in the right prayers, sing the right songs with the right fervor, turn the crank, and "the Spirit's moving" comes out of the bottom.

I'm leery of "personal prophecies" that justify ridiculous practices, ludicrous decisions, and fly in the face of Spirit-inspired wisdom.

I cast a skeptical eye on the exaggerated and sometimes fabricated stories of the miraculous. That includes the puffing up of numbers when healings or saved souls are calculated. (I've discovered that if a Pentecostal/charismatic reports a figure of souls saved or sicknesses healed, you would be wise to cut it in half and divide by two. Typically, that will yield the accurate number.)

I'm against the elitist attitude among some who purport to possess spiritual gifts.

I'm against views of the Spirit that end up dividing believers into the "haves" and the "have nots"—those who have had a particular experience and those who have not.

I'm against forcing the exercise of spiritual gifts on God's people.

I'm against those doctrines that promote seeking wealth and material prosperity from God at the expense of caring for the poor and relieving the sufferings of the oppressed.

I'm opposed to the idea that spiritual transformation normally takes place in one-time miraculous encounters rather than by a long-term process of being conformed to Christ's image by the instrument of His cross.

I'm against using the Holy Spirit and His gifts to make human beings the center of the universe.

I'm against promoting an intoxication with the restoration of the gifts of the Spirit. (The only thing worth being intoxicated with is Jesus Christ.)

I'm critical of the legalism that was born into the bloodstream of the Pentecostal movement and later infiltrated some aspects of the charismatic mind.

I'm skeptical of any activity, natural or supernatural, that claims to be a work of the Holy Spirit if it doesn't bring attention to the Lord Jesus.

*I believe that the real fruit of prayer is not spiritual insight, spiritual revelation, or spiritual encounter, but the transformation of character. To my mind, the product of real prayer is what Ignatius of Loyola called the *instrumentum conjunctum cum Deo* (an instrument shaped to the contours of the hand of God).*

I believe that spiritual maturity is not the ability to see the extraordinary, but the ability to see the ordinary through God's eyes. Consequently, no matter how wonderful our experience or encounter is with God, the test of its worth is in the fruit it bears in our lives and the lives of others.

Consequently, I believe in the operation of the Holy Spirit, but without the artificial wrappings. The

reason is simple. To my mind, these wrappings are often artificial, learned by imitation, and detract us from the reality and centrality of Jesus Christ. So while I'm post-charismatic, I'm certainly not post-Holy Spirit.

If we need a restoration of the Holy Spirit today, it's a restoration of His pure and undefiled working. That's my opinion, anyway.

So if I'm against all of the above, what am I for? *I'm for the centrality, supremacy, and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

To my mind, the Holy Spirit has but one job. It's to reveal, to make known, to magnify, to glorify, to make central and supreme the Lord Jesus Christ, and to transform us into His glorious image.

Oh, and if you're new to the series and you think I'm shortchanging the gifts, please read the whole series. You'll see that I'm a strong advocate of and a champion to the idea that spiritual manifestations are operative in the body of Christ today.

A CAUTION FROM THE PAST

The following is another revealing quote by Frank Bartleman. Bartleman was part of the Azusa street revival that gave birth to the modern Pentecostal/charismatic movement in the early 1900s. To my mind, his words were prophetic and ahead of their time. He foresaw the dangers of co-opting Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit. He wrote,

“In the beginning of the Pentecostal work, I became very much exercised in the Spirit that Jesus should not be slighted, ‘lost in the

temple,' by the exaltation of the Holy Ghost and of the gifts of the Spirit.

There seemed to be a great danger of losing sight of the fact that Jesus was 'all in all.' I endeavored to keep Him as the central theme and figure before His people. Jesus will always be the center of our preaching. All comes through and in Him. The Holy Spirit was given to 'show the things of Christ.' The work of Calvary, the atonement, must be the center for our consideration. The Holy Ghost will never draw our attention from Christ to Himself, but rather reveal Christ in a fuller way. We are in the same danger today. There is nothing deeper nor higher than to know Christ.

Everything is given by God to that end. The 'one Spirit' is given to that end. Christ is our salvation and our all. That we might know 'the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ' (Ephesians 3:18-19), 'having a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him' (Ephesians 1:17). It was 'to know Him (Christ),' for which Paul strove... We may not even hold a doctrine, or seek an experience, except in Christ. Many are willing to seek power from every battery they can lay their hands on in order to perform miracles, draw attention and adoration of the people to themselves, thus robbing Christ of His glory and making a fair showing in the flesh... Religious enthusiasm easily goes to seed. The human spirit so predominates the show-off, religious spirit. But we must stick to our text—Christ. He alone can save.

