

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Faith, phobias and fantasies

by

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Introduction

...the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Cor.13:14

If we have fellowship with the Holy Spirit, the more we understand him, the better the fellowship. A study of his person, power and gifts will help us *walk by the Spirit* as the apostle Paul urges us to do. (Galatians 5:16)

More controversy about the Holy Spirit exists today than any other period in church history. How do we answer questions that inevitably arise?

A study of everything about the Holy Spirit would take volumes. As a minister with a focus on Latin America, I will emphasize issues relevant to that context.

In the study of the Holy Spirit, theologians use the term *pneumatology*, from the Greek *pneuma*, “spirit”.

Controversy

Part Two deals with hot topics. With the emergence of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, debates about the workings of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts have come to the forefront.

We will examine three of the most controversial gifts: Prophecy, healing and tongues. The author holds to a moderate view: Spiritual gifts exist today but not with the same frequency or purposes as in the apostolic age.

Although this bias is evident, the author attempts to present other views as heard from their exponents. Students are free to disagree without effect on their grade.

Inferential logic

Certain important biblical themes lack a direct discourse in Scripture, such as the Trinity or even some of the data on the deity of Christ. We infer the truth from clues in discussions of other topics. We call this “inferential logic,” meaning we draw conclusions by gathering data on the subject. If the evidence is sufficient, the conclusion is as valid as though stated in plain language.

So with pneumatology. We gather data about the Holy Spirit from things he does to people in the Bible, along with comments from apostles about him in the context of the spiritual welfare of believers and the growth of the church.

PART ONE: WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Chapter 1: His place in the Trinity

The Holy Spirit is a conscious being, who thinks, speaks, guides, leads, rebukes, and inspires.

In understanding the Trinity, God the Father wants us to think in certain terms we call *attributes*. For example, the Father and the Son are no less holy than the Holy Spirit. These designations help us understand God's activity in his plan of salvation. God the Father rules, the Son purchases our salvation, and the Holy Spirit applies it. In creation, the Father is the architect, the Son is the builder, and the Holy Spirit breathes life into it. Yet we see a constant overlapping of attributes and activities throughout Scripture.

The Holy Spirit is not a mystical non-intelligent force as some teach.

Ontological vs Economic

The ontological Trinity deals with how the members relate to each other. It also deals with essence, authority, and attributes. The term comes from the Greek *ontos*, "being." What are the members of the Trinity in their "being"? Are they of the *same* essence? Do they have *equal* authority?

False cults are quickly identified by the above questions. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the Holy Spirit is a mystical, impersonal force emanating from the Father. This is a denial of his eternal nature as well as his equality in authority with the Father.

The ontological approach also emphasizes the oneness of God. There is one God, not three. This seems counterintuitive, but it is mathematically sound. Example: $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$. No matter how many times the number one is multiplied by itself, the answer is always one. Therefore, the idea of three in one and one in three, without each being a third of the whole, is logically sound.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Deut.6:4 (ESV)¹

The economic Trinity addresses how the members relate to us, especially with regard to the salvation of the elect. The Father sends the Son to pay the cost of salvation, and the Holy Spirit applies it to the believer. These roles are distinct, though overlapping, so that by their very nature they require a hierarchy of authority.

Equal in authority: The Son and the Holy Spirit are subordinate to the Father in regard to their functions. This refers only to function, not personhood. [John 5:18](#) ; [Philippians 2:6](#)

The Son is eternally engendered by the Father; begotten, not made. ([John 1:18](#); [Romans 1:3](#)) The continuous present participle is used in Greek in Romans 1:3, *genomenou*. This means he is not a created being and is not inferior to the Father.

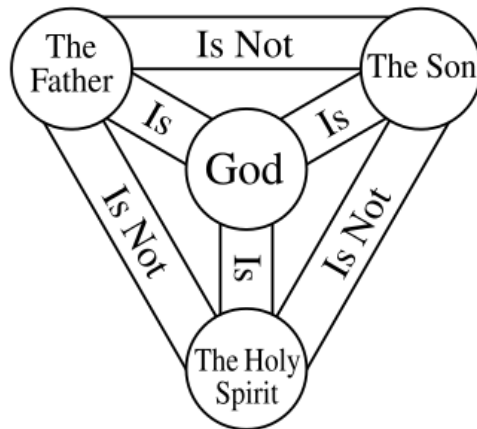
Louis Berkhof explains this by saying that the relationship between the first person and the second person is like the relationship between the sun and the light that the sun produces. Without the sun, there is no light. But without emanation of light, the sun would not be the sun. ²

Looking at the Trinity from these two perspectives simultaneously keeps our theology in balance. Heresies regarding the Trinity stem from imbalances in the ontological-economic perspective. The parallel of unity versus diversity is probably the best approach for our limited understanding. This helps us see the place of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity.

Historic orthodox view

The Athanasian Creed, named for the fourth-century bishop Athanasius, was written around the fifth century and has been adopted by Catholics and Protestants as the best expression of the Trinity.

The doctrine of the Trinity balances two extremes. God is one in essence, but three in person. Each member of the Trinity is equal in power, dignity, and authority. Yet each member is not one-third of the whole. The “shield” of the Athanasian creed depicts it well:



[Chapter 2: Fallacies and fantasies](#)

Anthropomorphism: From the Greek *anthropos*= man; *morphos*= form. This view pictures God as an enormous being in the form of a man. Such thinking is normal for children because their cognitive development lacks the ability to handle abstractions such as infinity or eternity. In mature Christians, this is inappropriate, although it is surprising how many think in such terms. It is important for teachers to remove this concept from the believer, because it will later distort other doctrines.

Answer: An effective way to undermine anthropomorphism is to teach that God is infinite and therefore cannot have a body. Infinity cannot have limitations by the very nature of the term. It is impossible for a body to be omnipresent. [Psa. 139:8](#)

Tri-theism: That God is made up of three gods in close cooperation with one another. This error is held by Mormonism.

Answer: Show verses declaring there is no other God but one. [Deut.6:4](#), [1 Cor. 8:4](#)

Modalism: The view that God is one person but manifests himself from time to time as different persons. Sometimes he manifests himself as Father, then another time as the Son and then again perhaps as the Holy Spirit. This heresy was invented by Sabelius in Egypt around 250 A.D. and is sometimes called Sabellianism. It was declared a heresy by various church councils of the third and fourth centuries.

Answer: Show how the members of the Trinity sometimes speak to each other. For example in Hebrews Chapter 1, we see God the Father addressing the Son as God and repeatedly using the pronoun “you.”

Jesus only: That Jesus is God and there is no Father nor Holy Spirit. The words Father and Holy Spirit are actually manifestations of Jesus in different roles.

Answer: This heresy is refuted by such texts as [1John 2:22,23](#). Notice the phrase, *the Father and the Son*. In the Greek, the article *the* appears before both nouns, implying a distinction of persons. If John meant that the Son is really the Father, with no distinction of persons, he would eliminate the definite article *the*, before the word *Son*. This would make it grammatically the Granville-Sharp rule, meaning “the Father who is the Son.” Notice the vehement terms John uses to describe those who deny this relationship between the Father and the Son: Liars and antichrists.

Unitarianism: The view that God is one person and there is no Trinity. According to this concept, Jesus was not God incarnate, but merely a man inspired by God.

Answer: A good place to start is John 1:1-14. In it we see that the divine *logos* is God and was with God before becoming flesh and dwelling among us. Another good text is Philippians 2:1-8.

Defenses against anti-trinitarianism (such as [Jesus Only](#); [Jehovah Witnesses](#), [Modalism](#)).

- In Scripture, the members of the Trinity speak to each other or about each other with pronouns such as *you*, or *I*. [Hebrews 1:8](#); [John 12:28](#)
- Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to replace him on earth while he himself goes to the right hand of the Father. [John 16:7](#); [Mark 16:19](#)
- Baptism of Jesus, [Mark 1:10,11](#) The three Persons of the Trinity are simultaneously active and yet described as localized. Although all three are infinite in essence, this highlights the distinction of the Persons. Here, God condescends to our limited humanity by showing each member separately during the baptism of Jesus. The Father speaks from heaven, Jesus is on earth, and the Holy Spirit descends.
- The distinctions of Persons in [1John 2:22](#)—The clause, *the Father and **the** Son*, is correctly translated. In Greek, the word “and” translates the word *kai*, with the article “the” attached. This highlights the clear distinction between the Father and the Son. Those who refuse to make this distinction are called *liars* and *antichrists*.
- The baptismal formula: *Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. (Matthew 28:19) The Greek grammar comes to our aid again. The word “name” is in the singular (*onoma* not *onomata*) and means there is one name, not three. Therefore, one *Being* in three Persons. The one name of God in this text is *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*.

Chapter 3: His essence

Theologians use the term *essence* to describe what God is, as a spirit. They avoid the term *substance* to avoid confusion with *physical* substance.

Incommunicable attributes of God

The Holy Spirit possesses the same incommunicable attributes of deity as the Father. The term *incommunicable* means those attributes that cannot be in common with a finite being.

These include eternal ([Hebrews 9:14](#)), all knowing ([1 Cor. 2:10,12](#)), infinite ([Psa. 139:7,8](#)) and almighty ([Rom.15:19](#)). If the Holy Spirit shares these same attributes as God, he must also share the same essence and is therefore God.

For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 1 Corinthians 2:10,11

In this text, we clearly see a distinction between two of the persons of the Trinity, the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has a mind and searches the mind of the Father.

The name God, is found 89 times in the New Testament in connection with the word Father. Therefore, whenever we find the term God by itself, we understand it to mean God the Father. ([1 Cor.1:3](#))

Notice the distinctions in 1 Corinthians 2 between the mind of God and the Spirit of God.

- The Spirit searches the depths of God.
- Paul illustrates the distinction between God and the Holy Spirit, by drawing a parallel between the spirit of a person that is in him and the person himself.
- The Spirit of God comprehends the thoughts of God. This shows two minds at work.

The filioque doctrine

This teaching means that the Holy Spirit is begotten of both the Father and the Son. The term comes from the Latin *filios*, "son". This was added to the Nicene Creed and caused the split between the Western churches under Rome, versus the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches under Constantinople. The Eastern churches hold that the Holy Spirit is engendered by the Father only.

The phrase "and of the Son" first appeared in the sixth century but the division took place in 1054 and is known in history as the [Great Schism](#).

