

**“SIGNS OF THE APOSTLES”
THE TEMPORARY GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

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*Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you
in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.
II Corinthians 12:12.*

Introduction

Not all would agree on the number of the special gifts of Spirit, identified in II Corinthians 12:12 as the signs of an apostle. To the list of gifts in I Corinthians 12:4-11 some would add exorcism, or even snake-handling and drinking of poisons (Mk. 16:17, 18), others, administration and helps (I Cor. 12:27-30),¹ but few would disagree that tongues-speaking, prophecy and miracles, especially miracles of healing, are the most important gifts. It is these three gifts that we will be examining, believing that what we learn from Scripture about these gifts will also be true of the other special gifts of the Spirit.

The question whether or not these special gifts continue is sharply divisive. Those who believe that these signs have ceased (cessationists) see the Pentecostals and Charismatics,² who believe in their continuance, as being in serious error. Those who believe that these special gifts are still to be found in the church accuse cessationists of being without the Holy Spirit:

A christian who denies and refuses to see whats plain to be seen re: The Baptism in the Holy Spirit is seeking to do the will of God without the power of God. Holy Ghost power came at pentecost. Your unbelief and tradition will keep you powerless.³

The question is important. It is the question whether or not the church has had and does have the Spirit of God. It concerns Scripture as the inspired and infallible Word of God. It has to do with the foundations of the church - whether the church is built on a firm apostolic foundation against which hell cannot prevail, or whether she is built on a foundation of sand and will be overwhelmed by the forces of evil.

¹<http://www.allaboutgod.com/gifts-of-the-spirit.htm>. These gifts of the Spirit are defined at this site as: “special abilities provided by the Holy Spirit to Christians for the purpose of building up the body of Christ.

²The names “Pentecostal” and “Charismatic” are not completely interchangeable. While most Charismatics would not object to being identified as Pentecostals, many Pentecostals would object to be identified as Charismatics. Generally speaking, those who identify themselves as Pentecostals today are those who show some concern for the teaching of Scripture regarding the gifts and their use, while those who are identified as Charismatics are those among whom the worst excesses of these movements are found. In the United Kingdom and Ireland, for example, the name “Charismatic” is associated with Roman Catholicism.

³Personal letter from a correspondent in County Clare, Ireland, dated March 19th, 1995.

We will show that these special gifts of the Spirit were only temporary and limited to the time of the apostles, and that a belief in their continuance is not only unbiblical but dangerous to the well-being of Christ's church and God's people. The Word of God is clear on these important matters.

We will also show, too, *that even if these gifts have not ceased*, the use of them by the majority of Pentecostals and Charismatics is unbiblical. Their tongues are not the tongues of Scripture. Their miracles are not the miracles of Scripture. Their prophecies and revelations are not at all the same as the prophecies and revelations of Scripture. These movements are in serious error, therefore, even if the special gifts of the Spirit have not ceased.

II Corinthians 12:12

We begin with this passage because it has to do with *all* the special gifts, and answers in a few words the question whether these gifts of the Holy Spirit continue in the church. It does that by calling them the "signs of an apostle," that is, the signs which identify an apostle and confirm a man's work as apostolic.

To understand this we must see what Scripture teaches about apostles. We might insist that the special gifts of the Spirit belonged to the age of the apostles and were given only to the apostles, but many in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements will respond by telling us that the apostolic age has not ended. What then is an apostle?

Scripture sets a number of qualifications for an apostle and most would agree with the following list:

1. He must have accompanied Jesus during His earthly ministry, which was from His baptism until His Ascension (Acts 1:21-23).
2. He must have been a *personal* witness of the resurrected Lord Jesus (I Cor. 15:7; I Cor. 9:1; Acts 1:22; 4:33; 10:39-42).
3. He must have received a personal call from Christ to Apostleship and a commission to fulfil its duties (Lk. 6:13; Mk. 3:14-15).
4. He must have had, as his field of labour, the whole world, rather than a local church or group of churches (Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15).

In carrying out this personal commission from the Lord Jesus Christ, these Apostles (along with the N.T. prophets) were in the process of *laying the foundations of the Church* - a historical architectural procedure which is a once-for-all exercise and which cannot be repeated through out every era of Church history (read Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14).⁴

To this we would add that an apostle was *the only one who could confer these gifts upon others*. There is no record in Scripture of anyone receiving any of these gifts from anyone but an apostle. The story of Philip's work in Samaria (Acts 8:5-25) demonstrates this. Philip was able to perform miracles himself in Samaria, having been given that power through the apostles (Acts 6:5-8), but no one else received the Holy Spirit and His gifts until Peter and John came from Jerusalem. So we read that "When Simon saw that through the laying of the *apostles'* hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money," desiring not the Spirit of God, but the special gifts of the Spirit, which only an apostle could bestow.

⁴Alan Morrison, *The Serpent and the Cross* (Birmingham, UK: K & M Books, 1994), 493-94.

Paul would, of course, appear to be an exception to some of these qualifications, and even he acknowledges that there was difference between himself and the other apostles in that he was one “born out of time” (I Cor. 15:8). That he saw the risen Christ, we know from the story of Christ’s appearance to him on the Damascus road, but what about accompanying Christ during His earthly ministry? As far as we know, he had no contact with Christ’s earthly ministry. Nevertheless he had the signs of an apostle and that must mean that he not only had the gifts of the Spirit himself (I Cor. 14:18) but *had conferred them on others*, in this case the members of the church of Corinth to whom he writes. That was the only direct proof of his apostleship they had!