The attention of the people must first of all, and always, be held to Him... Any work that exalts the Holy Ghost or the gifts of the Spirit above Jesus will finally end up in fanaticism. Whatever causes us to exalt and love Jesus is well and safe. The reverse will ruin all. The Holy Ghost is a great light, but will always be focused on Jesus for His revealing." (Frank Bartleman, *Another Wave of Revival*, Springdale: Whitaker House, 1982, pp. 94-96)

One of the churches I planted taught me a great lesson on this score. Their meetings were completely open, participatory, and indelibly centered on Jesus Christ. They had no building. No clergy. No set order of worship.

Each member would share his or her experience and insight into Christ as a result of seeking Him the week beforehand. That church had a steady flux of visitors. Most of these visitors would remark, "All they talk about is Christ. They seem to have a deep experience of the indwelling of Jesus."

One particular Sunday, a couple of Pentecostals visited the church. When the meeting was over, they sat with some of the brothers and asked, "How come you guys don't ever talk about the Holy Spirit? All you talk about is Christ." One of the young men who was in his early 20's answered with wisdom that exceeded his years. He said, "Well, maybe it's because the Holy Spirit only speaks about one thing—Jesus Christ."

I was not present for that meeting; the story was rehearsed to me. But it is one I shall never forget. If you wish to determine if a person is full of the Holy Spirit, listen to his words and watch his life. As far as his words go, he will have but one obsession. It will be Christ. And his life will match his words. He won't be perfect by any means. Nor will he be above making mistakes. But he will exhibit a spirit of kindness, honesty, and an inclusive openness to all of God's children—the outstanding marks of Christ's character.

A while back a friend of mine was perplexed about a certain minister whom he had sat under for years.

He said, "Frank, I don't understand. This man's message was Christ-centered. He talked a lot

about Christ. But as I got to know him personally, I discovered that he lied constantly, he ridiculed and demeaned others, he was always jealous of other people whom God anointed, he was sectarian and highly egotistical. He also hurt many people even though he preached against hurting Christians. I don't understand it."

My response was simple. A person is not Christ-centered just because he or she preaches the centrality of Christ. If they contradict the nature of Jesus by their character (their consistent, patterned behavior), they are not Christ-centered despite the rhetoric they parade.

Let me pass on a word of advice. If you ever hit a fork in the road with the people with whom you church, there's one sure way that the Lord will get what He wants. Drop whatever is causing the problem, and let it go into death.

There is nothing that we must cling to except for the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing. So let that other thing that your group is dividing over go into death. Give it up, and watch what the Lord can do.

This is the principle of death and resurrection. Whenever we place something into death, if it was born of Christ to begin with, it will return again. It will come forth out of the ground. But when it comes forth, it will always look different from what it looked like before it went into death.

Everything looks different in resurrection.

A group of Christians that I was a part of did this very thing with respect to our initial differences about the Holy Spirit. The result: the gifts of the Spirit operated in a very natural, unassuming way. There was no grandstanding or bluster. It was truly organic—out of life. We had learned

the lesson of stripping down to Christ alone. Somehow I believe that's what the Lord desires when it comes to the work of His Spirit in the earth today.

RETHINKING THE FIVE-FOLD MINISTRY

I'm often asked: "Frank, do you believe in 'the five-fold ministry'? And do you believe that God is restoring it today?" In this chapter, I will attempt to answer that question.

First off, my answer is largely hinged on what one means by "the five-fold ministry." In other words, what "five-fold ministry" are we talking about? Are we talking about the two-hundred-year old doctrine of the restoration of "the five-fold ministry?" Or are we talking about the ascension gifts that Paul had in mind when he penned Ephesians 4:9–16?

The Making of a Doctrine

In nineteenth-century England, Christians were ripe to embrace apocalyptic prophecies about the coming Millennial Age. The upheaval that the French Revolution produced left God's people wishing for a reign of peace that would set all things right.

In 1824, Edward Irving, a Presbyterian pastor in Scotland, began teaching that "the five-fold ministry" of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers had disappeared from the church and was in need of restoration. According to Irving, the restoration of these ministries would usher in the millennial kingdom of Christ on the earth.

