

The Holy Spirit Gives Spiritual Gifts to His Church

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The subject of spiritual gifts has received more detailed attention in the last few decades than perhaps ever before in the Lutheran church. The reason may be the challenge of the Pentecostal movement or the Charismatic movement, but a comparison with earlier writings and dogmatic treatments will show that very often it was not a separate topic, or was barely mentioned at all. For example, a free conference in 1972 had a series of five essays, published in a booklet, *God the Holy Spirit Acts*, but there was no essay dedicated to the topic of the gifts of the Spirit, and a cursory reading did not show any detailed discussion of the matter. Pieper does not have a special section of his *Dogmatics* dedicated to the subject either. Nor, as far as a quick survey of the table of contents revealed, does Hoenecke. This does not mean that the matter is never touched on, nor that there are not sections which give valuable insights concerning spiritual gifts, but in these treatments they do not receive the prominence which has become common in the last few decades.

It is probably this which above all leads to the charge that spiritual gifts have been neglected in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and which has led to the special challenge which the Charismatic movement presents to us in our day. However, I am happy to report that we are not so poor in resources for appreciating and evaluating properly the gifts of the Holy Spirit as it may at first seem. Luther, Walther and Pieper all discuss related movements, from the Anabaptists to the Methodists, and even classical Reformed to some extent, and the comments that they direct against such movements still give us many of the keys to a correct understanding of the true doctrine of spiritual gifts, and a reaction to the false doctrine espoused by the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement.

The greatest gift of the Holy Spirit

On the day of Pentecost, after the Holy Spirit had come upon the disciples with special manifestations, and had given them the ability to speak in other languages “the wonderful works of God,” Peter preached a powerful sermon. At the close of that sermon the people’s reaction to the sermon was that “they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (Ac 2:37). Peter’s reply takes us to the heart of our topic. “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The phrase, “the gift of the Holy Spirit,” could be taken in two ways. Either it is the great gift of faith, the means of appropriating Christ and the forgiveness of sins, or it is the Holy Spirit himself, “the gift which is the Holy Spirit,” who comes to the baptized in baptism working repentance and faith, and thus giving the forgiveness of sins. The second is more probable. We see here that Peter ties the reception of the Holy Spirit himself, with all his gifts and graces, to the sacrament of Christian baptism. This is also the finding of Presbyterian scholar F. Dale Bruner. He states: “Our text teaches us that since the occurrence of Pentecost Christian baptism becomes the locus of the Spirit’s reception in response to the Spirit’s pressure in preaching. Henceforth, baptism is Pentecost. . . . The content is God’s free gift of the Holy Spirit. And after Pentecost this gift is offered, as here, with forgiveness, in the humble rite of baptism. Baptism becomes the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Peter in Acts 2:38 offers no other definition.”¹ On Pentecost the word of Christ was preached, the sacrament of baptism was administered, and a vibrant Christian congregation was formed. Everyone who was baptized that day, according to Peter’s promise, received the gift of the Holy Spirit at the same time as he received saving faith and the forgiveness of sins.

The means of acquiring the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit

We maintain that the Holy Spirit himself with his grace, his gifts and his powerful working are available only in the means of grace, the gospel in word and sacrament. Commenting on the

statement of our Confessions in which Luther wrote: "We must maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil,"² Walther comments: "Note well what our church says here. Whatever a person claims to have achieved in the line of grace apart from the Word and the sacraments is from the devil, for he has given it to him. Such a person has a false God, a false Christ, a false grace. Therefore if the enthusiasts would cling to their basic principles even to their death, not a one of them could be saved, for they always say that if you want to receive grace you have to pray until you feel that you are filled with it. But because God has His own also among these people, such homemade notions are cast overboard, especially in the hour of affliction, perhaps not until the time of death. Then they think of this or that beautiful passage and cling to such a rock and are saved even in the hour of death. This [is] the only way in which they can be saved. Anyone who wants to find grace elsewhere than in the Word and sacraments sees only an apparition, not grace itself."³

Pieper insists on the same thing, and specifically mentions the gifts of the Holy Spirit. "But the remission of sins for Christ's sake and faith in this remission, regeneration unto spiritual life and all the spiritual gifts connected with it, God will give only through the means of grace He has ordained, through the Word of the Gospel and the Sacraments."⁴

He also quotes Luther: "God has established this order regarding His Holy Spirit, that ordinarily He is to come through the Word. Christ Himself says this at this place. . . . He will not have it that you fly to and fro to seek or to imagine a 'Spirit' so that you might say: I have received it through the 'inner voice' [Einsprechen] of the Holy Ghost. . . . Christ will not accept such inner voice, but binds us to His Word only; He does not want the Spirit separated from His Word. Therefore, if you hear some one boasting that he got something by inspiration or inner voice of the Holy Spirit, and it lacks God's Word, be it what it may, then declare it to be the abominable devil."⁵