What is even more striking about his reference to being born out of time is that it indicates that the time for apostles to be “born” was already past. He was an apostle, his having conferred the signs on others proved it, but born beyond the time when it was still possible to fulfil the other qualifications for being an apostle of Christ. No other passage shows so clearly that the apostolic age was temporary.

If there are no apostles today, nor even the possibility of having apostles, then it must also be true that II Corinthians 12:12 is teaching that the special signs of the Holy Spirit, which belonged only to the age of the apostles, have not continued. The passage cannot mean anything else.

“Signs of an apostle,” therefore, are the signs or gifts which were given to the apostles, belonged especially to the apostles, and marked those who had them as being apostles and could be given to others only by the apostles. This is implicitly recognized even by the Charismatic movement with its insistence that the apostolic age has not ended. That it has ended can only mean that these signs have not continued in the church.

Hebrews 2:1-4

A second passage that shows the inseparable connection between the special gifts of the Spirit and the Apostolic age is Hebrews 2:1-4. We quote verse 2-4:

For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?

These verses make it clear that an apostle is one who personally heard Christ, and that the miracles and other gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to confirm the apostleship of these men and for that purpose alone. One writer puts it this way in reference to the miracles worked by the apostles:

The message to which we must give heed ‘began to be spoken by the Lord’ himself. However, it was ‘confirmed unto us by them that heard him’. First-hand witnesses or apostles who had personally ‘accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us’ [Acts 1:21] had a confirming ministry. And Hebrews 2:4 tells us, ‘God also (was) bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.’ Again New Testament miracles are viewed in Scripture itself as God’s stamp

of approval upon the message of the apostles, which was an inspired record of the things they had seen and heard while with Jesus.⁵

There is no one who can meet the qualifications for an apostle today. These signs and gifts belonged to the apostles and their age. They do not, therefore, continue. It is as simple as that. The gifts claimed by the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, then, can only be an imitation of what is described in Scripture, an imitation which cannot have come from the Holy Spirit Himself. This we will see even more clearly as we examine the three most important gifts.

Mark 16:17-18

Mark 16:17, 18 is another passage worth looking at. It does not mention prophecy, but does mention tongues-speaking and miracles of healing. It reads:

And these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

It is difficult to see that one can claim tongues and healings as gifts of the Spirit without also claiming snake-handling and drinking of poisons as gifts, since they are mentioned side-by-side and not in an order that would allow anyone to separate these two from tongues and healings. Yet, with the exception of a few Pentecostal sects in the Appalachians there are no Pentecostals or Charismatics who are willing to claim these signs. To put it bluntly, they are willing to claim the “safe” signs but not the “unsafe.”

If they say that these two signs, snake-handling and drinking deadly liquids, were only temporary, then they destroy the very ground on which they stand with respect to tongues and healings. If they say that snake-handling and drinking poisons are not temporary, then they must claim and practice them also. Their failure to do so is a testimony against them.

It should also be noted that these signs are said to follow those who believe. Mark, however, indicates in verses 19 and 20 that it was the *apostles* whom these signs followed and to which the passage is referring:

So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

The signs followed the apostles and were given, according to Mark, for the confirmation of their preaching. That is the issue. That is what the Pentecostals and Charismatics do not accept and what is insisted on by every cessationist.

We might note, too, the rather unusual language used by Mark. Twice he speak of these signs “following.” That, too, suggests that they are neither essential or necessary, but only something that accompanied the progress of the gospel as preached by the apostles. They were, in modern language, a kind of hitchhiker on the early road followed by the gospel as it made its triumphant progress through the nations.

⁵Walter J. Chantry, *Signs of the Apostles: An Examination of the New Pentecostalism* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), 23.

Miracles

In looking at the actual gifts of the Spirit, we begin with the working of miracles, but only because it is this gift which is most readily accepted as continuing beyond the time of the apostles. There are those who will have nothing to do with tongues or with new revelations who hesitate to deny that the miracles continue to happen through the agency of men. This we deny. We do not deny that *miracles* continue. What we and every other cessationist denies is that miracles continue *to be worked by men*.

Believing that all God does is miraculous and beyond our understanding, we have no difficulty with the idea that God continues to do miracles today both in the natural and in the spiritual realm - that He sometimes heals the body when there is, humanly speaking, no hope for healing, and that He does other things that defy human explanation. Salvation itself is a great miracle! We agree with MacArthur:

I do not automatically discount all claims of supernatural healings just because some are false. But I am convinced that dramatic, miraculous, immediate intervention by God is quite rare - and never dependent on some supposedly gifted person who acts as an agent of healing. Genuine healings may come as a result of prayer and most often involve simple natural processes. Other times, God speeds up the recovery mechanisms and restores a sick person to health in a way that medicine cannot explain. Sometime he overrules a medical prognosis and allows someone to recover from a normally debilitating disease. Healings like that can come in response to prayer and the sovereign will of God and can happen at any time. But the gift of healing, the ability to heal others, special anointings for healing ministry, healings that can be “claimed,” and other typical faith-healing techniques have no biblical sanction in the post-apostolic era.⁶

It is not miracles that we and other cessationists deny or even the possibility of miracles, but the continuation of the spiritual gift of “working of miracles” (I Cor. 12:10).⁷

There are several things we wish to emphasize about miracles worked by human agents. First, even in Scripture these were not common occurrences, but appeared at certain times in the history of the church both in the Old Testament and New Testament as confirmation of new eras of revelation. John MacArthur speaks for every cessationist when he says:

Most biblical miracles happened in three relatively brief periods of Biblical history: in the days of Moses and Joshua, during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha and in the time of Christ and the apostles. None of these periods lasted much more than a hundred years. Each of them saw a proliferation of miracles unheard of in other eras. Even during those three time periods, however, miracles were not exactly the order of the day. The miracles that happened involved men who were

⁶MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 210.