Irving and his followers began the Catholic Apostolic Church in 1832. Its chief purpose was to restore “the five-fold ministry” and usher in the millennial kingdom. The Church ordained twelve “apostles” who were to be the last day’s equivalent of the original Twelve whom Jesus appointed. Henry Drummond, a wealthy banker from England, became the leader of the Church. Drummond himself took the highest position—“apostle to Scotland.”

It was prophesied that these “twelve apostles” would be the last apostles to appear on earth before Christ’s return. (This is a throwback to Mani of Persia of the third century who labeled himself the “Apostle of Light”—the very last apostle of Jesus.)

Eventually the twelve apostles of the Catholic Apostolic Church died (the last one dying in 1901). Upon their death, the Church expired in England. In Germany, however, the Catholic Apostolic Church ordained twelve more apostles and took the name the “New Apostolic Church.”

In 1896, an erstwhile Congregational minister named John Alexander Dowie founded the Christian Catholic Church. In 1901, with five thousand followers, Dowie established the “City of Zion” in northeast Illinois. In 1904, Dowie announced that he had been divinely commissioned to be the “First Apostle.” He then told his followers to anticipate the full restoration of apostolic Christianity. In 1906, the community of believers in the City of Zion began to break down. Dowie passed away the following year.

Following the famed Azusa Street revival in 1906 in Los Angeles, California, the emphasis on the restoration of “the five-fold ministry” and “a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit just before the return of Christ” reappeared. And a new

generation of apostles emerged. Luigi Francescon (“apostle to Italy”), Ivan Voronaev (“apostle to the Slavs”), and T.B. Barratt (“apostle to Europe”) were just some of them.

Pentecostal denominations in Wales, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States elected and ordained colleges of apostles to govern their denominations.

As the years rolled on, the restoration of “the five-fold ministry” doctrine somewhat faded. But it reemerged again with a revival spawned at Sharon Orphanage in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada in 1948. The “New Order of the Latter Rain” movement, as it was called, was prophesied to restore “the five-fold ministry” to prepare for “the manifestation of the sons of God” on the earth.

But when the waters of revival receded, the restoration of “the five-fold ministry” doctrine faded again until it was resuscitated in the charismatic movement of the late 1960s. In the late 70s, the doctrine’s flame began to dim again until a group of men resurrected it with new fervor in the mid-1990s.

In 1996, Peter Wagner led a conference at Fuller Theological Seminary entitled, *The National Symposium on the “Post-Denominational Church.”* This conference produced a new movement called the “New Apostolic Movement,” which Wagner claims is sweeping the globe with a new way of doing church. The churches that are part of this movement are being labeled “New Apostolic Churches.”

In 1999, Wagner sought to organize the movement under the name “International Coalition of Apostles” with Wagner as the “Presiding Apostle.”

The movement claims to be restoring “the five-fold ministry” today.

Parenthetically, the churches in the new apostolic movement are vanilla charismatic institutional churches replete with the office of modern pastor (often renamed “apostle”), Sunday sermons, pulpit, pews, church buildings, the five hundred year-old order of worship, music led by a worship team, etc. (See *Pagan Christianity* for the origin of these religious practices.)

Point: The doctrine of the restoration of “the five-fold ministry” is over 180 years old. And it’s been repackaged from movement to movement.

Running the Cart Over the Horse

So is God going to restore “the five-fold ministry”? To my mind, that’s the wrong question. It’s pushing the cart before the horse. The ascension gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4 are gifted people whom God gives to the body of Christ as gifts. They are the natural outgrowth and by-product of organic church life.

All in all, there are twenty gifts mentioned in the New Testament. If a group of believers gathers around Jesus Christ alone (rather than a doctrine, a theological system, or a ritual)—and they are void of a clergy system—then that group will eventually produce all the gifts and gifted ones that exist within the body of Christ.

It’s no mistake that Paul uses the human physical body as an apt image to describe the way the body of Christ functions. When a baby girl is born, most of her physical capabilities are not present. She can’t ride a bicycle, add and subtract numbers, or eat with a fork and knife.

However, within her body, she possesses the genetic codes that will produce the physical development by which to carry out these capabilities. If she is fed and nurtured properly, in time, these abilities will naturally develop within her. She will organically grow into them. Why? Because they are organic to her species as a human being. They are the product of human life.