We shall see later in the paper what the Pentecostals and Charismatics teach about the way in which the Spirit and his gifts come to men. For the moment we shall let this suffice, since this theme will have been adequately covered by Pastor Chinyama in the third essay. For our purposes, it is enough to insist that just as the Holy Spirit uses the means of grace to initiate and strengthen faith, those same means of grace are his means of producing the fruit of the Spirit in those who have been brought to faith by him, and to give them his gifts.

The fruits of the Spirit

In Galatians chapter 5 Paul discusses first the "acts of the sinful nature", and then "the fruit of the Spirit." "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:22). The first term is love, and it subsumes all the following terms. All Christians receive a new nature which is characterized by these attractive fruits. It is significant that when Paul discusses the individual gifts of the Spirit, he generally insists that they are to be exercised in love, going so far as to say that they are utterly valueless unless they are accompanied by love.

Nevertheless, Paul does not picture Christians as ever reaching perfection in this life in regard to the fruits of the Spirit, but reminds them that they also have a fleshly nature, so that "the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want" (Gal. 5:17). For that reason Paul reminds and exhorts us: "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." The presence of conflict, weakness, difficulty in living the Christian life as well as we would like is not evidence of the lack of the Holy Spirit, or that he has not yet come in his fullness. Rather, this very conflict is evidence of the Spirit's presence, and it is through this conflict, as we are strengthened and encouraged by the means of grace, that the fruits of the Spirit express themselves.

These general fruits of the Spirit, however, which are to be common to all Christians, are not what are usually meant when we speak of the gifts of the Spirit. Spiritual gifts, rather, are the special

endowments, different in the case of each Christian, which the Holy Spirit gives for the building up of Christ's church.

Saints equipped by the Spirit to carry out his work

In Ephesians 4 Christ is presented as a triumphant king, ascended into heaven after a descent to earth in which he triumphed over every opposing power. The enemies whom he conquered were our enemies, sin, death, Satan, hell. For this reason he was able to give "gifts to men" (v. 8). Another term occurs in verse 7, "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." Since the grace has been apportioned or given (ejdovqh) according to the measure of the gift of Christ (kata; to; mevtron th`" dwrea`" tou` Cristou`), this is not the favorable attitude in the heart of God which is the basic meaning of the word cavri", but rather a concrete result of grace.⁶ In the case of Paul, it was his apostolic office. But he was not alone in receiving gifts from Christ. Among the gifts of the exalted Christ to the church were people with the gifts to carry out different aspects of the office of the holy ministry. "But to each one of us grace has been given." "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers" (v. 11). A special place among the gifts which the risen Christ has given to his church is occupied by the different forms of the ministry of the Word. Some of these forms were temporary, given only in the formative years of the church. We no longer have apostles in the same sense, nor do we need more than those original apostles who together with the prophets are mentioned in Eph 2:19 as providing the foundation of the New Testament church (I believe the term prophets refers to the Old Testament prophets in this reference). Christ himself grants to the church ministers of the Word as his gifts, and the ministry of the Word is to be received by the church with full thanksgiving and appreciation. He who calls, also equips for that service for which he calls. "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant" (2 Co 3:5,6).

It could be asked, Why are we discussing a passage which deals with the gifts of the exalted Christ, when our theme is the gifts of the Holy Spirit? The reason is that the very same gifts are attributed to the Holy Spirit in other passages of Scripture. In 1 Co 12, for example, when spiritual gifts are mentioned, the three divine persons are mentioned as their source: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men" (1 Co 12:4-6). And Paul speaks to pastors and teachers, the elders of the Ephesian church, and reminds them that the Holy Spirit has made them overseers to shepherd (pastor) the flock of God (Ac 20:28).