⁷If we define miracles in terms of their relationship to revelation and insist that the miracles of Scripture were only ever performed as proof that new revelations were from God, then it is probably better not to speak of supernatural and unexplainable healings as miracles, but rather as extraordinary providences.

extraordinary messengers from God - Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus and the apostles.

Aside from those three intervals, the only supernatural events recorded in Scripture were isolated incidents... For the most part, however, supernatural events like those did not characterize God's dealings with his people.⁸

Morrison even goes a step farther and suggests that those who performed miracles did not do so ordinarily, but only as a result of the direct prompting of the Holy Spirit and only then, in very limited circumstances:

It is of great significance that the 'gifts of healings' and the 'workings of miracles' are referred to in the plural in the Greek texts (I Cor. 12:9-10, 28). This is because all occurrences of healings and miracles were separate gift-events which took place through the immediate impetus of the Holy Spirit. A person did not receive 'the gift of healing' on a permanent basis, so that he became a professional 'healer' and could heal at will, as it were. Every time a healing or a miracle took place, the one through whom the healing or miracle was performed received a *specific* prompting from the Holy Spirit to carry out the act.⁹

He cites the examples of the healing of the lame man at the temple gate by Peter (Acts 3:1-10), the healing of the demon-possessed slave-girl by Paul in Philippi (Acts 16:16-19) and the raising of Dorcas by Peter in Caesarea (Acts 9:40), and insists that this is what Hebrews 2:4 means when it says: "God bearing them witness ... with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, *according to His own will.*" We believe that he is correct.

It must also be pointed out that the miracles claimed by the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements do not follow the pattern of miracles in Scripture, are different from the miracles worked by Christ and the apostles and are therefore suspect. Not worked according to the pattern of Scripture they cannot be the work of the Holy Spirit. Whether they are real miracles or not, and if real where they come from, is another question, a question that is really beside the point.

Many objections to the miracles that are claimed today are proposed by those who have examined them. The principle objections are (1) that the healings claimed by Charismatics are generally of a non-organic nature, i.e., they are of such things as weak eyesight, intestinal complaints, etc., but not of diseases that visibly and permanently cripple the body, unlike the miracles of Christ and the apostles;¹⁰ (2) that when claims are made for the healing of organic illnesses, these are always claimed in circumstances where no proof is available so that they cannot be verified, whereas the miracles of Christ and the apostles were in many cases verified by the testimony of their enemies (e.g., the raising of Lazarus, the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple and the deliverance

⁸John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 112.

⁹Morrison, *The Serpent and the Cross*, 501.

¹⁰MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 206, gives the following definition: "In simple terms, a functional disease might be a sore arm. An organic disease would be a withered arm or no arm at all. A psychogenic disease would be *thinking* your arm was sore."

of the demon-possessed slave girl in Philippi); (3) that Christ and the apostles' healings were complete both in that they never failed to heal and that those who were healed were healed completely, unlike the "incomplete" miracles of today's faith-healers; and (4) that modern healings are always done today in carefully controlled environments, whereas the miracles of Christ and the apostles were done spontaneously and in a completely uncontrolled environment.

This alone is proof that those who claim to do miracles as a gift of the Spirit are lying. Their miracles are not the miracles of Scripture and are not, therefore, from God.

Morrison issues a unanswerable challenge to every modern miracle-worker:

*Here is a challenge to any readers who may imagine that they can lay claim to a personal ongoing 'healing ministry' today: Don't just minister in your tent meeting, conference or prayer seminar, waiting for all those misled people to line up in front of you. Instead, go out in the casualty departments of your local hospitals on a Saturday night and bring *instantaneous organic healing* to the battered and broken victims of the brawls and accidents that present themselves there for treatment. Then nip up to the surgical wards and lay your hands on the amputees, everything-ectomies and hopeless cases, so that their limbs and entrails will be restored to them whole. When those places have been emptied, find your local 'Institute for the Blind' and bring some colour into their lives for the first time with your remarkable 'healing' powers. Then buss over to the offices for one of the societies for the handicapped and get them to take you out to their many training centres, where you can restore those withered and calipered limbs *on the spot*. If you still want to show you have a 'proven anointed' ministry, find some local authority Special Schools and make that Down's Syndrome melt away from those pleading little faces. And if you still have any energy left, take a taxi across to the local mortuary and bring some of its frigid occupants out with you for a breath of fresh air and a good meal.*

If you lay claim to a 'healing ministry', the Word of God challenges you to do all these things today. Why wait? For those are the kinds of healings which the Lord Jesus and the Apostles carried out in the course of their ministry... Not only did they have a 100% success rate, but nothing was too difficult for them to tackle. If you believe you should be healing just like Jesus, then anything less than the same success rate and instantaneity of His healing is a complete sham. By all means call yourself a 'faith-healer' or even a Shaman, but do not make the false claim that you are doing the works of Jesus.¹¹

The inescapable conclusion is that the miracles claimed today are not the miracles of Scripture. Whether they be real but lying miracles, therefore, or only trickery, is not the issue. Unlike the miracles of the prophets and apostles and of Christ Himself, they do not come from God, and that is all that matters.