The Eastern churches claim this doctrine depreciates the personhood of the Holy Spirit and borders blasphemy. The Western churches insist this is not the intent because the Scriptures declare the following:

- The Holy Spirit is sent by both the Father and the Son, [John 15:26](#).
- He is called the Spirit of Christ in [Romans 8:9](#) and [1Peter 1:11](#).
- Redemption in Christ is applied by the Holy Spirit, [Hebrews 9:14](#).
- The term *Spirit of Jesus* is used interchangeably with the Holy Spirit in [Acts 16:7](#).
- The apostles were sent out by the Holy Spirit in [Acts 13:4](#).
- We know that the Holy Spirit replaced Christ on earth. Jesus said he would send the Holy Spirit. [John 14:16](#)

It is difficult to see from the above considerations how the Holy Spirit is denigrated because he is generated by both the Father and the Son. The Son himself is generated by the Father, yet is equal in authority and dignity. Obviously, generation does not diminish personhood.

The Filioque is found in Reformed confessions, western in origin.

Cultural causes of the schism

At first glance, it seems strange that such an obscure doctrine would split Christendom into irreconcilable halves. Were there hidden causes?

East and West have never gotten along, politically or religiously. The cultural mindsets, worldviews, priorities, and values are different. These factors probably had more to do with the Great Schism, than doctrine.

Another contributing dynamic is the struggle for power. The competition for dominance in the region between Rome and Constantinople is historical fact.

Chapter 4: His person

Throughout church history, movements have attempted to portray the Holy Spirit either as a non-personal force or as a metaphor for God's power in general. Jehovah's Witnesses, Modalists, Jesus Only, and Unitarians hold such views.

How do we demonstrate from Scripture and logic the unique personhood of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity?

We will see that the Holy Spirit is a personality within the Trinity, just like the other two members. He is not an impersonal force or merely a metaphor for the power of God the Father.

Personal attributes

Mind

The Spirit has a mind and intercedes for believers, [Romans 8:26](#). He is a conscious personality, [Romans 8:27](#). Notice that in this verse, Paul distinguishes between the mind of the Spirit and the mind of God the Father. Two different minds are involved. Therefore, the term *Spirit* cannot be a metaphor for the mind of God the Father.

He has a will and apports spiritual gifts accordingly. [1 Corinthians 12:11](#)

The Spirit speaks [John 16:13](#), leads [Luke 4:1](#), convicts [John 16:8](#), prophecies [2 Peter 1:21](#), can be grieved [Ephesians 4:30](#) and loves [Romans 5:5](#).

His power versus his person

The Scriptures occasionally speak of the power of the Spirit as an attribute separate from his Person. This would make no sense if the Holy Spirit were nothing more than power itself, a mere emanation from the Father. [Acts 10:38](#); [1 Cor. 2:4](#)

To say that the Holy Spirit is nothing but a power and not a personality is like saying "love is God" just because love is a key attribute of God and therefore God is not a personal entity. Liberal theology leans towards this. Beware of it.

Fellowship

We cannot have fellowship with an impersonal force.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2Cor.13:14

Holiness

All members of the Trinity share the same personal attributes. In their representation to us in salvation, each displays a particular attribute. Although the members of the Trinity are equally holy, the Holy Spirit represents the holiness of God to us in a special way.

Gender

Cults such as Jehovah's Witnesses point to the neuter pronoun in Greek to justify their teaching that the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force. The Greek noun *spirit* (pneuma) is neuter and requires a neuter pronoun. Nothing in logic requires us to deny the personhood of the Holy Spirit simply because a neuter pronoun is used. It does not deny personhood, any more than the feminine gender for table in Spanish implies that a table has the characteristics of a woman.

With disregard to normal Greek grammar, John deliberately uses the masculine singular pronoun **he** in reference to the Holy Spirit rather than the neuter. [John 16:8](#) (Greek: *Ekeinos* not *ekeinon*) Apparently John wanted to clarify the personhood of the Holy Spirit by the exceptional use of the masculine singular pronoun.

Ambiguity and humility

Throughout the ages, Christians have expressed that the Holy Spirit seems ambiguous. They can picture Jesus and God the Father well enough in their minds, but not so much the Holy Spirit.

This is by design. The role of the Holy Spirit is to exalt Christ. [John 16:13, 14](#) He deliberately directs attention away from himself. It is a truism that the Holy Spirit is most effective where Christ is most exalted. Theologians call this the humility of the Holy Spirit, a charming aspect of his personhood, as well as an example for us.

Chapter 5: How he relates

To the Father

- He proceeds from the Father, [John 15:26](#).
- Communicates to us only what he has been given by the Father, [John 16:13](#).
- Knows fully the mind of the Father, [1 Corinthians 2:11](#).

To the Son

- The virgin birth was operated by the Holy Spirit, [Luke 1:35](#).
- Jesus was led by the Spirit, [Matthew 4:1](#).
- Jesus resurrected by the Holy Spirit, [Romans 8:11](#).

To believers

- Replaces Christ on earth, [John 14:16,17](#).³
- The source of prophecy and inspiration of Scripture, [1 Peter 1:10,11](#).
- He [regenerates](#), [indwells](#), [calls](#), [teaches](#), [convicts](#), [guides](#), [sanctifies](#), [seals the elect](#).
- The source of our character development, [Galatians 5:22,23](#)

Christians often speak of Christ as being in them, and this is acceptable though theologically imprecise. Christ is in heaven at the right hand of God. Our union with Christ is by the Holy Spirit and this union makes us part of the body of Christ.

To the church

Provider of spiritual gifts, [1 Corinthians 12:7-11](#).

To the world

As a convicting power, [John 16:8](#).

As a restraining influence, [2 Thessalonians 2:6](#).⁴

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not developed in the Old Testament. Only two verses use the term.

*Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Ps.51:11*

But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit;... Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit? Is.63:10

An Old Testament Jew would probably view this as no more than a poetic expression that God is holy. Nevertheless, New Testament writers consistently attribute Old Testament inspiration to the Holy Spirit.

- David is said to have spoken by the Holy Spirit about the resurrection of Christ,

[Acts 4:25](#).

- The writer of Hebrews quotes from Psalm 95:7-11 and attributes the words to the Holy Spirit. In [Hebrews 9:8](#), he attributes the symbology of the tabernacle utensils to the Holy Spirit, although the Holy Spirit is not specifically mentioned in those texts.

Is the term, *Spirit of the Lord*, in the Old Testament a reference to the Holy Spirit?

A Jew hearing this phrase would probably consider it a reference to a special divine activity, without thinking of it as an entity distinct from God the Father.

In the New Testament, however, the phrase "Spirit of the Lord" can be considered a synonym for the Holy Spirit. We see this through a series of events at the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

In Luke 3:21, we see the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus at his baptism. ... *in bodily form, like a dove...*

Then immediately afterwards in Luke 4:1, we see Jesus *full of the Holy Spirit*. Following this, he is *led by the Spirit* into the wilderness where he fasted 40 days.

After this, in Luke 4:18, we see Jesus in his home town declaring his messiahship by quoting from Isaiah 61:1,

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...

Therefore, the Holy Spirit that came upon him at his baptism is the Spirit of the Lord. The terms are synonymous. It seems acceptable to assume it is the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament where we see the Spirit of the Lord, although the term may be used differently.

The same is true of the phrase, *my Spirit*, as in Joel 2:28, which Peter quotes and describes in Acts 2 as prophetic of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Most New Testament doctrines, including that of the Holy Spirit, have their roots in the Old Testament and were not developed and clearly understood until the coming of the Messiah.

Was the existence of the Holy Spirit understood by New Testament Jews?

There are indications that this may be the case.

In the ministry of John the Baptist, he declared,

I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."
Mark 1:8

It seems odd that John would use this term unless he assumed that his audience knew what he was talking about.

Likewise, Peter mentioned the Holy Spirit twice in his sermon at Pentecost; first as an explanation of why the disciples spoke in tongues, and second as a promised gift to those who repented.

In Peter's defense to the Sanhedrin in Acts 5, he declares,

And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.

It is inconceivable that he would say this, if the Jewish leaders had no concept of the Holy Spirit. There would seem to be no reason for their anger against Peter if they knew nothing of the Holy Spirit.

Stephen, before the Sanhedrin, accuses them of always resisting the Holy Spirit as did their forefathers, [Acts 7:51](#).

In Hebrews, the writer uses the term *Holy Spirit* five times in such a casual manner that he seems to assume his readers have a clear understanding of the doctrine.

Chapter 6: How he ministers

The Father planned our salvation. Jesus purchased it. The Holy Spirit applies it.

This simplistic explanation helps people grasp the role of the Holy Spirit in redemption.

Everything related to salvation, spiritual life and growth of the church is under the authority and power of the Holy Spirit.

Replacement

The Holy Spirit replaces Jesus Christ on earth. The church does not replace Jesus, it only represents him. This is a critical difference between us and the Roman Catholic Church.

In Catholicism, the Pope replaces Jesus, not merely represents him. On his Tiara, is written in Latin, *Vicarius Filii Dei*: "The Vicar (replacement) of Christ." As such, he supposedly has the power to forgive sins, release people from purgatory, decree what is correct doctrine and function as the head of the church as though he were Christ. He holds the keys to hell and death, in the place of Christ.

This makes the church not only the bearer of the message of salvation but with the power to dispense it. That is blasphemy.

His work in Christians

Each of the works of the Holy Spirit would require a lengthy essay. Here we will touch on a few that can lead to misunderstanding.

Is Christ in us? Yes and no. The person of Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father. The Holy Spirit is in the believer as his representative and replacement.

Teaching

All instructions and spiritual growth are by the Holy Spirit in the place of Christ.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. John 14:26

Witnessing to our spirit

The experience of the Holy Spirit's inward witness to the believer is taught in Scripture.

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, Romans 8:16

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 1John 4:13

The Westminster Confession (WCF) mentions the witness of the Holy Spirit for authenticating the Word of God.

...arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority [of the Word of God] is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts. WCF Chapter 1, Article 5

Personal guidance

Does the Holy Spirit speak inwardly to believers today to guide them in personal decisions and activities?

Yes, he does. Grudem expresses this by commenting on the Greek verb *AGO* (I lead).

When first century readers...saw that Paul used this verb to speak of being “led” by the Holy Spirit, they would have understood it to mean detailed, specific guidance in the various choices and decisions of daily life. ...not simply the imparting of generalized moral concepts...it is an actual leading through the path of life.. ⁵

This point is important. Some reformed theologians are so fearful of what they call “extra-biblical revelations” that they shut the door on subjective spiritual experiences. Some of that fear is justified. It is true that false teachings and foolish behavior has entered into some churches by people who claim to be “led by the Spirit.”