In the same way, when an organic church is born, it possesses within its spiritual DNA all the giftings that are in Jesus Christ. But it takes time for them to develop and emerge. (Unfortunately, we live in a day when many church leaders don’t seem to understand this spiritual principle. Hence, they try to force the exercise of gifts and ministries in the body prematurely.)

What is needed, then, is not a restoration of the so-called “five-fold ministry.” What’s needed is the restoration of organic church life. And that is what God is seeking to restore today as He has in every generation.

Therefore, if we can discover how a church is born from God’s perspective and how it is to be nurtured and maintained, then we will see a restoration of all the gifts that are in Christ *in the way* that they were meant to be expressed. (For a detailed discussion on how churches were planted and sustained in the New Testament, see *Finding Organic Church*.)

Since I’ve been meeting in organic churches over the last twenty years, I’ve made a startling discovery: The gifts of the Holy Spirit function very differently in an organic expression of the church than they do in the typical institutional church. The gift of prophecy, for example, that comes up out of the soil of authentic body life looks profoundly different from the way it’s packaged in

the typical Pentecostal/charismatic church. (The latter is often based on imitating others.)

In the 1980s, I was part of a spontaneous expression of organic church life. Most of us who were gathering at that time came from the Pentecostal/charismatic tradition. We functioned freely in spiritual gifts as they were modeled to us by that tradition. A number of years later a group whose background was anti-Pentecostal/charismatic joined us, and we had a first-class dilemma on our hands.

After a blood-letting church split, the Lord graciously showed us that both groups needed to lay down their beliefs and practice of spiritual gifts and leave them at the foot of the cross. Though it was difficult, we let our ideas and practice of the gifts go into death.

In a year's time, something remarkable happened. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were resurrected in our gatherings. However, they looked very different from what any of us had ever seen before. The Pentecostal/charismatic packaging was utterly stripped away. And what was left was a pure expression of the Holy Spirit that glorified, unveiled, and lifted up the Lord Jesus Christ. As a result, the two groups came into a unified experience of the Holy Spirit's power and work.

Consequently, the pressing question is: Are we going to get serious about discovering how to gather around Jesus Christ in an organic way? Or are we going to blithely ignore New Testament principle and for the next two hundred years continue to hope (and prophesy) that "the five-fold ministry" will one day be restored?

Again, God's way of raising up the ascension gifts is by restoring organic body life. The ascension gifts don't magically appear because someone writes a book prophesying that they're just

around the corner. Nor should we assume that they have been restored when someone claims to be the "First," the "Last," or the "New" Apostle.

Authentic apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherd-teachers are gifted people who grow up in organic churches—not as leaders, but as brethren—equal in status to everyone else in the church. Because they have grown up out of the soil of authentic church life, they have been tested and proven to be safe to the kingdom of God and to the Lord's children. Their outstanding landmark is that they glorify, reveal, present, magnify, and bring into clear view the Lord Jesus Christ in unusual depths and practical experience.

This is the heritage of the Ephesians 4 ascension gifts. It was true for all the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds/teachers in the first century. And Jesus Christ has not changed (Heb. 13:8).

The Peril of a Wrong Environment

So what happens when gifted Christians are reared in a human organization built on unbiblical systems rather than growing up naturally in an organic expression of the body of Christ? To put it another way, what happens when a gifted Christian's only experience is in the modern institutional church?

The answer? Mixture with a capital M.

Add to that a footnote: Malfunction.

What happens when you remove polar bears out of their natural habitat? If they survive (and some do not), they cannot function as God designed. They lose their ability to reproduce.

What happens when lions are caged and domesticated from birth? They lose their predatory and

killer instincts. They lose something of the natural functioning with which God wired them.

Over the past decade, I've met scores of men who were self-proclaimed prophets and apostles. Some were genuinely gifted. Some had the gift of teaching. Others had authentic gifts of healing. Others had a genuine operation of the word of knowledge.

But most lacked any real depth in Christ and very little experience in embracing His cross. And few of them grasped God's eternal purpose or witnessed real, thriving, healthy organic church life.

Why is this? Because of the institution that raised them up. Or, in some cases, because they raised themselves up in isolation from other Christians. (The latter is an equally abnormal environment for a Christian to be nurtured in.)