Chrysostom comments on this in his Homilies on Galatians: "But that it [the apostleship] was not entrusted to him by men, Luke declares in the words, 'As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul' (Ac 13:2). From this passage it is manifest that the power of the Son and Spirit is one, for being commissioned by the Spirit, he says that he was commissioned by Christ. This appears in another place, from his ascription of the things of God to the Spirit, in the words which he addresses to the elders at Miletus: 'Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in the which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops' (Acts 20:28). Yet in another Epistle he says, 'And God hath set some in the Church, first Apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers.' (1 Corinthians 12:28.) Thus he ascribes indifferently the things of the Spirit to God, and the things of God to the Spirit."⁷

However, it is also important that we note the purpose for which God has given gifted men to the church for the public ministry of the Word. It is not so that they will be the only people with gifts or a task in the church, but rather, "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:12,13). Some, such as Stoeckhardt and Hodge, take the second element of verse 12 as a separate activity, and thus interpret the phrase as saying that the men that were given are to exercise themselves in the work of the ministry, that is, perform the duties of their public ministry. "They

have been appointed to the 'work of ministering,' or 'the business of the service,' and this ministering is the 'building up of the body of Christ,' of the Church; it consists therefore of preaching and teaching."⁸ Others such as Lenski and Markus Barth, interpret as the NIV translates, "to prepare God's people for works of service." The second seems preferable. As all members receive gifts from the Holy Spirit, all are to exercise these gifts for the edification of the church. Nevertheless these works of service are not to be confused with the public work of the called ministry. For those who have the particular gifts of speaking words which encourage and build up the church, their activity would be more in line with the "mutual conversation and consolation of brethren"⁹ of the Smalcald Articles, which would include all private uses of the keys. The result will be that "then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph. 4:14-16). Each member of the body will have something to do so that the body reaches its goal. The public ministry has as one of its functions preparing and encouraging all the members of the body in using for the common good those gifts which the Holy Spirit has given them.

While the Ephesians passage speaks of gifted men as a special gift of Christ to the church, Romans 12 has a wider reach. Not only the public ministry of the word is mentioned, but also many other services which would be included in the service referred to in Ephesians 4:12.

Let us use our varied gifts according to the measure of faith and the gift given to us

"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully" (Ro 12:6-8).

In this passage only the first term has a direct connection with the ministry of the Word. Some of the others may be reflective of offices in the church, occupied by those elders that did not labor in word and doctrine (1 Ti 5:17), but others seem to reflect the countless opportunities that God gives to members of the congregation whom he equips with special gifts to serve in those varied capacities. Remembering the purpose for which God gives the gifts, for the building up and benefit of the body, not for personal self-aggrandizement, each Christian is actively to use the gifts which have been entrusted to him or her.

Those who can find a special satisfaction in the countless types of service which are needed both within and outside the congregation are actively to use their gift and their opportunities. "If it is serving, let him serve." In my last congregation in the United States, there were flowers on the altar every Sunday. For months I didn't even know how they got there. A very kind and unpretentious member of the congregation simply always took care of seeing that they were there, without ever drawing attention to herself. And that is typical of the gift of serving when it is used as God intended. Pastor-teachers were listed in the Ephesians passage. But it seems that this passage in Romans is broader, and includes many members who have the special gift of being able to teach others. That gift, too, is to be exercised, whether on the congregational level, as our Sunday School and Vacation Bible School teachers do, or on the family level, or when there is an opportunity to teach others who do not know what the Word says about sin and salvation to those who fall into their circle of influence. Not only the gifts will vary, but the aptness for age levels or for teaching at different levels of complexity will vary. Paul is saying that whatever the level of ability, if God has given us this gift, we should use it according to that level for the good of the body.

Certainly many besides the called workers in a congregation will have the gift of finding just the right thing to say to encourage those who are suffering and dispirited. This gift, too, is to be used actively, so that the body will lack nothing. All Christians have the responsibility to give of their

means for the spread of the gospel and for the alleviation of human suffering. Paul in this passage, however, implies that God gives certain individuals a special gift of finding joy in giving generously for the support of his church or for other needs. That gift is not to be resisted, but exercised. Here surely we are not dealing with a gift that could conceivably be limited to the public ministers.

Leadership is also mentioned. Any organization needs leaders, and the church is no exception. Yet its needs are greater than a worldly organization. The church needs people whom God has gifted so that they lead by example, by inspiration, and above all, for the glory of God and the benefit of his people, not for self-glory or even for the glory and success of the organization as such. When God supplies such consecrated leaders they are not to be despised nor undervalued. Nor should those whom God has given the gift of contributing to their brothers in this fashion turn away from leadership positions in the congregation and its organizations. This gift, too, is to be used.

Paul ends the list with showing mercy. But here Paul doesn't just mention that the gift is to be used, but prescribes the manner in which it is to be used, "cheerfully." Another dear lady from my former congregation could be the embodiment of this gift. Wherever she saw need, she would try to help in any way she could, always with cheerfulness, never grudgingly. It wasn't that she had great resources; what she had was a big heart that the Holy Spirit had given her. Returning to the Ephesians passage, one of the responsibilities of the public ministers of the Word whom God has given to the church, is to encourage and train the members of the body to find those areas in which the Holy Spirit has given them gifts by which the body can be built up, not with legalistic pressure, but through teaching and encouraging to use faithfully the opportunities to serve which present themselves. Peter also writes an exhortation similar to St. Paul's: "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Pe 4:10,11).