But the opposite is also true. Christians often testify of an inner impulse to do something that turned out to be of God. Believers need to cultivate the art of being led by the Spirit, keeping in mind that the Spirit always leads in accordance with biblical moral principles.

A sense of peace, or a lack thereof, may be a leading from God.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, ... Colossians 3:15

The Bible itself attests to such leadings of the Holy Spirit.

In persecutions

And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, ¹²for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.

Luke 12:11,12

This text cannot mean an exegetical analysis of a biblical text while in a jail cell waiting for trial.

Discernment of the spiritual condition of others

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to

him, and he is not able to understand them...¹⁵ The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. 1 Corinthians 2:14,15

The unregenerate cannot figure us out but we have them figured out. This is because, we *have the mind of Christ. 1 Corinthians 2:16*

Simeon

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, ...²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple,... Luke 2:25-27

Let no one rob you of personal experience of the Holy Spirit because of a paranoia about "extra-biblical revelations." To those who deny the personal and subjective leading of the Holy Spirit, I have only one thing to say: *You must be born again! John 3:3*

Emotion

The Holy Spirit is an entity, not an emotion. Yet, he imparts emotions.

...joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17

...love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Romans 5:5

We are never instructed to ask for a manifestation of the Holy Spirit in order to feel an emotion. Neither the presence nor the absence of emotion is evidence of the Holy Spirit's involvement. When the Holy Spirit imparts emotion, it is to generate praise to God.

Other ministries to Christians by the Holy Spirit

Helps in prayer, [Romans 8:11](#)

Sanctifies, [Romans 15:16](#)

Calls to service, [Acts 13:2](#)

Anoints for preaching and teaching, [1 Peter 1:12](#)

Resurrection of believers at the return of Christ, [Romans 8:11](#)

Regeneration

The act of being born again is a work of the Holy Spirit.⁶ This happens by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon a sinner, resulting in the transformation necessary for the person to be justified by grace and receive eternal life.⁷

From Part One we learn...

As the third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is fully God with all the attributes of deity: Omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, eternal and of the same essence.

- He proceeds eternally from both the Father and the Son but this does not diminish his dignity or personhood as an equal member of the Trinity.

- Scripture shows his individual personhood by attributes of mind and will through which he performs certain functions distinct from the other members. He is not a mere impersonal emanation of power from God the Father.
- He replaces Christ on earth in all functions of deity relating to believers. These include regeneration, teaching, indwelling, guiding, inspiring and sealing the elect for salvation.

PART TWO: FILLING AND POWER

What is the baptism in the Holy Spirit?
Do supernatural spiritual gifts exist today?

Chapter 7: How and when he fills – Reformed view

The term "baptism in the Holy Spirit" has become controversial in our day because of some Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. An enormous amount of false doctrine has grown up around the subject and we should know how to address it.

The term is biblical, although much of the theology surrounding it in our day is not. It is found in the pronouncement of John the Baptist ([Mark 1:8](#)), in the prophecy of Jesus himself ([Acts 1:5](#)) and in the teachings of Paul, ([1 Cor. 12:13](#)).

We will study this topic from two perspectives: Reformed and Pentecostal.

Synonym for regeneration

Reformed theology holds that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is synonymous with regeneration, being born again. This is our conversion to Christ, and no post-conversion experience should bear this label.

The Holy Spirit is poured out on repentant sinners, regenerating them and causing them to trust in Christ, be justified by grace, receive the gift of eternal life and become members of the body of Christ. This is our baptism in the Holy Spirit. This view is held by Baptists, Presbyterians, and most other non-Pentecostal churches.

Rule of progressive revelation

This perspective is based on the epistles rather than on the Book of Acts. Reformed scholars acknowledge the principle of progressive revelation; the epistles take precedence over the historical books, such as Acts, and have the final word on doctrine. For more on this rule, see the section on Pentecostalism below.

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

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is what joins us to the body of Christ. This cannot be anything other than our conversion, for otherwise we would be forced to say that it is possible to be saved without being joined to Christ.

The passage below deals with the sequence of events in our salvation and shows the clear connection between the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and our salvation.

...he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:5-7

Notice these points:

- Salvation is accomplished through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It cannot be denied that this is a baptism.
- This results in justification by grace.
- Through this experience, we receive the gift of eternal life. These particulars show that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit cannot be a separate experience from salvation.

Pentecostals, however, insist that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for our salvation and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for our empowerment are two separate and distinct baptisms. There is nothing in the epistles to justify such a position. We will now consider the Pentecostal view.⁸

Chapter 8: How and when he fills – Pentecostal view

Pentecostalism assumes that two things about Christian experience in the Book of Acts should be the experience of Christians throughout the church age:

- Receiving the Holy Spirit is an experience separate from conversion to Christ.
- Speaking in tongues as the sign that a person has received the Holy Spirit.

Proof texts

Pentecostals rely on the Book of Acts to support this perspective. There are several examples of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit after conversion. These include:

The Day of Pentecost. The disciples were already believers and had already received some measure of the Holy Spirit, according to [John 20:22](#).

The Samaritan believers had received the gospel and believed in Jesus, but had not received the Holy Spirit. Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to administer the blessing of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8: 14-16)

The Ephesian Christians had not received the Holy Spirit although they were believers in Jesus through having heard of the testimony of John the Baptist. They received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by Paul. (Acts Chapter 19)

Response to the Pentecostal perspective

This view ignores two hermeneutical⁹ principles:

- The rule of progressive revelation.
- The rule of imperatives.

The rule of progressive revelation

The latter revelation supersedes the former as the final word in doctrine and practice. The Bible is clearly a progressive book with redemption and the kingdom of God gradually unfolding.

For example, the New Testament supersedes the Old Testament and has the final word about Old Testament teachings. The whole book of Hebrews is based on this principle. Bad doctrine has been invented by people who take Old Testament narrations or laws and drag them into Christian living without New Testament authorization.

The same principle applies within the New Testament. The gospels and Acts provide historical background for the epistles which, in turn, were written to instruct us as to doctrine and practice throughout the church age. Overlapping occurs in doctrine between the epistles and the historical books, just as there is between the New Testament and the Old Testament. Nevertheless, where there may be doubt as to what Christians should practice today, the epistles have the final word.

Is the Book of Acts the blueprint for the church age?

The Pentecostal movement assumes a resounding, *yes!* The Reformed movement responds with an equally strong, *no!*

The reason for the Reformed response is that the Pentecostal view fails to respect the rule of progressive revelation mentioned above.

- The Book of Acts records a transitional period of about 70 years between the Old Testament dispensation of law and the New Testament dispensation of grace. It is illogical to suppose that a transitional period should be the norm for the entire church age.
- The epistles themselves contradict the Pentecostal presuppositions. The Holy Spirit is received at conversion according to [1 Corinthians 12:13](#). This joins us to the body of Christ. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on sinners results in regeneration according Titus 3:5-8. This is our conversion and is not a post-conversion experience.
- The Book of Acts is an extension of the Gospel of Luke and is intended as an historical narrative, not as a blueprint for the church age. Comparing the first verse of each of these books makes this clear. In [Luke 1:1](#), he tells us he wrote it as an historical narrative so Theophilus will understand the factual foundation of his faith. Then in [Acts 1:1](#), he tells Theophilus this second book is an addition to the first narrative. Nothing in Luke suggests he intended this narrative to be a detailed precedence for the church age.
- Nothing in the epistles suggests a secondary post-conversion experience that separates Christians into distinct categories, superior versus inferior. Therefore, the post-conversion outpourings of the Holy Spirit in Acts cannot be used as the definitive doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the church today. Any teaching that divides the Body of Christ in this way is unscriptural and leads to spiritual pride.

The rule of imperatives

Imperative is a grammatical term meaning "command." This rule tells us that a narrative is not necessarily a command to do likewise.

Another way to put this is, "description is not proscription." Just because a narrative describes a phenomenon, does not necessarily mean we should do the same. Luke, as a good historian, is simply describing what happened, not insinuating the same thing be duplicated. It could occur, but to require it is absurd.

Just because some people in the apostolic age spoke in tongues does not prove that all Christians since then must experience the same gift.

Is the Pentecostal experience valid?

Errors in theology do not invalidate spiritual experiences. Christians can have a variety of experiences with the Holy Spirit and then mislabel them. This may happen in Pentecostal or Charismatic circles.

Experiences of being filled with the Holy Spirit after conversion are biblical. Just as revivals have occurred throughout church history, personal and individual revivals and Spirit-born gifts can occur at any time.

The apostles had already been filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, yet received another filling of the Holy Spirit after being persecuted by the Sanhedrin.

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. Acts 4:31

Evangelist D.L. Moody was once asked by a friend why he always prayed to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Moody replied, "I leak."¹⁰

There is truth in that. Jesus alluded to this in the parable of the wineskins in the context of fasting. Sometimes we need to get aside with God and get the wineskins of our souls repaired so we can hold more of the new wine of the Holy Spirit.

We may judge the unbiblical theology used to substantiate another person's experience but that does not invalidate the experience. Nor should their weak theology keep us from seeking our own experiences with the Holy Spirit.

The Charismatic movement

Although the Charismatic movement is an offshoot of Pentecostalism, it differs in that Charismatics might not regard speaking tongues as the necessary sign of a post-conversion "baptism in the Holy Spirit," although such may occur. Nor do they subscribe to all the cultural nuances and practices of classical Pentecostalism, some of which may be reflected in disorderly worship.

Some Charismatics agree that the conversion experience may be the only filling of the Holy Spirit some may receive, although manifestations of spiritual gifts may come later. There tends to avoid dividing Christians into superior and inferior categories.

They tend to share the Pentecostal view of guaranteed faith healing.

In its early days, the Charismatic movement claimed to be a revival of spiritual gifts that had been neglected by denominations. This was relatively harmless and in some ways healthy. Beginning in the 1970s, however, the movement was hijacked by an Oklahoma-based cult called Word of Faith, now known as the *prosperity gospel*.¹¹

Chapter 9: What offends him?

Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Complex interpretations have been offered to explain what is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. There seems no reason to complicate it. The clause, *speaks against the Holy Spirit*, seems clear enough. Knowingly, consciously and intentionally saying bad things about the Holy Spirit should fall into this category.

There may be a number of ways to commit this sin. One way would be to attribute the works of Christ to Satan, which is what the Pharisees seemed to be doing.