Be that as it may, the most important thing is that miracles were for the sole purpose of authenticating some of Old Testament prophets at importance junctures in Israel's history, as well as the work of Christ Himself and of the apostles. They were not an evangelistic tool or means of conversion as many Charismatics believe. Jesus makes that clear in the parable of the rich man and

¹¹Morrison, *The Serpent and the Cross*, 503-04.

Lazarus: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” They were not performed simply out of pity for those who were suffering. Jesus healed only one man at the pool of Bethesda (Jn. 5:1-9). Nor were they ever used for personal reasons.

MacArthur says:

In Philippians 2:25-27 Paul mentioned his good friend Epaphroditus, who had been very sick. Paul had previously displayed the gift of healing. Why did he not simply heal Epaphroditus? Perhaps the gift was not longer operational. Or perhaps Paul simply refused to pervert the gift by using it for his own ends. Either way, healing Epaphroditus was beyond the purpose of the gift of healing. The gift was not given to keep Christians healthy. It was to be a sign to unbelievers to convince them that the gospel was divine truth.

We find a similar case in II Timothy 4:20, where Paul mentioned that he had left Trophimus sick at Miletus. Why should Paul leave one of his good Christian friends sick? Why didn't he heal him? Because that was not the purpose of the healing gift. (See also I Tim. 5:23 and II Cor. 12:7.)¹²

He explains:

Why do we seldom hear of the gift of healing being used in the hospital hallways? Why aren't more healers using their gifts on the streets in India and Bangladesh? Why aren't they in the leper colonies and AIDS hospices where masses of people are racked by disease?

It is not happening. Why? Because those who claim the gift of healing do not really have it. The gift of healing was a temporary sign for the authenticating of the Scriptures as the Word of God. Once that authenticity was established, the gift of healing ceased.¹³

That they were a matter of authentication in the ministry of Jesus is clear from Jesus' reference to them when asked by John's disciples if He were truly the Messiah (Matt. 11:2-6). John says of Jesus' miracles that they were done and recorded “that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (Jn. 20:30, 31). Hebrews 2:1-4 says the same of the miracles performed by the apostles.

This means that miracles are secondary to the Word. In Charismatic circles the opposite is often true and they become an end in themselves. Thus the proliferation of services for healing, and the endless “healings” that take place at such services, in which the Word of God takes second place or no place at all.

Miracles, therefore, are always associated with prophecy:

It is an inescapable conclusion of Biblical study that no true servant of Christ will be given power to work miracles unless he is directly associated with prophecy. Whenever we see *men* working miracles by the Spirit of God, we will expect an inspired communication of God's words to attend them. Miracles are God's

¹²MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 205.

¹³MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 202-03.

attestation to the divine mission of those who bring his fresh revelations to us. We are compelled to look upon the men who work wonders and transmit the ability to others not merely as preachers, but as the very prophets of God.¹⁴

Have miracles worked by human agents have ceased? Only if prophecy has also ceased. The Pentecostals and Charismatics would say that prophecy has not ceased and that miracles continue to be the attestation of prophecy and prophets. We must, therefore, examine the matter of prophecy more closely.

Prophecy

In Pentecostal and Charismatic circles the claim to inspired prophecy goes hand in hand with claims of visions, revelations, direct access to God and to heaven, and face to face communication with the Almighty and with the Holy Spirit. We will look especially at the matter of prophecy.

Claims to have the gift of prophecy are very interesting, for on the one hand those who make these claims say without hesitation that they are truly prophesying and bringing God's Word. They even assume to speak in God's name, addressing others in the first person just as the prophets did of old. Yet on the other hand most of them hesitate to say that their prophecies are on a par with Scripture and are inaccurate and infallible:

Bob (Bob Jones, a prophet with the Kansas City Fellowship and not the Bob Jones of Bob Jones University, RHH) was told that the general level of prophetic revelation in the church was about 65% accurate at this time. Some are only 10% accurate, a very few of the most mature prophets are approaching 85 to 95% accuracy. Prophecy is increasing in purity, but there is still a long way to go for those who walk in this ministry.¹⁵

But to say that prophecy is less than 100% accurate is to say that it is neither prophecy, nor the Word of God. Prophecy, by definition, is the Word of God, and the Word of God cannot be inaccurate and fallible without impugning the character of God Himself.

Wayne Grudem, in his *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1988) and in his *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) proposes a solution to the problem. Robertson describes his view thus:

Dr Grudem argues that the 'reception' of a revelation by a prophet is only the first ingredient of the current prophetic experience. According to this new perspective on prophecy, the next step in the process must be the delivery of the revelation by the prophet to the parties concerned.... And it is at this point of delivery of the prophetic message, his argument goes, that human error invariably enters into the picture, because the full authority of the revelation given from the Lord is diluted when transmitted to others by the prophet. As we shall see, Grudem seeks to prove

¹⁴Chantry, *Signs of the Apostles*, 25-26.