The Corinthian problem

The Corinthian congregation appears to have had the gifts of the Holy Spirit in special abundance. What should have been a great blessing for the congregation, however, instead became a serious problem. The gifts themselves, of course, were not the problem. The manner in which they were evaluated and used was.

There is a reason why we have saved our consideration of this chapter until last. One is that in Pentecostal circles, chapters 12 to 14 of 1 Corinthians receive almost all the attention. Bruner writes: "The Pentecostal places unusual stress upon the gifts of the Spirit and particularly upon the gifts discussed in 1 Corinthians 12 to 14."¹⁰ He also says: ". . . in the life of the Pentecostal movement, as far as we have been able to observe, there appears to be no deliberate or widespread practice of the non-remarkable gifts per se. Therefore, if it can be said that Pentecostalism stresses the spiritual gifts, then it would be more accurate to say that it stresses the extraordinary spiritual gifts. For there is no serious emphasis in the Pentecostal movement on the gifts associated with (to take but one New Testament list) wisdom, knowledge, or faith, all somewhat intangible endowments. It is the more striking gifts which are the special Pentecostal concern."¹¹ Just because Paul in Corinthians is dealing, not with general exhortation, but the resolution of a problem, we can get a distorted picture of the Biblical teaching on spiritual gifts if we give first and primary attention to the 1 Corinthians passages. This can be illustrated by the argument of some Pentecostals that tongues are to be given the highest value, because otherwise Paul would not have spent so much time on them in 1 Corinthians 14.12

When we examine Paul's treatment of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, we find several emphases that we have seen before. He speaks of their diversity: "There are different kinds of gifts . . . There are different kinds of service, . . . There are different kinds of working" (v. 4). Later on, through a series of rhetorical questions, he reinforces this principle of variety. "Are all apostles? Are all

prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?" (vv. 29,30).

A second emphasis which may also be found in Ephesians, and more explicitly in Romans (12:4,5) is the comparison with a body. As in the physical body no member works against the other members of the body, but rather all aid and support each other with their particular functions, so in the spiritual body of Christ, the church, all gifts are to be used for the good of the body, rather than for selfish ends against the body. Here in 1 Corinthians 12:12f. Paul writes: "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. . . . If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. . . . Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

While the Lord's initiative in determining the distribution of the gifts among the members of the congregation was implicit in the other treatments of spiritual gifts, in 1 Corinthians 12 the Spirit's sovereign will in determining who will receive what gift is made explicit and emphatic. After mentioning the message of wisdom, the message of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, different kinds of tongues (or languages) and interpretation of tongues, Paul writes: "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines" (v. 11).

All are gifts of the same Spirit (vv. 4,7,8,9,11). It is possible that the term translated "spiritual gifts" in verse 1 could be translated "spiritual people." Tw'n pneumatikw'n could be either masculine or neuter. If this was the term which the Corinthian tongues speakers used for themselves, then it is possible that Paul subtly changed the emphasis when he chose the term *cavrisma* in verse 4, to emphasize not a supposed higher status or quality of the persons who had particular gifts, but the fact that all were in fact gifts, provided purely out of grace, not in response to any merit or worthiness on the part of the recipients. It would then be a master stroke of pricking the bubble of pride and egoism which seemed to afflict the Corinthian tongues speakers.

The other special emphasis of 1 Corinthians 12 is the purpose of the gifts. "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (v. 7). Gifts of the Spirit do not have the purpose of bringing personal glory or providing an occasion for boasting, or envy, or for despising the recipients of "lesser" gifts. All are to be used for the common good. Nevertheless there is a certain hierarchy in the spiritual gifts. Those are most to be desired which best serve the common good, which serve particularly to build up the church (v. 31; 14:1,5). Thus Paul enumerates some of the gifts in verse 28: "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues." The argument is made by some that the order does not indicate Paul's level of appreciation, but in view of the discussion in chapter 14 and the problem of the overvaluation of tongues in Corinth, it seems inescapable that when Paul begins with "first," "second," "third," he is establishing a scale of values based on the criterion of their contribution to the edification of the church.

Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians is intimately related to both chapters 12 and 14. Since all spiritual gifts have been given not for selfish and egotistical use, but for others, to build up the body, Paul reminds the Corinthians that unless love, that queen of the fruits of the Spirit, predominates and motivates all practice of the spiritual gifts, they become worthless. Thus Paul ends 1 Cor. 12 with the words: "But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way." That most excellent way is the way of love. We are reminded that love is not self-seeking (13:5), that no matter what the spiritual gift, in contrast with faith, hope and love, it is temporal, and therefore limited. "But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away" (v. 8). Following his magnificent hymn on selfless Christian love, Paul begins his 14th chapter with "Follow the way of love and eagerly

desire spiritual gifts.” Not just any gifts, however, but with a gentle corrective for the Corinthian specialization in the most showy but at the same time least useful of the gifts, he exhorts them, “especially the gift of prophecy.”

Why does Paul suggest that they seek especially the gift of prophecy (probably a gift which God gave to some at that period through which he gave them special revelations of his Word and will to speak in the congregation as well as in other situations, cf. Rev. 1:3; 10:11; 19:10; 22:7; Acts 21:10-11; as well as verses 29-32 of this chapter)?¹³ It is because they speak in clear and intelligible words and thus edify the congregation. “But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church” (vv. 3,4). Since edification of the church, the contribution to the body, is the purpose of the spiritual gifts, Paul can say: “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified” (v. 5).

Paul reinforces this by contrasting the effects of tongues with the effects of prophecy on a stranger who may happen to come into the worship service. “So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’” (vv. 23-25). Indeed, the congregation itself will suffer if everyone insists on speaking in tongues, and there is no prophecy. “Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?” (v. 6). Thus Paul can write: “So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church” (v. 12). After regulating both the public exercise of tongues and prophecy (no tongues unless there is an interpreter, though they may be used in private, and even if there is an interpreter, no more than two or three people, as well as no more than two or three prophets) Paul concludes his discussion: “Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (vv. 39,40).

What were the tongues in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14? Most contemporary scholars take them to be ecstatic utterance, not necessarily in ordinary human languages. One book defines them: “Glossolalia appears, then, to be a form of the phenomenon of ecstatic speech which is characteristic of primitive Christianity, a phenomenon which—as we see from the history of religions—was very widespread and had its antecedents in the Judaism of the time of the New Testament, had its own terminology, and as we shall see, had its own proper original situation, in accord with the experience of the Spirit which existed in the primitive Christian community and with its eschatological consciousness, and it also had its own interpretation, derived from this situation.”¹⁴ Hodge, however, makes a persuasive case for viewing them as languages not learned by the speaker, and not understood by the hearers, but nevertheless real human languages as were those spoken by the disciples on Pentecost, though he admits that no single theory meets all the difficulties presented by some of the passages. Those who interpret them as ecstatic speech like to point to 1 Corinthians 13:1, where Paul speaks of tongues of men and of angels. However, it seems that Paul is using hyperbole here, just as he does when he speaks of himself or an angel from heaven preaching another gospel. That doesn’t imply that any angel from heaven really will preach another gospel, and it is unlikely that the 1 Corinthians 13 passage refers to speaking in angelic languages as a real occurrence in Corinth either. Chrysostom reminds us: “This whole passage is very obscure; but the obscurity arises from our ignorance of the facts described, which, though familiar to those to whom the apostle wrote, have ceased to occur.”¹⁵

The Chrysostom quote raises another question. Did tongues disappear, or are they still present or once again present in the church today? If in fact they disappeared, there is not much need to inquire too deeply into their precise nature. And the historical evidence, as the Chrysostom quote

from the fourth century shows, is that they did disappear. Only in marginal and heretical groups such as Montanism was there any widespread practice of what were represented as special miraculous sign gifts after the immediate post-apostolic period.

Some have in fact attempted to demonstrate exegetically that tongues had to cease with the completion of the New Testament canon. An example is Douglas Judisch in his book: *An Evaluation of Claims to the Charismatic Gifts*. Judisch states: "The thesis of this study, however, is that it is contrary to the Word of God to claim prophetic gifts in the postapostolic era. . . . The charismatic movement of course warns us not to limit the Holy Spirit in this way. The truth of the matter, however, is that we must recognize and respect the limits that the Holy Spirit has set upon Himself. Indeed we limit the Spirit if we insist that He conduct Himself in the same way in every age—if we argue that, because he bestowed miraculous powers on men in biblical times, He must bestow miraculous powers on us today as well." He particularly argues on the basis of the phrase "but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears" (1 Co 13:10). He argues that the "perfection" or "perfect thing" is the completed revelation of God in the Holy Scriptures, and that therefore the Scriptures themselves have declared that the prophetic gifts must cease with the passing of the apostolic age.