Some have suggested that it is impossible to commit this sin today because it only applied to the actions of the Pharisees at that time. There seems little reason to assume such a limitation.

Others hold that willful rejection of Christ until death is the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Persistent rejection will indeed result in eternal condemnation, but that is not the subject of the text.

Occasionally we meet a believer who fears he has committed this sin. Grudem¹² comforts such a person with this statement:

The fact that the unpardonable sin involves such extreme hardness of heart and lack of repentance indicates that those who fear they have committed it yet still have sorrow for sin in their heart and desire to seek after God do not fall in the category of those who are guilty of it.

Statements about the Holy Spirit said in ignorance and unbelief would not qualify as this sin.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit may be an exceptionally rare sin. It would seem to require a minimal understanding of who the Holy Spirit is and what he does. Then speaking against him knowingly and intentionally would constitute this sin.

Chapter 10: Are the gifts for today? Three views

There exists a wide variety of views, often overlapping. For the sake of brevity, we will categorize them into three main sections: Full continuationism, modified continuationism and full cessationism.

Before we start, we need to ask ourselves, where is the burden of proof?

All continuationists, both Pentecostal and moderates, insist that no burden rests on them to prove anything because spiritual gifts are taught in the New Testament. Nowhere is there a hint they would end with the apostles or with the completion of the biblical canon. Continuationism in some form is therefore the default setting of the New Testament.

The ceasing of gifts, continuationists argue, would be such a monumental event that the apostles would have foretold it. After all, John predicted the fate of the churches in Revelation 1-3. Therefore, the arguments for continuationism consist mainly in refuting cessationist claims.

Apostolic assumption

Some Scriptures seem to indicate that the apostles assumed that the spiritual gifts would continue until the second coming of Christ.

...so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ,⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:7,8

The *revealing* of Jesus and the day of our Lord Jesus Christ can only be references to the Second Coming. The word *revealing* in Greek is *apocalypsis*, the Greek title of the last book of the Bible.

Continuationists point out that Paul seemed to amplify this point further on in the very the same letter:

As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part,¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 1 Corinthians 13: 8-10

Clearly the day will come when prophecies will pass away, tongues will cease and knowledge will pass away. Cessationists claim that this refers to the completion of the Bible after the departure of the apostles. This, they say, is ***the perfect***, meaning that the Bible is the perfect Word of God.

Continuationists reply that the cessationist interpretation falls short for several reasons:

- Verse 12 says, *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face*. Where is the nose on the cover of the Bible? Where are the lips? The teeth? The eyebrows? Books don't have faces. Although the Bible is the perfect Word of God, Paul is talking about the coming of a person, not a book. He is referring to the coming of a person, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring the perfect kingdom of God to earth, as Paul declared in Chapter 15. Therefore, the gifts will continue until the coming of Christ.

Other problems exist with the cessationist interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13.

- Verse 8 says, *knowledge* will pass away. And then, *we shall know fully*, as we have been fully known (verse 12). It would be strange to suppose that we know Jesus as well as he knows us, simply because we have the Bible.

Lack of evidence

Continuationists claim that cessationists have failed to provide convincing evidence that spiritual gifts would end with the close of the apostolic age or the biblical canon.

Full continuationism: Pentecostal view

This view holds that all the miraculous manifestations and spiritual gifts of the New Testament are available to Christians today, and the church should seek to display them with the same intensity and frequency. The Book of Acts is the template for the entire church age.

Pentecostals and some charismatics hold to this.

Moderate continuationism

A moderate perspective sees a middle ground between full continuationism and cessationism.

The spiritual gifts described in the epistles, especially Romans and First Corinthians, are available to the church today, but with less intensity and frequency than in the Book of Acts.

The extraordinary signs and wonders that typified the apostolic age are not characteristic of the current church dispensation, although such have occurred in occasional revivals throughout church history. Spiritual gifts today have no doctrinal authority and are used only for the encouragement of believers and the building up of the church.

There exists a difference between the *signs and wonders* as described in the Book of Acts, versus the *charismata* in the epistles. The former existed for the establishing of the church, the latter for the continuation of it. In this, the moderate continuationist can agree to some extent with the cessationist.

The so-called *sign gifts* such as prophecy, lack the authority and infallibility of Old Testament prophecy and may be subject to human error in their manifestations. Those

who claim authority or credibility on the basis of a spiritual experience are in error. The only authority is Scripture.

The moderate continuationist can agree with the cessationist that the Scriptures are the only authority for doctrine and practice; that the offices of apostle and prophet, if they exist today, have no foundational doctrinal authority and are limited to edification, exhortation and comfort of the believers.

The epistles are the template for the church age, not the Book of Acts. Though some overlapping may occur, Acts provides the historical background.

Full cessationism

Cessationists hold that certain spiritual gifts, they call *sign gifts*, disappeared from the church after the apostolic age and have not occurred since. These include prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues, word of knowledge, word of wisdom, and gifts of healings. They deduce that those who claim to possess these gifts today are misguided.

The Book of Acts is not a template for the church to follow but only the historical background for the epistles which are the template.

Do spiritual gifts prove godliness?

*“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’
Matthew 7:21-23*

The manifestation of a spiritual gift proves nothing about the person. It doesn't even prove that the person is saved.

Jesus made this clear with the phrase, *I never knew you*. They were *never* Christians nor backsliders. Jesus will reject them because they were *workers of lawlessness*.

Some unsaved religious people try to make up for sin by doing good works. Their problem is not a lack of zeal, for they have plenty of that. Their problem is a lack of repentance; trying to make up for sins by doing works for Jesus. Some people never really get it...there is no substitute for repentance.

Nothing in this text suggests that the miracles and gifts were counterfeit. How do we explain this? The answer may lie in the very name of Jesus. Some will say,*did we not prophesy in your name*? God could be honoring the name of Jesus in spite of the corruption of the person who speaks it.

Chapter 11: Cessationism

Cessationism is the view held most widely by the Reformed branch of theology along with Baptists and some Arminian denominations such as Nazarenes. It asserts that certain spiritual gifts mentioned in the epistles disappeared from the church after the death of the apostles; or disappeared after the canon of Scripture was completed.

These gifts, called “sign gifts” are prophecy, word of knowledge, word of wisdom, miracles, gifts of healings, tongues and interpretation of tongues. These are sometimes called *charismata*, the Greek word for spiritual gifts.

The origins of cessationism

Cessationism has its origins in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Previous to that, the existence of miracles and spiritual manifestations were accepted as part of Christendom throughout the church age.¹³

Certain reformers, John Calvin in particular, reacted against the excesses of the Catholic church, with its supposed miracles extending to the absurd. Rome even claimed special miracles during the Reformation period that supposedly testified against the Protestant movement.

Miracles in the New Testament always involve some kind of healing. Some Catholic miracles are far outside the norms typified in the Acts of the Apostles. The *stigmata* in Catholicism, for example, have nothing to do with healings or benefits to anyone. These were supposed appearances of Christ's wounds on a person's body as a sign of divine favor. St. Francis of Assisi claimed to have them.¹⁴

Other supposed miracles of the Church of Rome endorse idolatrous practices and therefore cannot be from the Holy Spirit. For example, healings in the name of Mary at Lourdes and other places simply encourage the sin of idolatry practiced by the Catholic populace.

An important milestone in the development of the cessationist position was B.B. Warfield's *Counterfeit Miracles* in 1918. This solidified and categorized the main arguments of cessationism and is a text studied and revered by cessationists today.¹⁵

Main cessationist arguments

Apostolic authentication

The purpose of *signs and wonders* performed by the apostles was to authenticate their ministry for the establishment of the Christian movement. Once that was accomplished and the last Scriptures were written, miracles were no longer necessary.

The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. 2 Corinthians 12:12

The cessationist interprets this verse to mean that signs and wonders were given to apostles. Since there are no apostles today, then the gifts necessary for signs and wonders are not extant either.

Sufficiency of Scripture

The word of God is fully sufficient for the growth of the church and therefore nothing else is needed. The Bible is an adequate guide from God in and of itself and therefore the sign gifts diminished and disappeared after the apostolic age.

Against ongoing revelation

Scripture is the final authority from God. Therefore, no further revelations are necessary, and if there were any, they should be canonized as part of the Bible. To support this, cessationists appeal to [1 Timothy 3:16,17](#); [1 Corinthians 13:8-10](#).

Cessationists use the term "extra-biblical revelation" to describe revelations of any kind outside the Bible, whether doctrinal, personal guidance, or whatever. They reject all such as spurious.

Abuses

Opening the door to spiritual gifts leads to disorder and often false teaching and problems in the church. The carnality of the Corinthians testifies to this.

Continuationist response

As mentioned above, the main continuationists arguments consist in refuting cessationist assertions.

On apostolic authentication

According to [Acts 14:3](#) miracles authenticated the gospel of grace itself, not a particular person or office. There is no reason why the gospel does not need authentication today.

The Bible does indeed indicate that one purpose of signs and wonders was to authenticate the apostles. However, it does not follow that this was the only purpose. Others, such as Stephen and Philip, performed miracles, and they were not apostles.

The cessationist argument here embodies the fallacy of extension: Supposing one purpose eliminates all other possible purposes.

On the sufficiency of Scripture

A cessationist typically asks, "What is lacking in the Bible that we need further revelations like prophecy or tongues?" The continuationist may reply, "What is lacking in the Bible that we should bother to pray, attend church or take the Lord's Supper?"

The cessationist misuses the concept of sufficiency and confuses the issue.

Imagine holding a book in each hand: A novel and a gardening manual. Each book is sufficient for its own purpose. When we read the novel, it has fulfilled its purpose, which is entertainment. When we finish reading the gardening manual, it has not fulfilled its purpose. The manual cannot plant a garden. It tells us how to do it.

Looking at it that way, the Bible is not sufficient in and of itself, any more than reading a gardening manual plants a garden. It needs people and tools to accomplish its purpose. The spiritual gifts are the tools.

On continuing revelation

Another fallacy of definitions. The term “revelation” indeed refers in Scripture to final apostolic authority. It is also used in the non-authoritative sense of an impulse of the Holy Spirit for a Christian to edify, exhort and comfort other believers.

On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. 1Cor. 14:3

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 1Cor. 14:29

In [1 Corinthians 14:30](#), the actual word used is *revelation*.