¹⁵ Rick Joyner, "The Unfolding of a Prophet," *Fullness Magazine* (Fort Worth: Fulness House, Jan-Feb. 1990), 13; quoted in David W. Cloud, "The New Prophets" (Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 1991), 6-7.

that this type of fallible, ‘ordinary congregational prophecy’, which he alleges continues today, already existed in the New Testament era.¹⁶

The problems with Grudem’s view are obvious. If human error enters into prophecy at any point, then it is no longer the “Word of the Lord” any more than Scripture is the Word of God if human error has at any point entered into it. Prophecy is “the Word of God,” and any mixture of the Word of God and the word of man is not prophecy.

II Peter 2:19-21 has something to say about this. When Scripture is called there “a more sure word of prophecy” and “*the* prophecy,” we are not being told that it *contains* prophecy, but that it *is* prophecy from beginning to end.¹⁷ Peter explains by saying (1) that “No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation,” and (2) that “holy men of God spake as they were moved (literally: carried) by the Holy Ghost.” Scripture, in other words, is prophecy *because it is the inspired and infallible Word of God*.

When Grudem says that the modern prophet receives the inspired and infallible Word of God, but mixes it with the fallible words of men when he in turn speaks it, then he not only contradicts Scripture’s definition of prophecy, but (1) he makes the prophetic and infallible Word of God inaccessible to those who listen to these modern prophets (they cannot tell what is God’s Word and what is the word of man); and (2) he makes these modern prophecies useless and worthless.

Robertson points this out:

It might be proposed that this situation is no worse than the circumstances brought about by a specific application of the Bible that might come from an ordained minister of God’s Word. But the two situations are drastically different. In the case of an admonition addressed to the congregation by a preacher or teacher, the basis of the teaching is immediately available to the congregation. Each member of the church can search for himself the same Scriptures as their teacher and are admonished to do so. But in the case of the supposed ‘prophetic’ word, only the prophet himself has direct access to the revelation that came from God.¹⁸

If Pentacostalism and Charismaticism push their claim that their prophecies are equal to Scripture, they by that very claim add to the Scriptures, contrary to Revelation 22:18, and place themselves alongside the cults with their extra-biblical writings and revelations. In not pushing that claim, but talking about another kind of prophecy, they admit that their prophecies are no prophecies, as indeed they are not. Many such prophecies can be found on the Internet, and are little more than

¹⁶O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word: A Biblical Response to the Case for Tongues and Prophecy Today* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993), 87-88.

¹⁷To understand this one must understand that prophecy is not mere prediction of the future (less than 5% of the “prophetic” material in Scripture predicts the future), but is God’s shining on all things past, present and future and showing them in proper perspective, that is, in relation to the coming of God’s kingdom. O. Palmer Robertson calls it “forth-telling,” not “fore-telling” (*The Final Word*, 3).

¹⁸Robertson, *The Final Word*, 93.

disconnected ramblings, that are of no value for reproof, for instruction, for correction, or for anything except to maintain a certain control over the people who are subject to them.

What is far worse than the fact that such revelations do unspeakable damage in the lives of those who are convinced that they come from God, is that many of these so-called prophecies and revelations and “words from the Lord” are in direct contradiction of Scripture. The doctrinal aberrations of the Charismatic movement, most of which are claimed to be revelations from God Himself, are a case in point.¹⁹

These self-styled prophets must consider the Word of God in Deuteronomy 18:20-22. It is not just a matter of speaking falsely, but even of speaking in God’s name without a direct commission or command from God. Such behavior is worthy of death. Yet, at the same time, the nonsense they claim as prophecy is itself proof that prophecy has ceased.

This cessation of prophecy is connected with the cessation of miracles. Before the Scriptures were completed other things were needed, including miracles, to prove and confirm the apostolic authority of those who were bringing these new Scriptures and to confirm the truth of what they brought. When Scripture was finished then those additional signs were not needed, just as the apostles themselves were not needed. And indeed, to say that they are still necessary is to deny the sufficiency of Scripture.

That doctrine of sufficiency not only teaches that in the sixty-six books of the Bible we have a full and sufficient revelation of God in Christ, a revelation that is sufficient for our faith and life, but also means that Scripture is sufficient in the sense that self-interpreting and self-attesting. It needs no proof of its authority besides itself and no interpreter but itself.

This emphasis on continuing revelation in all its forms is the reason why the Charismatic movement has gained great ground in Roman Catholicism, has never been repudiated by that sect, and why Protestant Charismatics have been on such friendly terms with Rome. Who, having heard it, can ever forget Robert Schuller’s bold statement (and he was not referring to the Great Shepherd), “It’s time for Protestants to go to the Shepherd and say ‘What do we have to do to come home?’”

This emphasis on prophecy and continuing revelation is the reason why the Charismatic movement moves further and further from Scripture, looking for signs that have no basis whatsoever in Scripture (holy laughter, being slain in the Spirit, being drunk with the Spirit, dental miracles, pogoing in the Spirit, etc.), why there is such prevailing ignorance of Scripture that its adherents will believe nearly anything they are told, and why the Charismatic movement is more and more known for its gross heresies.