Judisch's interpretation, while possible, does not seem to be well enough established to make this a *sedes doctrinae* for the cessation of tongues, however. It seems to me that Joel Gerlach offers us a better criterion for evaluating the claims of the continuance of the special miraculous gifts, and particularly the gift of tongues or languages. Prof. Gerlach writes: "That makes for an interesting bit of exegesis consistent with the reading of the tongues episodes in Acts by these interpreters. It also simplifies the solution to the tongues problem today for those who accept that exegesis. To us however it seems to press something from the text which Paul does not explicitly say. That tongues will cease—yes, definitely. That tongues will cease prior to the rendering useless of prophecy and knowledge—no, not positively. In context Paul's purpose is merely to establish the supremacy of love over all else (cf. verses 8 and 13 particularly). We must be cautious not to make Paul say more than he intended to say. Moreover, an assessment of the tongues movement today is possible without recourse to this particular passage."¹⁶

Prof. Gerlach adds a little later on in his article: "Our basis for judging righteous judgment is the whole counsel of God. Thus, if a person comes to me and claims to have the gift of tongues, the important thing for me is not to hear a demonstration so that I can determine whether or not it is of the Spirit. I want to know how that person understands and confesses the gospel. If anyone comes to me, and does not bring 'this doctrine,' then I am not to receive him into my house nor bid him God speed (2 Jn 10). In such a case there is no need to determine whether his ecstatic speech is of the Spirit or not. His doctrine certainly is not.

"On the other hand, if someone comes to me (as in one case with which I am familiar) and claims to have the gift of tongues, and confesses with me the whole doctrine of the gospel, then I am going to extend the right hand of fellowship to that person. As for the tongues, I still may not be certain whether it is a thing of the Spirit or not. I am not certain that it is, but neither can I be certain that it is not. I will simply withhold my judgment. Meanwhile, I will counsel that person with regard to the restrictions St. Paul imposes upon the use of this gift in the church. He will use it privately, not publicly without an interpreter. And if it is ecstatic rather than a legitimate language, there will be no interpreter available. He will not encourage others to seek the gift because Christians are to desire prophecy rather than tongues, and because in all authenticated cases it was not given to individuals seeking it or even expecting it. I will also warn him about the abuse of the gift as in the case of the Corinthians lest he become 'puffed up' as did many of them."¹⁷

An examination of Pentecostal and Charismatic positions on the gifts of the Spirit

Following Prof. Gerlach's counsel that the true basis for judging those who claim to possess the gift of tongues and other special charismatic gifts is to examine their doctrine, we shall take a brief look at some of the teachings of those who promote particularly the gift of tongues in our day, the Pentecostals and Charismatics.

When we test the doctrine of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement, it will be found wanting in many areas. Perhaps one of the most obvious is the common Pentecostal insistence that all Christians should speak in tongues. The obvious answer to Paul's rhetorical question in 1 Corinthians 12:30, "Do all speak in tongues?", is No, unless it is also to be maintained that all should be apostles. Pentecostals have several ways of trying to escape the force of this passage, some claiming that there is a distinction between speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and the gift of tongues as in Corinth,¹⁸ while others claim that Paul speaks there only of the public use of the gift, while all should use it privately.¹⁹

Another obvious problem is that Paul doesn't tell the Corinthians that they should all speak in tongues, but rather that they should seek "especially the gift of prophecy" (1 Co 14:1); again he says, "[B]ut I would rather have you prophesy" (v. 5). The Pentecostal overemphasis on tongues and on the spectacular in general contradicts Paul's entire treatment in 1 Corinthians 12–14.

A far greater problem, however, is what Pentecostal teaching does to grace alone, faith alone, and Scripture alone, as well as to baptism as a means of grace.

Regarding grace alone, Bruner describes the Pentecostal doctrine as deficient in several respects. "Grace, according to Paul, is the condition of the believer's mastery of sin. It is the tragedy of Pentecostalism, on the other hand, that it makes the mastery of what it considers sin to be the condition for the grace of the Holy Spirit. Grace itself, or the forgiveness of sins, appears in Pentecostalism to play a role only in the Christian's conversion, rarely appears in other discussions, and thus ceases for all practical purposes to be the center, accompaniment, and determinant of the whole Christian life. The reversal of the apostolic sequence of grace-then-obedience lies at the bottom of the Pentecostal error."²⁰

Pentecostalism, together with the Charismatic movement, teaches that there must be a second great crisis experience after conversion and that the full coming of the Holy Spirit must await that event. This coming is dependent on the Christian's fulfilling a number of conditions. According to mainstream Pentecostal thinking, a believer must pass through several stages before he is eligible for the reception of the Holy Spirit in his fullness.