Are there ongoing revelations in the life of the church? The Scriptures themselves indicate there most certainly are, although within defined limits. As mentioned in Chapter 6, personal leadings for the Holy Spirit and his internal witness to our spirit is clearly taught in Scripture. None of that has anything to do with ongoing revelations about doctrine.

Lack of logic

At first, cessationism seems a solid wall of sound theology until examined more closely. Then it appears as a house of cards constructed of logic fallacies. These include the fallacy of definition, the fallacy of extension and guilt by association.

Abuses

Paul never disallowed the validity of the gifts just because the Corinthians abused them. He congratulated them for their use but rebuked them for the misuse. Abuses of gifts cannot count as a valid argument for cessationism.

The Corinthians also abused the Lord’s Supper. By the same logic, one could also suggest that the Lord’s Supper be discarded because it was abused.

Are the benefits worth the risk? Paul seemed to think so.

Fear

Pointing out the illogic rarely has any effect on the cessationist. Why? Because neither logic nor Scripture is behind it. The real basis is **fear**. Fear of Pentecostalism, fear of losing control, fear of the supernatural, fear of false doctrine is at the root of cessationism.

To some extent, these can be legitimate. Such fears can be alleviated by giving up the gifts altogether. This is the easiest approach. The more difficult approach is to learn to cultivate them properly, as Paul encouraged the Corinthians.

A major problem with teaching a balanced view of spiritual gifts today is that the model most people know for spiritual gifts is Pentecostalism... a dubious one indeed. Teaching spiritual gifts without people thinking of Pentecostalism is virtually impossible today.

People have asked me, "If spiritual gifts are for today, how do you explain such and such phenomena in Pentecostal meetings?" This is guilt by association and follows an erroneous syllogism:

Pentecostals believe in spiritual gifts and strange things happen among them.
You believe in spiritual gifts.
Therefore, you are obliged to justify what Pentecostals do.

This is guilt by association, a logic fallacy.

This quote from Dr. Walter Martin¹⁶ is well worth remembering:

I am not a Pentecostal. I do not speak in tongues. But that does not mean I will be cajoled into holding a view that is irrational, historically false and contrary to sound biblical exegesis.
1

About sign gifts in general

Continuationists point out that no scriptural warrant exists for categorizing spiritual gifts this way. To remove any gifts by categorizing like this, would require apostolic authorization, and such is not found in Scripture.

Furthermore, there seems no reason why supernatural spiritual gifts cannot point today to the Scriptures themselves and their authenticity or even to just the gospel itself. The question is, why does the gospel need less authentication today than it did in the first century?

From Part Two we learn...

- The term "baptism in the Holy Spirit" is defined differently by various groups.
 - Reformed: The term refers to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on sinners, resulting in regeneration, faith in Christ and justification.

¹ This was a quote I hear him speak personally during a lecture at an Assembly of God church in California, several decades ago.

- Pentecostal: A post-conversion outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Christians to empower them for ministry, typified by speaking in tongues.
- Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has been defined variously as final rejection of Christ, attributing the works of Christ to Satan or simply speaking evil of the Holy Spirit.
- A debate exists within Christianity whether miraculous spiritual gifts continue today. This is known as the continuationist/cessationist controversy.

PART THREE: SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Paul tells he does not want us to be uninformed about spiritual gifts. Yet ambiguity exists in the study of them. Some gifts are partially defined while others are not defined at all.

If gifts were defined in detail, it might cause more focus on the Holy Spirit than on Christ and the needs of his body, the church.

We know that *word of knowledge* has something to do with knowledge, but about what? The *word of wisdom* must be different from the *word of knowledge* or it would not be listed separately. It has something to do with wisdom apart from the data acquired through study but beyond that, we cannot be sure.

In this study, we will set aside gifts that function within natural attributes of personality, like teaching, administration or helps. These are not controversial. We will look specifically at three supernatural gifts: Prophecy, healing and tongues.

Chapter 12: Prophecy – Legit or no?

Predicting the future leaps to mind when we hear the word *prophecy*. This is a legitimate meaning of the term, but not the primary sense of the original Greek.

The Greek *profeceía* means “forth-telling”, expressing the will of God. This could include predicting the future but in New Testament usage it is more likely to be exhortatory. This is apparently what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 14:3,

... one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

A study of the gift of prophecy in the New Testament quickly reveals an apparent contradiction. Jesus made it clear in his defense of John the Baptist, that John was the last of the prophets and that the new dispensation of the kingdom of God has come. ([Luke 16:16](#)) In [Hebrews 1:1,2](#), we read an apparent change in the way God speaks to his people in this dispensation.

That’s plain enough until we notice:

- There were prophets in Antioch, Acts 13.
- In the Book of Acts, we see Agabus called a prophet and he prophesied.
- Prophecy was practiced in the church in Corinth, Chapter 14 and Paul congratulated them for it.
- We are commanded in 1Thessalonians 5:13 to not despise prophecy.
- It appears in 1 Corinthians 13 that prophecy will continue until the second coming of Christ. Therefore it exists today.

Both moderate continuationists and cessationists struggle to accommodate these two lines of Scripture.

Full continuationist view of prophecy

This view insists that the Old Testament prophetic ministry is for today.

A variety of opinions exist among Pentecostals as to how this works in the current age. Major Pentecostal denominations accept that any church member may prophecy, and that the usual content is exhortatory, not condemning or authoritative.

A few hold the Old Testament idea of absolute authority and obedience to their “prophets.” Disobedience to a local church prophet may result in the discipline of a member.

Pentecostals do not elevate prophecies to the level of biblical authority.

Moderate continuationist view of prophecy

The Old Testament prophetic office differs radically from New Testament prophetic ministry in these respects:

- Infallible: Old Testament prophets were infallible when speaking in the name of the Lord.
- Authoritative: Their pronouncements were directives from God that required unquestioning obedience. Disregarding the prophet was grounds for punishment.
- Emphasis on judgment: This is noticeable in all Old Testament prophetic books and generated the saying, “prophets of doom.”
- Guidance: The Old Testament prophets were the guides of the people in conjunction with the priests.
- Superior spiritual endowment: The Holy Spirit was given to them in a measure unavailable to the people of God in general. ...the spirit of Christ in them...
1 Peter 1:11

New Testament prophetic ministry differs from the Old Testament office in these respects:

- Fallible: Regarding prophecy, Paul says to the Corinthians,
Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.
1 Corinthians 14:29

By subjecting the utterance to evaluation by the church, it is clear that New Testament prophecy is both fallible and non-authoritative:

Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good.
1 Thessalonians 5:20,21

Cessationists sometimes say that if prophecy were for today, then such prophecies should be included in the canon of Scripture. Paul’s indication that prophecies are non-authoritative answers this objection.

- Limited in purpose: *Edification, exhortation and comfort.* (1 Corinthians 14:3 KJV)
Notice the positive tone consistent with the message of grace and the absence of judgmental language.
- Available: It seems to be available to the church as a whole rather than to a single individual.

For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, 1
Corinthians 14:31

This suggests that it is not necessary to hold an office of prophet to be able to prophesy

in this dispensation. The question of whether the office of prophet exists today is therefore irrelevant to our discussion.

- Spiritual equality: All members of the body of Christ have the Holy Spirit.
For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... 1 Corinthians 12:13

A moderate continuationist may agree that the Old Testament prophetic ministry is no longer relevant in a dispensation of grace. However, this seems weak for denying the existence of New Testament prophecy within the biblical limits described by Paul.

Just because a phenomena is canceled for one purpose does not mean it cannot exist for other purposes.

Cessationist view of prophecy

The cessationist argues on the basis of Luke 16:16 and Hebrews 1:1 that God no longer speaks through prophets but only through his Son, who has given us his final word.

The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. Luke 16:16

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. Heb. 1:1,2

Now that the dispensation of grace has come, with the completion of the canon of Scripture, prophetic ministry is no longer necessary. Prophets and prophecies do not exist today. Those who claim to be prophets are false ones.

Cessationists sometimes appeal to Ephesians 2:19,20,

but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,

They interpret this text to mean that the apostles and prophets laid the foundation for the church and there is nothing to add. Therefore, neither apostles nor prophets are necessary today and nor are such gifts.

What about examples of prophecies in the Book of Acts and the epistles? The cessationist argues that these are special concessions for the transitional period between dispensations.

Another cessationist view is that references in the New Testament to prophecy mean *preaching the gospel* and nothing more.¹⁷

How do continuationists answer Luke 16:16?

John the Baptist was under the dispensation of law and ministered exactly like an Old Testament prophet would do.

- John emphasized judgment on the nation, the leaders in particular, as Old Testament prophets did. This is in contrast to the New Testament emphasis on grace and mercy.
- John applied the Law of Moses to Herod regarding an illicit marriage with his brother's wife.
- John applied works-righteousness to soldiers and tax collectors. An apostle would never preach this kind of message to unbelievers.¹⁸
- The John's baptism was not Christian baptism according to Acts 19.

Therefore, Luke 16:16 says that John was the last of a line of prophets of the Old Testament dispensation. Jesus, by declaring about John that *the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he*, was announcing a new dispensation of God's kingdom. Those in the dispensation of grace have prominence over those in the Old Testament dispensation.

It is hard to see why all prophetic ministry should cease if the new dispensation is greater than the old. Therefore, nothing in Luke 16:16 is relevant to the cessationist point.

How do moderate continuationists answer Hebrews 1:1?

Yes, God now speaks by his Son rather than through Old Testament prophets. Yet the Son, in turn, has *given gifts to men*¹⁹ under his leadership. These gifts include offices, ministries and spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 1:1 is irrelevant to the point.

It can be said that there is indeed a prophet in the world today. It is the body of Christ. In Revelation 19:10 we read that *the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*. Could this be what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 14 when he said, "You may all prophesy"? A cessationist should have no objection to this.

Chapter 13: Healing – Legit or no?

We will look at healing from three perspectives: Full continuationist, moderate continuationist and cessationist.

This gift is in the plural: *Gifts of healings*, (1 Corinthians 12:28.) Why the plural is a matter of speculation.

Full continuationism: The Pentecostal view

Historic Pentecostalism holds to these three premises:

- Healing is in the atonement.
- Healing is guaranteed for any believer who exercises sufficient faith.
- It is always the will of God for a person to be healed. 3 John 2

By “healing in the atonement”, Pentecostals mean that Jesus died for our illnesses just as for our sins. If we believe in him for the forgiveness of sins, we should also be able to believe in him for healing. This is as much a part of our inheritance in Christ as the forgiveness of sins.