To put it in a sentence, such men didn't grow up in their proper habitat. Few if any of them grew up in organic body life where they were simply brothers among other brothers. Few if any spent any time in a New Testament expression of church life where their weaknesses and blindspots were exposed to others. Instead, most were part of several institutional churches and launched out into independent ministry on their own. As Watchman Nee once observed, "The tragedy in Christian work today is that so many of the workers have simply gone out, they have not been sent."

The New Testament never envisions such a situation.

To place my concern into a question, where are the churches that the "new apostles" have planted that are gathering under the headship of Jesus Christ without a clergy, where the members

know one another deeply and are experiencing a depth in Christ—where decisions are made by consensus, and where every member functions in the meetings without any man controlling, directing, facilitating, or dominating?

Still more disappointing, every titled "apostle" in the new apostolic movement that I know of fiercely defends those church practices that are rooted in pagan tradition and have been hindering the headship of Jesus Christ and the full functioning of His body for the last eighteen hundred years. For these reasons, I'm monumentally unimpressed with the "new apostolic movement."

What Are the Ascension Gifts?

When the ascension gifts emerge organically in a local assembly, their chief function is to nurture and encourage the believing community toward spiritual maturity in Christ, unity, and every-member functioning.

I will now try to demystify the so-called "five-fold ministry" and discuss how each of the ascension gifts probably functioned in the first century:

Apostles. Apostles were extra-local, traveling, itinerant church planters. They were highly gifted individuals who were sent by the Lord and by a particular church to plant and equip new churches. Apostles enabled the church by giving it birth, raising it up from the ground. They also helped it walk on its own two feet. Apostles grew up in an organic expression of church life as non-leaders before they were sent out to plant churches of the same kind. *In other words, they first experienced what they would later establish elsewhere.* And they always left the churches they planted on their own without installing a clergy or religious ritual.

Prophets. Prophets were people who had a clear vision of Jesus Christ, and who were able to articulate it lucidly. Prophets enabled the church by speaking the present word of the Lord to it. Sometimes their words would simply reveal Christ, to encourage, inspire, and comfort. Other times their words would cast spiritual vision. Prophets sought to restore God's will whenever it had been lost. They sometimes confirmed the gifts and callings of other members and prepared the church for future trials.

Evangelists. Evangelists enabled the church by modeling the preaching of the good news to the lost. They were fearless souls who possessed an extraordinary boldness to share Christ with non-believers. And they had a genuine passion for the unsaved. The closest equivalent to an evangelist today is a natural-born salesman (an honest one of course).

Shepherd-teachers. Shepherd-teachers refer to two sides of the same gift. In Ephesians 4:11, the apostles, prophets, and evangelists are mentioned separately, while shepherds and teachers are joined together. Further, the first three ministries (apostles, prophets, and evangelists) are preceded by the word "some." But the word "some" is attached to shepherds and teachers together. This indicates that shepherds/teachers are one gift.

The chief task of the shepherds/teachers was to help the church in times of personal crisis (shepherding) and to enlighten and cultivate the church's spiritual life by revealing Christ through the exposition of Scripture (teaching). Shepherding was the private side of their ministry; teaching was the public side. The closest equivalent to a first-century shepherd/elder is a modern-day Christian counselor who is capable of teaching.

None of the ascension gifts dominated the meetings of the church. They were simply brothers and sisters in the body carrying out certain functions. Every other member functioned in the gatherings and in the community-life of the church. In that connection, you would never see a first-century Christian sporting titles like "Apostle Delaquarius Epps," "Prophetess Pamela Jones," or "Evangelist Tarianna Dunson." As I've established elsewhere, the use of honorific titles and offices were unknown to the early Christians.

Answering the Call

The burden of my heart is to see God's people far less concerned with a "five-fold ministry" that's supposed to be recovered someday and instead, focus their attention on discovering what the church is supposed to be according to the mind of God. Upon making this discovery, the Lord's dear people will be faced with a decision. To answer the call of meeting around Jesus Christ alone in the way that He has prescribed. Or to remain chained to the unmovable traditions of men.

If the former path is taken, it will involve considerable cost. But all the giftings in Christ will eventually come forth in the way that He has designed, organically. And those gifts will never usurp or dilute the ministry of the entire body.

Would to God that all men and women who feel called to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd-teachers would soberly reexamine what these ministries were in the first century and in the thought of God. I believe that when this happens, many of them will be led into brand new directions. And those directions will undoubtedly lead them to break with cherished traditions and popular concepts. Yet only by these elements will the house of God begin to be restored on a broad scale.