¹⁹Among the more prominent of these are denials of the Trinity, the “little gods” doctrine of Benny Hinn and others, as well as denials of Christ’s divinity. Especially the leaders of the Word-Faith movement are known for their weird teachings. Kenneth Copeland believes that God is “A being that stands somewhere around 6’2”, 6’3”, and that weighs somewhere in the neighborhood of a couple of hundred pounds, little better, has a hand span of nine inches across.” (quoted in “Is the Charismatic Issue Really a Secondary Matter?” by Chris Hand, *CRN Journal*, Issue 8, Spring 2000, p. 15). David Yonggi-Cho teaches that “you create the presence of Jesus with your mouth... He is bound by your lips and by your words... Christ is depending on you and your spoken word to release His presence (quoted in “The Image Makers” by Peter Glover, *CRN Journal*, Issue 7, Winter 1999, p. 10).

Chantry points this out:

As the 'gifts' increase, exposition of God's Word decreases. Meetings are filled with 'sharing experiences' but with only an occasional reference to the holy Word of God. Many who have been drawn after this movement are woefully untaught in the first things of the faith through a neglect of the Word. They live on visible, emotional experiences and not upon truth. Even some who spend hours perusing the Bible do so not for the purpose of grasping truth but in the hope of inducing a new thrill in their truth-parched souls.²⁰

It is also the reason that some of the more sober within the Charismatic movement have begun to warn of the possibility that some of these manifestations may come not from God but from Satan:

We believe that there are some who purport to prophesy that actually get their unusual ability to know the future, not from the Holy Spirit, but from a spirit of divination. And there are some charismatics who are so eager to know God's will or to get a word from God or to be singled out in a service where this special gift may be manifest that they are susceptible to spirits that are not from God.²¹

We may never forget that Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light and that Scripture gives this warning in the context of a warning against false apostles and deceitful workers who masquerade as apostles of Christ (II Cor. 11:13-15).

Tongues-Speaking

Tongues-speaking, though we consider it last, is the gift of the Spirit *par excellence* in the minds of both Pentecostals and Charismatics, the proof that a person has been baptized with the Spirit and is filled with the Spirit. There may be questions among them about other "gifts" but about this there cannot be any question, since Scripture speaks of it so plainly and so often (Acts 2:4, 11; 10:46; 19:6; I Cor. 12:10, 28, 30; 13:1, 8; 14:1-39).

We have no quarrel with the teaching that tongues-speaking was practiced in the church during the time of the apostles. Nor do we deny that the gift of tongues is inseparably connected in Scripture with the gift of the Holy Spirit. We only deny that tongues have *continued* in the church.

Before we show that tongues have ceased and why, it must be pointed out that every rule set by Scripture for tongues-speaking is ignored and violated by those who claim the gift of tongues today. Most of these rules are found in I Corinthians 14. Paul makes it clear there that women are to keep silence in the churches and in the context this must include tongues-speaking (verses 34, 35). This rule is completely disregarded by those who believe in the continuation of tongues. Paul says that there must always be interpreter (verses 13-19; 27-29). Seldom if ever is any effort made to interpret modern tongues. Many would even say that they cannot be interpreted insofar as they are not even real languages. Paul also tells the church (verses 27-29) that when there is tongues-speaking is to be done only by a few, two or at the most, three, and this because tongues are of

²⁰Chantry, *Signs of the Apostles*, 28-29.

²¹ Stephen Strang, "A Caution on Personal Prophecy," *Charisma* (September 1989), 9; quoted in MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 82.

secondary importance.²² In the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements this rule, too, is more often than not disregarded.

This disdain for Scripture's teaching is a testimony against modern claims for tongues-speaking, but there are more serious objections to the tongues that are practiced today. These objections center in the following teachings of Scripture:

- (1) that Biblical tongues were real languages;
- (2) that the gift of tongues was not for all the members of the church;
- (3) that the use of this gift was for public edification only and not for private use;
- (4) that tongues were only ever meant to be a sign to the unbelieving Jews that God was taking the gospel from them and giving it to the Gentiles;
- (5) that when this was accomplished tongues ceased, as Scripture itself says they would;
- (6) that tongues were, therefore, a very inferior gift, not nearly as important as they were made out to be then, or are made out to be now.

That tongues were real languages and not a private prayer language, a heavenly language known only to God, celestial speech or some other kind of unearthly idiom, as modern tongues-speakers claim, is clear from the fact that the two words used for tongues in Scripture only ever refer to real languages. Acts 2:6 is confirmation of this in that Luke names fifteen different countries whose languages were spoken on the day of Pentecost. It is arbitrary and wrong, therefore, to make the words mean something else in the passages which mention the sign of tongues-speaking. Few who claim the gift have claimed to speak in known languages, and those who have, have not been able to demonstrate the truth of their claims, except to the credulous and gullible.

Modern tongues-speakers refer to I Corinthians 12:1 as proof that Paul spoke in some heavenly language and in defense of their own babblings, but Paul neither states this in I Corinthians 12:1 nor is there any evidence for such in the New Testament. The statement in I Corinthians 12 is hypothetical and all the evidence from Acts and I Corinthians is to the contrary.²³

That tongues were not for all is abundantly clear from Paul's statement in I Corinthians 12:8-10: "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom ... to another divers kinds of tongues." If tongues are *the* sign of being filled with the Spirit then Paul did not believe that every one who had gifts of the Spirit was filled with the Spirit. Yet, Pentecostalism makes tongue-speaking a *sine qua non* for all those who claim to be filled with the Spirit of God. If you do not speak in tongues you do not have the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, though not all had the gift, it was meant for public use and not for private use. Morrison points out that I Corinthians 14:4 is misused to support the notion that tongues are a private prayer language:

A common assertion in Christian literature about the spiritual gift of tongues is that it is given to be used for personal communication with God and is for the benefit of the individual rather than the whole church (See, for example, *The*

²²"Let the others judge" in I Corinthians 15:29 means "let the others judge *who will speak*" and not "let the others judge *whether what is said is the Word of God.*"

²³It should be noted that the word "unknown" in I Corinthians 14:19 has been inserted by the translators.

Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible (Zondervan, 1975-76), vol. 5, p. 508)... But these notions are based on a misinterpretation of Paul's words in I Cor. 14:1-5.... The pivotal verse concerning tongues is when the Apostle makes the statement, 'he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church' (I Cor. 14:4). That is not a statement about the true nature of tongues; it is Paul's criticism of the Corinthians for the way that they used the gift.²⁴

I Corinthians 13:1, which is often used to support the idea that tongues are a private prayer language actually proves the opposite. Paul says in effect, "If I speak in tongues without the love that does not seek its own, the love that seeks the well-being of the other members of the body, I am only making a worthless noise."

In defense both of the idea that tongues are a private prayer language and of the idea that they are not known human languages some have taken the position that modern tongues are not the same as biblical tongues:

In this regard, one view that has been promoted widely in recent days must be rejected, not for its initial points but for its rather unexpected conclusion. This particular viewpoint begins by affirming that the tongues described in the New Testament were for public usage in the church. It is furthermore asserted that the tongues of today must be regarded as something other than the phenomenon of tongues described in the New Testament Scriptures.

But in the end it is proposed that the tongues of today, though not of the nature of New Testament tongues, are nonetheless a gift of the Spirit to the modern church. Though admittedly not the same as the tongues of the New Testament, it is said that they have a proper role in the life of God's people today. Because of the frantic pace of modern life, God's Spirit has devised this means by which the modern-day stressed-out Christian may find emotional and psychological relief. Through 'speaking in tongues', an answer may be found to the tensions associated with living in today's world.²⁵

This means, however, that these tongues cannot be claimed as a gift of the Spirit. If they are not the same as the Spirit's gift in Scripture, who then can tell from whence they come? And, as Robertson, points out, they are then of no more value than other means of emotional and psychological relief; a good cry, a long vacation, or a favorite hobby.

The fact that tongues were public and not private and that they were real languages is also clear from the fact that they were meant primarily as sign to the unbelieving Jews of the coming of a new era in which the privileges of the covenant would be taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles. Of this both Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesied:

Isaiah 28:11, 12 - For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

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²⁴Morrison, *The Serpent and the Cross*, 499.

²⁵Robertson, *The Final Word*, 35-36.

Jeremiah 5:15 - Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say.

By quoting the Isaiah passage in I Corinthians 14, Paul is telling the Corinthians that they were placing far too much emphasis on something that was primarily meant to be a sign to unbelieving Jews that the gospel and other privileges they had enjoyed (Rom. 9:4, 5) were being taken from them in the just judgment of God and given to the Gentiles. They were using something that was a sign to unbelievers as the principle means of edification and blessing in the church!

Once the gospel was taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles there was no need for the tongues and they ceased in the church as Paul says it would in I Corinthians 13:8. The verb used in I Corinthians 13:8, translated "shall cease," is a word that means "stop completely." According to I Corinthians 13:8, then, prophecies and knowledge will be done away by the perfect, but tongues will already have ceased and ceased completely when the perfect comes. There is, then, no way in which the modern proponents of Spirit baptism can claim that tongues are the proof of this baptism.

It must be said also, that I Corinthians 12-14, the only passage in Scripture outside of the book of Acts which speaks of tongues, does more to condemn the misuse of tongues among the Corinthians than to promote their use in the church. The overriding emphasis is on the fact that tongues are an inferior gift, inferior to prophecy and even to Christian love, the more excellent way.

We see then that the tongues of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements are not only not the tongues of Scripture, but that there is no biblical reason for having them. The gospel has been sent to the Gentiles, the Jews have come under the judgment of God, and the church is edified by the Word of God in a far better way than tongues could ever edify.

Thus Augustine, noting their cessation in the early church, says: "Why is it that no man speaks in the tongues of all nations? Because the Church itself now speaks in the tongues of all nations."²⁶

Warnings

With regard to the signs claimed by Pentecostalism and Charismaticism, the only possible conclusion to all this is that of David Cloud: "Their healers can't heal. Their tongues are tongues. Their doctrine isn't scriptural. Their binding of the devil doesn't bind the devil. Their slayings don't slay.... Their prophets can't prophecy accurately."²⁷ To which we would add, that they cannot, therefore be of God and must be what Congregationalist preacher, G. Campbell Morgan called them: "the last vomit of Satan."

Nevertheless, there are dangers of which even we must be warned. We must be warned against opening the door to these errors as many have. David Engelsma sounds this warning in a recent speech, mentioning first of all the statement of the Christian Reformed Church regarding the gifts of the Spirit, a capitulation to Pentecostal error:

²⁶ Augustine "Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John," Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 195; quoted in MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 233-34.

²⁷Cloud, "The New Prophets," 5.