We can see some of this illustrated in the example which Bruner cites of a Pentecostal exegesis of Acts 2:38. Donald Gee, a Pentecostal writer, says Bruner, finds "three specific conditions for the baptism in the Holy Spirit: repentance, baptism, and reception. It is important for us to mark how these terms are defined in the exposition in order for us to understand the Pentecostal thought-world." He must repent, that is forsake all sin, then he must be baptized in water, a symbolic public act that includes more than the baptismal rite but rather "applies to all-round obedience in everything. It means actions that witness before all that you have accepted the position of discipleship. Notice particularly that baptism is for 'remission of sins.' It is hopeless to expect the Holy Spirit to come in and fill you until your heart is clean." Bruner remarks: "It may be observed here that baptism is given a very practical and active interpretation. Baptism means, as Gee emphasizes, 'actions,' the believer's actions—'actions that witness before all that you have accepted the position of discipleship.' Or as Pentecostals usually express it, baptism signifies obedience. Obedience is the positive complement to and fulfillment of repentance which is primarily negative. In Pentecostal exegesis obedience as a condition for the spiritual baptism means, specifically as Gee explained above, activity directed toward the promised removal of all remaining sin through Christ's blood, toward what is called 'heart cleanness,' so that the Holy Spirit may have a suitable dwelling-place in the believer."²¹

While Pentecostal writers such as Gee do go on to speak of faith in third place, and can even say that "we 'receive the promise of the Spirit through faith' (Gal 3:14). Ultimately there can be no other way," it is important to understand what Pentecostals understand by faith in this context. For faith is not simple trust in the divine promise, but rather what I can finally do after I have fulfilled all the other conditions for the reception of the Holy Spirit. Chief among these conditions is a separation from sin, or obedience. "Sin is something which, with Christ's help, the Christian can, indeed must, remove prior to his being able to receive the full gift of the Holy Spirit. Obedience

has as its major task the removal of sin. For 'you can receive the Holy Spirit, but not with sin in your heart' (Conn [a Pentecostal writer]).²² The believer, without having the full presence of the Holy Spirit we might add, must make his heart sinless, so that the Holy Spirit can come in. Bruner aptly comments that of "the believer is required nothing less than the supreme accomplishment—the removal of sin—and this prior to the supreme divine bestowment, the full gift of the Holy Spirit. Without the filling of the Holy Spirit men are given the Herculean task of removing all known sin—in order, finally, to obtain this full Spirit. But if men can do all this without the full Spirit why is he necessary?"²³

When the Christian has accomplished this, then he may believe. "Obedience facilitates faith. This is why it will be noticed that faith is not infrequently placed at the end of Pentecostal lists. For when the necessary obediences have been carried out, then one can believe that God will fulfill his promise."²⁴ Bruner quotes a Pentecostal writer: "If, upon searching your heart you find that you are truly submissive to the revealed will of God and in harmony with your fellow man . . . , then it will be easy for you to exercise that simple and childlike faith in the Lord that will bring a quick response from him."²⁵ As Bruner summarizes the Pentecostal concept of faith: "Faith to the Pentecostal means going all the way with Christ; being totally yielded. Thus the first faith is not ordinarily sufficient for the gift of the Spirit, due not only to its insufficient object or direction (Christ and not the Spirit himself) but also, and as important, due to its insufficient content or substance. Pentecostal faith, like Pentecostal obedience, is not normally effective until it can approach totality. Total obedience plus total faith should grant the total baptism in the Holy Spirit."²⁶

The contrast of this with the Scriptural doctrine that the Holy Spirit is received purely by grace, through baptism and the promise of the gospel, should be evident. Baptism is man's obedience. All activity of the Spirit has been removed from it. Small wonder that the Pentecostals must then look for another stage when the Spirit finally comes to them, through what Bruner calls the real Pentecostal sacrament, speaking in tongues. What is gift in the Scriptures becomes reward in Pentecostal teaching. Our Confessions reject: "the teaching of the Synergists, who maintain that in spiritual things man is not wholly dead toward that which is good, but only grievously wounded and half-dead. As a result, his free will is too weak to make a beginning and by its own powers to convert itself to God and to obey the law of God from the heart. Nevertheless, after the Holy Spirit has made the beginning and has called us by the Gospel and offers his grace, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life, then the free will by its own natural powers can meet God and to some degree—though only to a small extent and in a weak way—help and cooperate and prepare itself for the grace of God, embrace and accept it, believe the Gospel, and by its own powers cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the continuation and preservation of this work within us. But we have shown above that such a capacity naturally to prepare oneself for grace does not come from man's own natural powers but solely through the operation of the Holy Spirit."²⁷ And also, "When [not before] we have received the Holy Spirit by faith, the keeping of the law necessarily follows, by which love, patience, chastity, and other fruits of the Spirit gradually increase."²⁸