Key Pentecostal proof text: 1 Peter 2:24

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 1Peter 2:24

When it comes to the subject of healing, Pentecostals or Charismatics will often say, “by his wounds you have been healed!” This passage is seen as undeniable proof that physical healing is in the atonement and guaranteed according to one’s level of faith.

The term “wounds” in this verse is translated in other versions as “stripes,” meaning the wounds caused by a whip. This term is correct, but modern translators use “wounds” because the word “stripes” has other meanings and could cause confusion.

In some Pentecostal teachings, the term *stripes* is distinguished from the other wounds Jesus received. The wounds caused by the nails in his hands and feet were for our sins, while the whip marks were specifically for our physical healing.

The interpretation of 1 Peter 2:24 revolves around the past tense of “to heal.” For Pentecostals, our physical healing is a legally accomplished fact, as readily available as our salvation from sin. Since the one is obtained by faith alone, the other is also available. The only obstacle is unbelief. There is no more legitimate reason to be sick than to continue in sin. All symptoms of illness are lies of the enemy and should be rejected.

Receiving the healing

Certain phrases are heard, such as “receive your healing.” By this they mean healing is a gift that already exists in the spiritual realm because it was purchased for us by Christ, and therefore it is up to us to receive it in faith.

The receiving may involve confessing we already have it spiritually before the healing is manifested. They support this from such texts as,

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:24

Bearing our diseases

From a phrase in Matthew 8:17, *He took our illnesses and bore our diseases*, the Pentecostal deduces that we do not have to bear them. He showed this by healing everyone around him. All we need to do is trust him to take away the illness because it does not really belong to us, according to the Pentecostal perspective.

That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases." Matthew 8:16,17

The prayer of faith

The key point in the James 5 passage is the phrase, *the prayer of faith*. This is presented to support the view that a sufficient degree of faith will produce healing.

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the leaders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. James 5:14-16

Always God's will

Pentecostals interpret the clause, *as it goes well with your soul*, in 3 John 2, to mean it is always God's will to be healed. Spiritual fitness produces good health.

Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. 3 John 2

The logical conclusion is that if a believer is sick, unbelief is the cause. Many do not carry it that far. Personal experience with sickness, or with believers who remain sick, tends to moderate these extremes. Many realize that healing will be "manifested" at the resurrection when Christ returns.

[Chapter 14: Healing – a moderate view](#)

Is healing in the atonement?

What about *by his stripes we are healed*?²⁰ This verse has nothing to do with physical healing.

For an English speaker, the idea of physical sickness comes to mind when we see the word *heal*, because that is the way we normally use the term. This isn't necessarily so in the original Greek.

The New Testament uses three basic Greek words for "healing." One, THERAPEUO, means physical healing (literally, "to heal"). Another, SOZO, means "to save" and is often used for physical healing because the person is saved from the consequences of the disease. The third, HIAOMAI, is the one used in 1 Peter 2:24 and means "to heal, to make whole."

This latter term has the peculiarity of taking on the flavor of its context. If it is a spiritual thing, the word means spiritual healing. If it is a physical thing, it means physical healing. To interpret this verb, one must ask, "Is the object of the verb a spiritual thing or a physical thing?" The correct interpretation will be given accordingly.

Applying this principle to 1 Peter 2:24, we find that Peter is referring to a spiritual thing, sin. By the wounds of Christ we have been healed of the disease of sin; a concept that fits perfectly with the theology and emphasis of the entire book of 1 Peter.

If Peter wanted to make it clear that physical healing was meant, THERAPEO would have been more appropriate than the ambiguous IAOMAI.

The Bible often speaks of salvation as healing. In Acts 28, Paul quotes from Isaiah,

Otherwise they will see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and turn and be healed. Isaiah 6:10

In both Acts and Isaiah, the cleansing of moral guilt is the healing. Given the context and word usage, it is clear that 1 Peter 2:24 does not support physical healing in the atonement and certainly does not guarantee it in this life.

Healing is not in the atonement, although divine healings occur today. Nor is it guaranteed, depending on a certain level of faith.

Now but not yet

Paul clarified in Romans 8:19-23, that the physical creation has not yet been *redeemed* from the effects of the fall. We are saved from the guilt of the fall, but not from the physical effects of God's curse on creation, of which our bodies are a part.

When we look at Romans 8 as a whole, we see that Paul is dividing the saving work of Christ into parts: What applies now versus what applies later. In the first part, he makes it clear that there is no condemnation for sin in this present life. We do not have to wait for it.

In contrast, he explains later in the chapter that we are not yet delivered from the effects of the fall on our physical bodies. We have to wait for that.

And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

This clearly tells us that we are waiting for the redemption of our bodies. The work of Christ on the cross for our sins is not in the same category as our physical healing. Spiritual healing from the guilt of sin is guaranteed for now; physical healing is not guaranteed for now, even if we believe it is in the atonement.

In short, we are saved from the condemnation of the law but not yet saved from the effects of the fall. Miraculous healings that occur now may be foretastes of the great healing that will take place at the resurrection.

Why the groaning? Our physical bodies get sick, hurt, old and die because our adoption as sons of God is not yet complete. The physical must catch up with the spiritual, and we wait for that to happen.

If perfect health were guaranteed now, there would be no room for groaning, and if it were always God's will for a person to be healed, the whole creation would have been restored by now.

Does it make any difference?

Even if this verse meant that physical healing is in the atonement, it would not prove when or how the healing would occur; whether it would be instantaneous, gradual, miraculous, without medical means, or even in this life.

Our moral perfection was also accomplished at Calvary. Are any of us perfect yet? Sanctification is both a legal fact and a process. Even if the Pentecostal interpretation of 1 Peter 2:24 is correct, the question of God's timing and application remains open.

Even if 1 Peter 2:24 taught physical healing in the atonement, support for a guaranteed healing in this life or by miraculous means without medicine, is feeble indeed.

Did Jesus bear our diseases?

We saw in the previous chapter the clause; *He took our illnesses and bore our diseases*. The key to understanding this verse is in the words, *This was to fulfill...*

What was being *fulfilled*? The quote is from Isaiah 53, regarding the identity of the Messiah. In verse 4, Isaiah tells us that the Messiah would have an extraordinary healing ministry.

That is why Matthew used the word, *This*. Jesus proved his messiahship by an unprecedented healing ministry. This happened before Jesus was crucified. That one event *fulfilled* the prophecy. This was a unique event and says nothing about healing in the atonement.

Whose faith?

Does James 5:14-16 guarantee healing dependent upon a special degree of faith?

This passage is a biblical procedure for praying for church members with physical ailments. The question is whether it guarantees healing, depending on a sufficient level of faith.

The text says, *the prayer of faith shall save the sick*. We may ask, “whose faith?”

The elders, not the afflicted, pray the prayer of faith. The text makes no mention of faith being required of the person who is ill. Although Jesus and the apostles usually expected faith from those who received prayer, it is not essential in every case, especially in serious cases.

While all believers can pray for the sick, the leaders should be prepared to counsel those with difficult health or sin problems. *Let them pray over him*, refers to the elders in this context.

James is giving advice on how the local church is to function in general, not necessarily asserting a promise of absolute guaranteed healing for any and all ailments according to one's level of faith.

Examining this text closer shows it lends little support to the Pentecostal view of absolute guaranteed faith healing for any and all afflictions, although it is strong encouragement to make prayer for the sick a proactive part of church life.

Always God's will?

Pentecostals and Charismatics assume from [3John 2](#) that it is always God's will for believers to be healed. Serious problems are involved with this interpretation.

- No conditional clauses exist in this verse.

A conditional clause is the part of a sentence that states the condition for something else to happen. Often, these clauses are introduced by the word "if," as in the sentence, "If

you believe, then you will be saved." The "if" introduces the condition and the "then" is the result.

The Greek language is precise about conditional clauses. Whenever a general condition is meant, certain grammatical constructions occur to indicate that. The verse contains no conditional clauses and only expresses a well-wishing on John's part. This means the verse contains no instructions to Gaius about what he should believe or do.

- This is a prayer, not a promise.

The phrase *I pray* can be translated as *I wish*, depending on the context. From this, Pentecostals assume that God is declaring his will for all believers. However, Vine's Expository Dictionary states that even when the King James translates this word as "I wish," as in 3John 2, the meaning still indicates that prayer is involved.²¹

- It is a common first century greeting.

This epistle is modeled after the typical letter format of the first century. William Barclay, one of the world's outstanding scholars, points this out by quoting from a pagan ship's captain, who uses almost identical wording as that found in 3John 2.

Since this verse merely records the John's wishes for Gaius, it cannot be construed as a declaration from God for the whole body of Christ, nor should it be viewed as a promise.

Critique of the full continuationist view

None of the three premises presented by Pentecostalism are biblical. Healing is not in the atonement, nor guaranteed by a special level of faith nor does the New Testament teach it is always God's will to be healed.

Nevertheless, divine healing occurs today and we should pray for the sick. God is sovereign in his working in each individual believer and we are not at liberty to accuse others of a lack of faith because they are ill. God's normal way of working is through the practical means he provided, such as doctors, God's general grace. It is not a lack of faith to resort to them.

Dangers

"The harassment of the Christians in my church is almost as bad as the cancer!" said Judy, shaking. "I cannot stand it any longer and I'm on the verge of leaving the church." She had come to us for prayer and counsel.

This young woman with colon cancer, postponed her operation as long as possible, while she sought God and believed for her healing. Despite her faith, God did not heal her by miraculous means. She continued attending her popular Charismatic church where in each meeting Christians approached her to say, "Oh, Judy, I wish you would just believe God for your healing!" Such comments cut deeply into her already distressed emotions.

The time came when the operation could not be postponed. Her husband Tom put her in the hospital before her condition became inoperable.

"While waiting for the operation," Judy said, "Christians kept coming with books on faith for me to study. I couldn't hardly hold a book, let alone read one. They told me, 'if you have enough faith you will not have to go through this operation.' I was believing with all my might. But since God didn't heal me, I began to feel more guilty. Even worse were suggestions that I might be harboring a secret sin. This nearly drove me out of my mind."

Her surgery was successful, but when she returned to the church, she was met by a lady who said in a sad tone of voice. "How sorry I am to see that you had this operation. How I wish you had the faith to be healed. You wouldn't have had to go through this!" Judy said that comment felt worse than her incision!

Excuse the pun, but the Pentecostal doctrine on healing is very unhealthy. It almost killed Judy.

Do full continuationists experience more healings than others?