We call on the church to recognize the freedom of the Spirit to bestow His gifts according to His will, and that the Scriptures do not restrict the charismata spoken of by the apostolic witness to the apostolic age. Let the church be open to an acknowledgment of the full spectrum of the gifts of the Spirit ("Neo-Pentecostalism," in Acts of Synod 1973 (Grand Rapids: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, p. 481).²⁸

He goes on to mention the unspeakable damage that Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has done to the cause of evangelicalism by his teaching concerning the work of the Holy Spirit:

In his book, *Joy Unspeakable: Power & Renewal in the Holy Spirit*, published in 1984, but consisting of sermons preached in Westminster Chapel in 1964 and 1965, Lloyd-Jones declared that he "believed passionately in the baptism with the Holy Spirit as a distinct, post-conversion experience"; that all the gifts exist today; that the experience of the baptism with the Holy Spirit is the only thing "that holds out any hope for us today"; and that whoever denies the baptism with the Holy Spirit is guilty of quenching the Holy Spirit (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1984, pp.13, 54, 278).

And finally he warns against some of the more subtle dangers that confront faithful churches:

The Pentecostal movement has influence even where its main doctrines and practices are officially rejected. The Pentecostal movement is the cause of widespread dissatisfaction with the preaching of the doctrine of the cross and of the shrill clamor for more emphasis on the Christian life and religious activities. There is boredom with the structured Reformed worship according to the regulative principle of worship and agitation to change the public worship, to make it more lively, to involve the people more. As for ecumenicity, people from many different denominations freely join in the praise and fellowship of Promise Keepers, which is strongly influenced by the charismatic movement in its most radical form, Wimber's Vineyard Fellowship....

Men and women are openly participating in the warm fellowship of Bible studies that are explicitly and insistently non-doctrinal (as though this were possible!) and that involve the communion of Protestants and Roman Catholics, Calvinists and Arminians, Baptists and Reformed, and, indeed, charismatics and noncharismatics.²⁹

We would add that these evil influences are spread especially through the Christian media. Every evangelical bookstore carries books that promote openly or indirectly a charismatic agenda. Popular books on marriage and family such as Pentecostal pastor Larry Christenson's *The Christian Family*,³⁰ promote a Pentecostal view of prayer, of healing, of spiritual warfare, and of revelation (God beams thoughts and attitudes and feelings into our minds, p. 214). The Alpha Course, hugely

²⁸David J. Engelsma, "Pentecostalism: What Is It?" in *Pentecostalism: Spirit-Filled Blessing ... or Dangerous Heresy?* (No publisher's information given), 1-2.

²⁹Engelsma, "Pentecostalism: What Is It?", 2-4.

³⁰(Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1970).

popular in the UK some years ago, is now being promoted in numerous churches in the USA, including many Reformed churches, though it is nothing but Charismatic propaganda. The "Christian" TV and radio stations are largely controlled by these movements.

We must be warned above all against any kind of subjectivism. When we to say, "God showed me...;" "God made clear to me...;" we had better mean that He showed us explicitly in His written Word. Apart from His Word He tells us nothing. The temptation to interpret circumstances as signs from God is another kind of subjectivism. In attempting to discern God's will where He has not spoken decisively in His Word, we can only do what we believe to be right, weighing as best we can the alternatives, looking at our place and calling in home and church, and doing as those who are sanctified what we believe is best for His glory and for the well-being of His church and his people.

That this warning is needed is clear from many who have written against the errors of Pentecostalism and Charismaticism. One writer, after condemning the Charismatic movement for its "revelations" goes on to say:

The Lord still guides Christians today. Hudson Taylor heard the divine direction, "Go to China," and so have many other missionaries who have been directed by the Lord to their life's work, such as William Carey, who was sent to India.³¹

That is nothing short of surrender to the subjectivism and mysticism of these unbiblical movement.

The personal danger of subjectivism is well-expressed in the following poem:

Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord;
Once it was the feeling, now it is His Word;
Once the gifts I wanted, now the Giver own,
Once I sought for healing, now Himself alone.³²

Believing that revelation has ended, we had better "give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard" (Heb. 2:1). Believing that apostolic miracles are a thing of the past, we had better be sure that we do not give in to the craving for the sensational that lives in every heart. Believing that tongues have ceased, we must listen more carefully to the "still, small voice" of the gospel. Instead of looking for signs to guide us, we must "grow up into Christ in all things" (Eph. 4:15) living as men and women of God who are "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:17), who know the will of God in the Scriptures and who are able to act accordingly.³³

These things come into the church when the Word of God is neglected and forgotten. When God's people do not have the comfort of the Word then they begin to look for other things. When

³¹John R. Broome, "Spirit of Truth: Some Aspects of Charismatic Teaching" (Pensacola: Chapel Library, 1993), 39.

³²First stanza of a poem, "Himself," by A.B. Simpson quoted in Charles W. Mayes, "A Look at the Modern Healing Movement" (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1979), 32.

³³We agree with Robertson who says that responsible adulthood by the people of God is more quickly achieved when they are not always waiting for a word or sign from the Lord (*The Final Word*, 133-34).

they are not rooted and grounded in the Word, then they being to depend on feelings. When the Word is not read and studied then they cannot discern between truth and error, between the true fruits of the Spirit and the temporary gifts of the Spirit. The Word must have a central place in our lives or the errors of Pentecostalism will take its place, as they have everywhere.

But we must not despair when we see so many gone after these errors and deluded into believing lying wonders, men's words of wisdom, and false signs. Rather, we should see them as the fulfilment of God's Word, that He would send strong delusions before the end to those who believed not the truth (II Thess. 2:11, 12). They are, therefore, evidence of Christ's soon return. To these things, too, we may apply the words of Jesus in Luke 21:28, "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."

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