The Pentecostal teaching on conditions for the full reception of the Holy Spirit finally tends to subvert the very substance of the gospel. Bruner points this out by once again calling attention to the Pentecostal doctrine of absolutes. "But a difference separates the two classic religious ways—the ways, respectively, of law and gospel, to and of the Spirit—and this difference may be discovered by observing the location of absolutes. The way of the law places the absolutes on men; the way of the gospel places the absolutes on the Messiah. The necessity of the law's righteous demands being fulfilled is of central concern to the gospel. But the gospel removes the burden of absolute fulfillment from the back of the believer to the cross of Christ and we may say that this is what makes it gospel."²⁹

Bruner concludes with a devastating evaluation of what is truly at stake in the Pentecostal insistence on a later baptism in the Holy Spirit with its initial evidence as speaking in tongues. "But something graver must be said about the Pentecostal evidence. The Pentecostal evidence is not simply a harmless idiosyncrasy which can be smiled upon in its naiveté and passed by. For since this evidence is required of Christians in addition to faith before they can have God in his

fullness, it threatens to remove Pentecostalism outside the sphere of Christian faith. The Pentecostal evidence bears the marks of the demand in the early church for circumcision (cf. Gal. Passim; Ac 15). And Paul did not look upon this or any addition to faith as harmless.”³⁰ Thus Bruner can say, and we concur in his judgment, “The problem in Pentecostalism is not that Pentecostals take the Bible too seriously or literally but that Pentecostalism as a rule does not take that which the Bible exists to teach seriously enough—the Bible’s message and *raison d’être*, the gospel. The Pentecostal conviction, in Hollenweger’s words, that ‘we must fulfill the whole Scripture’ . . . is precisely the message of the law (cf. Gal 3:10-13). . . with which Paul contrasts the message of the gospel. The false Pentecostal Bible understanding, in our opinion, flows at its deepest level from a false understanding of the gospel, not from a failure to understand the Scripture less literally.”³¹

These are just a few of the areas in which Pentecostalism can be placed before the bar of Scripture and found to be in serious and soul destroying error. Of course, if we were to believe the Pentecostals, we would have no reason to discuss the gifts of the Spirit, for they are available only after we have earned the so called gift of the baptism in the Holy Spirit by meeting all the proper conditions and speaking in tongues. God preserve us from such a perversion of a precious doctrine of the Holy Scripture!

Where do we receive the Spirit together with all his gifts and graces? We shall allow Luther to remind us once more: “For what the Holy Spirit works in us we, too, know and teach, thanks to God, even more and better than they. But we should not permit Him thus to be torn from Baptism and the Sacrament and made to stand in an empty corner, as they stare into space for the Spirit and seek private revelations apart from the Word and God’s order. For we know that He wants to be active in us through the very Word and Sacrament and in no other way. For this reason there is no need of searching further for the Spirit if we have this Sacrament of Baptism; because we hear from Christ’s Word and institution that the name of the Holy Ghost, as of the Father and of the Son, i.e., the name of the whole divine Majesty, is present there. Since, however, God’s name and Word is there present, you must not regard it as simple and plain water, accomplishing no more than bathing water, but you must regard it as a water that washes us of our sins and Scripture calls a washing of regeneration, by which we are born again into eternal life.”³²

May God grant us, though his appointed means of grace, a rich measure of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, gifted men to guide our congregations, gifted people to serve one another in love, and true edification of the body of Christ through the rich application of the gifts of the Spirit. May we be renewed day by day through the grace of the Holy Spirit, and may his gifts come to ever more people through the preaching of the gracious gospel of the forgiveness of sins through Christ. And may we be preserved from all perversions of the Spirit’s gifts which convert the *charismata*, gifts of grace, into rewards for human effort, which lead to spiritual pride and the classification of true Christians as carnal and inferior because they cannot prove with tongues that they possess the Holy Spirit. Let us continue to see the evidence of the Spirit and his gifts where we may truly find them, in the preaching of his Word and in the precious fruits of faith, including faithful use of the non-spectacular gifts of the Spirit in the everyday walk of struggle with sin which is the Christian’s daily task. Let us remember that the Spirit has been given for the conflict; he is not the reward for having won the conflict on our own.

Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord!
Be all Thy graces now outpoured
On each believer’s mind and heart;
Thy fervent love to them impart. TLH 224:1