I can say from observation that they do not experience any more genuine healings than other branches of Christianity. They may just talk about them more.

Critique of the cessationist view

Absolute cessationists usually see healing as one of the "sign gifts" that has disappeared from the church. When it does occur, it is extremely rare and must not be considered the norm.

Anointing with oil as taught in James 5, is not practiced since this is viewed as inappropriate for our day.

Chapter 15: Tongues – Legit or no?

This controversial gift should never have become controversial. In our decades of ministry in Latin America, participating in numerous church plants, we have never had confusion, division or dissent about this gift.

The reason? We have never taught either of two false extremes: That the gift of tongues has passed away nor that everyone who is filled with the Holy Spirit will experience it.

Paul asks, *Do all speak with tongues? (1 Corinthians 12:30)*

The question requires a negative answer. The original Greek uses an untranslatable particle called the **ME explicative**. This requires a negative answer to any question where it is found. Some translations render Paul's question as "Not all speak in tongues, do they?" Meaning, "Isn't it true that not all speak in tongues?"

But in 1 Corinthians 12:13 we see that all the Corinthians had been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

The meaning is clear when we compare these two verses: All the Corinthian believers were baptized in the Holy Spirit, joined to the body of Christ and *made to drink* of that same Spirit. Yet not all spoke in tongues.

This is a significant example of the rule of progressive revelation. The letter to the Corinthians interprets and refines this teaching in relation to the narratives in the book of Acts. While Acts describes how tongues was used in the founding of the Christian movement, the epistle proscribes and limits its usage throughout the church age.

Paul goes on to explain how this gift can be abused, but that's another study.

Is tongues divisive?

Cessationists are quick to point out how divisive tongues have been. This charge has some validity, but it is irrelevant. All doctrine in church history has caused division at some point.

The accusation backfires because cessationists have also been known to cause division. They may object even when people with this gift do not hold to the view that everyone should have it.

Do not forbid speaking in tongues. 1 Corinthians 14:39

A friend of mine was talking to a colleague who told him he had forbidden certain people to practice tongues, even privately because he felt it was nonsense. My friend replied,

“Have you repented for that sin yet?” This shocked the colleague who asked what he meant. My friend quoted the verse above and explained this is a command from God. Therefore, forbidding people to speak in tongues is a sin.

The only limitations Paul puts on this gift or any other, has to do with disorderly conduct, spiritual pride or pressuring others to practice the same gift.

Spiritual pride

Any teaching that divides Christians into superior versus inferior categories based on a single spiritual experience, is false. It leads to spiritual pride. This can be a problem. Those who have not spoken in tongues are seen as lacking the Holy Spirit and therefore spiritually inferior, regardless of their commitment to Christ and godly living.

The epistles describe spirituality as progressive growth through the use of the practical means God has given us which are the Bible, prayer and the fellowship of the church.

Should we pursue spiritual gifts?

*Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.
1 Corinthians 14:1*

Pursue love? What does that have to do with spiritual gifts? Love drives us to want to help people. Have you ever wanted to help someone but were unable to do so? That’s where the earnest desire for spiritual gifts is born. Love and spiritual gifts are linked. That is why the word **and** is there.

Earnestly desire. A friend once expressed a passive attitude toward spiritual gifts by saying, “I’m open to whatever God may give.” How does that square with Paul’s encouragement to *earnestly desire* spiritual gifts? He didn't say, be open to them. He said desire them eagerly. A passive attitude shows neither faith nor love and will result in nothing.

Be a specialist

God’s gifts rarely come fully mature. Each gift has multiple facets and the wise Christian will study the gift and become a specialist in it. This channels and refines the gift making it a part of one’s personality as God intended it. Those with a gift of preaching need to study everything they can find on how to preach.

Paul insinuates this in Romans 12:6-8. Whatever gift a person has, he should master it.

For example, a person with the gift of help needs to learn wisdom and discernment about helping others without making them dependent. Other mature believers with this gift can be a great resource.

Sometimes God gives extraordinary gifts to the most ordinary people, even the most unworthy. This should encourage us.

Chapter 16: How to evaluate gifts

*Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts,
But all things should be done decently and in order. 1Corinthians 14:1,40*

Abuses abound today with spiritual gifts, just as they did with the Corinthians. It is legitimate to put a question mark over some manifestations that have been passed off as genuine. It is not legitimate to reject extraordinary spiritual gifts on that grounds. Doing that is fear-based theology. The fears are...

- Fear of falling into the extremes of certain movements.
- Fear of losing control of oneself or allowing disorder in meetings.
- Fear of unbiblical teaching that may come through supposed spiritual manifestations.

These reservations are dispelled when we apply biblical criteria for distinguishing the genuine from the counterfeit. Once these principles are rooted in our minds, we are free to *earnestly desire the spiritual gifts* and enjoy a new sense of security in evaluating spiritual manifestations. Following are four criteria for assessing the legitimacy of any supposed spiritual phenomena:

Who does it glorify?

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, ... He will glorify me. John 16:13-14

God gave the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus Christ. His mission is to bring attention to Christ, not to himself. If another person, doctrine or movement or even a “gift” itself is getting more glory than Christ, something is wrong. If Christ alone is glorified, then we can safely assume the manifestation is from God.

What does it produce?

*Beware of false prophets...You will recognize them by their fruits. Matthew 7:15,16
Let all things be done for building up. 1Corinthians 14:26*

The perfecting and sanctifying of his people is God’s goal in the church. Does it lead to that? Or does it produce disorder? Does it result in a better understanding of sound doctrine? Or does it introduce doubtful and confusing questions? Is the teaching implied scripturally sound?

Does it follow biblical order?

But all things should be done decently and in order. 1Corinthians 14:40

Paul lays down rules to maintain order in the use of spiritual gifts. Are these rules respected?

Is it in submission to biblical authority?

...let the others weigh what is said. 1Corinthians 14:29

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Hebrews 13:17

Does the person manifesting a supposed spiritual gift show a willingness to submit to evaluation and correction? Or do they insinuate they are above it on the grounds that their supposed *gift* came from the Holy Spirit? The latter is spiritual pride and deserves rebuke. Manifestations of supernatural gifts are not authoritative in this dispensation. Our only authority is Scripture.

What are sign gifts?

Cessationists use the term "sign gifts" to refer to gifts that are obviously supernatural and cannot be attributed to natural causes. These include prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues, the gift of miracles, word of knowledge, word of wisdom and gifts of healings.

These are called "signs" because they point to the authentication of the apostles and the message of grace they preached. The signs are no longer necessary today because the Scriptures replace them as the pointer to the message of grace.

Continuationists point out that no scriptural warrant exists for categorizing spiritual gifts this way. To remove any gifts by categorizing like this them would require apostolic authorization, and such is not found in Scripture.

Furthermore, there seems no reason why supernatural spiritual gifts today cannot point to the Scriptures themselves and their authenticity or even to just the gospel itself. Why does the gospel need less authentication today than it did in the first century?

Signs and wonders vs charismata

The term *signs and wonders* occurs only in the Book of Acts, except in a couple of places where Paul applies the term to his own ministry. Conversely, the term *charismata* is found only in the epistles, never in the Book of Acts.

As a defense for their position, some moderate continuationists point out a difference between *signs and wonders* in the Book of Acts and *charismata* in the epistles.²²

The two are similar, with some overlapping, but are like the difference between a *genus* and *species* in biology. They may be in the same general category but not exactly the same.

If this distinction is correct, then moderate continuationists can accept a difference between the apostolic age and the present church dispensation without abandoning spiritual gifts for today. The apostolic age was characterized by extraordinary miraculous manifestations with a frequency that could be classified as signs and wonders. This established the Christian movement on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, as Paul said in Ephesians 2:20.

This is like the difference between building a house and living in it. The tools for one are not the same as the tools for the other. Similar, maybe some overlapping but different circumstances.

The cessationist argues at this point that since the foundation has been laid, the miraculous is no longer necessary. If by the term *miraculous* they mean extraordinary and frequent apostolic miracles, the continuationists can agree with this. If the cessationist means *any* miraculous or supernatural manifestations, then the moderate continuationists must disagree at this point.

A fallacy of extensions seems involved in this cessationist view. It assumes that the charismata of the epistles are in the same category as apostolic signs and wonders and that the only purpose for anything supernatural is foundational.

The epistles, however, do not confirm this. The charismata in the epistles, the continuationists argues, fulfill a different purpose; the growth of the church, not the founding of it. This allows for spiritual gifts to occur in a regular and orderly fashion without the failed and frustrated attempts of Pentecostals to duplicate the apostolic age.

Summary

Once biblical criteria are established, fear-based theology goes out the window. This frees us to be proactive in the pursuit of spiritual gifts as Scripture commands. We can evaluate any spiritual manifestation with a greater sense of confidence. This allows us to exalt Christ even more.

Chapter 17: The first four centuries

During the first four centuries following Christ, the two main concerns of early church fathers were how to avoid persecution while also refuting major heresies. Quotes about spiritual gifts are scanty, found in the context of subjects more vital to them at that time.

From the few quotes we have, we see that spiritual gifts continued well beyond the apostolic age though not as spectacular. Toward the fifth and sixth centuries, there seems to be a diminishing of gifts in general.

Cessationists claim this diminishing supports their view. Continuationists, such as Jack Deere,²³ suggest that such a diminishing may be due to increased apostasy because the church incorporated Greco-Roman philosophies and practices. The Holy Spirit would naturally withdraw from such.

Below are some quotes of early church fathers, taken from an excellent article on this subject:²⁴

Early Christianity (100 - 500)

Justin Martyr (d.165) in his Dialogue with Trypho comments, 'For the prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time.'²⁵

Irenaeus (d.202) was a pupil of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John. He wrote in his book Against Heresies, Book V, vi.: "In like manner do we also hear many brethren in the church who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light, for the general benefit, the hidden things of men and declare the mysteries of God, who also the apostles term spiritual".

"Those who are in truth His disciples, receiving grace from Him, do in His name perform [miracles], so as to promote the welfare of other men, according to the gift which each one has received from Him. For some do certainly and truly drive out devils, so that those who have thus been cleansed from evil spirits frequently both believe [in Christ], and join themselves to the Church. Others have foreknowledge of things to come: they see visions, and utter prophetic expressions. Others still, heal the sick by laying their hands upon them, and they are made whole. Yea, moreover, as I have said, the dead even have been raised up, and remained among us for many years.... The name of our Lord Jesus Christ even now confers benefits [upon men], and cures thoroughly and effectively all who anywhere believe on Him".²⁶

Origen (AD 185–253). He professed to have been an eye-witness to many instances of exorcism, healing, and prophecy, although he refused to record the details, lest he should rouse the laughter and scorn of the unbeliever.²⁷

Chrysostom (d.407) – writing on 1 Corinthians and the gift of tongues said, "This whole place is very obscure; but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place.

And why do they not happen now? Why look now, the cause too of the obscurity hath produced us again another question: namely, why did they then happen, and now do so no more?". (AD 347–407) ²⁸

Augustine (d.430) – In a homily on the 1st Epistle of John, Augustine commented that speaking in tongues was a miracle suitable for the early church, but that it was no longer evident in his own time.[23] In chapters 8 and 9 of Book XXII of his City of God, written circa AD 415, Augustine noted that miracles in his day were not as spectacular or noteworthy as those at the dawn of Christianity, but that they continued to take place.²⁹

From Part Three we learn...

Three main views exist regarding the controversial gifts of prophecy, healing and tongues.

- Pentecostal view: These gifts continue today the same as in the apostolic age. If they are not manifested, there may be a lack of faith.
- Moderate continuationist view: These gifts continue but not with the same intensity or frequency as in the apostolic age. God is in sovereign control of how or when they may be applied and is free to act with or without human cooperation.
- Cessationist view: The above mentioned gifts ceased with the close of the apostolic age. Those who think they possess them are in error.
- Spiritual gifts or manifestations can be evaluated according to criteria found in Scripture.

Conclusion: Pastoral Letter, PCA

The following letter is the official stance of the Presbyterian Church in America on issues related to the Holy Spirit, miracles and spiritual gifts. Although a strong cessationist element exists within that denomination, the reader will notice it takes a moderate continuationist view of the issues.

A PASTORAL LETTER CONCERNING THE EXPERIENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH TODAY PCA Position Paper Adopted by the Second General Assembly, 1974

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, being fully aware of the widespread notice being given to the question of the work of the Holy Spirit today, offers the following pastoral letter addressed to its churches:

The General Assembly rejoices in all evidences of new life in Christ's body. It prays earnestly that the Spirit which Christ has poured out on his church may continue to affect radically the lives of men throughout the world.

At the same time, the General Assembly would express concern over an increasing emphasis on experience-centered criteria as they are applied to the life of God's people. The General Assembly would encourage the church as a whole to take most seriously its commitment to the Scriptures as the "only infallible rule of faith and practice" (BCO 2-5), particularly as Scripture relates to current questions within the church.

In seeking to provide guidelines from Scripture to questions relating to the church's experience of the Holy Spirit, the General Assembly would offer the following observations:

I. Concerning the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised by Joel and other prophets in the Old Testament' as well as by John the Baptist and our Lord in the New Testament. It found its fulfillment at Pentecost. While public and external manifestations of the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred on occasion in the Apostolic Age, Scripture teaches that the normal experience of the Spirit's baptism coincides with regeneration. It is therefore not to be viewed as a second blessing or a special work of grace enjoyed by some but not by all Christians. The initial reception of Christ by faith is not to be separated from the total impartation of the Person of the Holy Spirit

II. Concerning Life in the Spirit

Life in the Spirit begins with regeneration. The first manifestation of this life is the believer's calling on the name of the Lord for salvation. Assurance of salvation is not based on any experience, but on the Word of God that promises eternal life to all who believe. This assurance is to be cultivated by the continual use of the means of grace.

III. Concerning the Filling of the Spirit

The filling of the Spirit denotes the dominion of Christ in our lives and occurs when one is led willingly by the Word through which the Spirit works. By their subjection to the Word of Scripture, believers grow in grace and the benefits of the redemption they receive freely through Christ. The evidence of this spiritual growth is seen in the fruits of the Spirit, which is proof of their abiding in Christ and His Word abiding in them. By the filling of the Spirit they are enabled to speak the truth of Christ with great boldness.

The Scripture commands every Christian to be filled continually by the Holy Spirit, and to grow spiritually by obedience to God's written Word and the proper use of the means of grace. When we neglect or ignore His Word or are disobedient to it, we are guilty of quenching and grieving the Holy Spirit. 17

IV. Concerning the Gifts of the Spirit

Spiritual gifts are granted to every believer by the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each Christian "individually as He wills." 18 Christians are to use these gifts to serve Christ in the work of His Kingdom and for the edification of the body of Christ. 19 All true believers receive some spiritual gift or gifts. No spiritual gift is to be despised, nor is it to be misused to bring glory to any other than to Christ. Specific spiritual gifts noted in Scripture are found in the following passages: Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11-16.

Some spiritual gifts plainly have ceased, such as the founding office of apostle. Others are obscure and cannot be clearly defined, such as "helps." Others are clearly seen today, such as "teaching" and "giving." Some have received undue prominence in recent days, such as "tongues," "working of miracles" and "healing."

A. Tongues

It seems evident that the tongues described in Acts 2 were foreign languages known to the hearers there present. It is more difficult, however, to resolve the question of the exact nature of the tongues mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. It is also difficult to determine with certainty the relationship of the modern tongues phenomenon to the New Testament experience. The General Assembly suggests however, that:

Any view of the tongues as experienced in our time which conceives of it as an experience by which revelation is received from God is contrary to the finalized character of revelation in Scripture. Any view of tongues which sees this phenomenon as an essential sign of the baptism of the Spirit is contradictory to Scripture; and any practice of the tongues

phenomenon in any age which causes dissension and division within the body of Christ or diverts the church from its mission is contrary to the purpose of the Spirit's gifts.

B. Miracles

Much discussion and debate continues throughout the church of Christ on the subject of miracles. In the Scripture certain clusters of miracles were associated with various servants of God and related to the giving of revelation, such as, Exodus 4:1-9; 1 Kings 17:23-24; John 2:11; 3:2. Such miracles were signs by which God communicated divine truth or confirmed that the speaker indeed spoke from God. These miracles related to revelation have ceased, since revelation was completed with the closing of the Canon in the New Testament era. Scripture also uses the term "miracle" or "wonder" to describe the acts of God in all areas of creation and providence. The power of God in response to believing prayer to work wonders and to heal the sick cannot be limited. Such wonders certainly do continue to this day and are all for the glory of God not man.

Finally, the General Assembly would speak a word of caution against an obsession with signs and miraculous manifestations which is not indicative of a healthy church, but of the opposite. The Spirit provides all that is necessary for the equipping of the saints through His presence and power in the lives of the regenerate.

2. The true basis of faith and spiritual growth is the work of the Holy Spirit in believers as they are made subject to His written Word, which is sufficient in itself for spiritual growth to complete maturity. The General Assembly would also urge a spirit of forbearance among those holding differing views regarding the spiritual gifts as they are experienced today.

As the church continues to study these matters, the General Assembly would recommend:

1. Prayerful study of the Scriptural teaching on the Holy Spirit and His gifts;
2. Study of the church's Standards on such areas as Scripture, Trinity, Doctrines of Grace;
3. Careful training, examination and selection of officers and others in the place of teaching and leadership in the church to assure a consistency of commitment to Scripture and the Reformed faith and to the health and unity of the church;
4. Preaching and teaching of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and His work as taught in Scripture and the Standards of the church; and
5. The promotion of a charitable spirit in the whole church.

Adopted 1974

Those who like this study guide will also like our book,
[The Prosperity Gospel: Wounded Charismatics](#)

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Endnotes

- ¹ All quotes are from the ESV unless otherwise indicated.
- ² Berkhof, Louis. Systematic Theology, PDF version:
<https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/berkhof/SystematicTheologybyLouisBerkhof.pdf>
- ³ The Pope claims to replace Christ on earth. Such a claim is blasphemous because the Pope puts himself in the place of the Holy Spirit.
- ⁴ This text does not name the Holy Spirit in particular as the restraining agent. Scholars, however, usually attribute this text to the Holy Spirit for lack of any other plausible explanation.
- ⁵ Grudem, Systematic Theology, P.786
- ⁶ John 3:5-8
- ⁷ Titus 3:4-8
- ⁸ The origins and development of the Pentecostal movement are outside the limits of this study. The student can find information about this from a church history text.
- ⁹ Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation of literature. It follows common sense rules and is normally applied in biblical studies. Courses and books on hermeneutics are readily available.
- ¹⁰ On one occasion, he was visiting the United Kingdom and spoke to a group of church leaders. For his text he chose Ephesians 5:18, where Paul urges the recipients of his letter to 'Be filled with the Spirit.' Moody pointed out that this is legitimately translated into English as 'Continue to be filled with the Spirit.' At the mention of this, a vicar objected. 'Why do I need to continue to be filled with the Spirit? I was filled with the Spirit at conversion.' <https://www.moody.edu/about/our-bold-legacy/d-l-moody/>
- ¹¹ 'I need to continue to be filled with the Spirit,' replied Moody, 'because I leak.'
- ¹¹ For an exposé of this movement, see my book The Prosperity Gospel: Wounded Charismatics
- ¹² Grudem, Systematic Theology, P.640
- ¹³ Wikipedia has a good general review of this point in Cessationism vs Continuationism.
- ¹⁴ <https://sacredheartfla.org/about-us/being-franciscan/franciscan-feast-days/the-feast-of-the-stigmata-of-st-francis-of-assisi/>
- ¹⁵ Warfield, B.B. Counterfeit Miracles. 1918
- ¹⁶ Dr. Walter Martin was the foremost expert on cults. His book Kingdom of the Cults is a classic.
- ¹⁷ A view espoused by John MacArthur in one of his YouTube videos.
- ¹⁸ Luke 3:10-14
- ¹⁹ Eph.4:8
- ²⁰ 1 Peter 2:24
- ²¹ <https://www.cob-net.org/church/freespring/docs/Vines-Expository-Dictionary.pdf>
- ²² Jack Deere elaborates this in his book, Surprised by the Power of the Spirit,.
- ²³ Deere, Jack. Surprised by the Power of the Spirit. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1993
- ²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cessationism_vs_continuationism
- ²⁵ Justin Martyr. Dialogue with Trypho. Chapter 82.
- ²⁶ Irenaeus. Against Heresies. Cosimo Classics, P.847
- ²⁷ Irenaeus. Against Celsus: Ante-Nicaean Fathers. 2013
- ²⁸ Chrysostom. Borrowed from Piney.com. Homily 29.
- ²⁹ Church Fathers: City of God. Book 22.