

SEW 1. PNEUMATOLOGY AND THE MIRACULOUS GIFTS.

Let me begin by drawing out what will be an important opening distinction. Alistair McGrath in his introduction to Christian Theology stated that the 'Holy Spirit has long been the Cinderella of the Trinity. The other sisters have gone to the theological ball; the Holy Spirit got left behind every time' – it seems a hard conclusion to escape. The identity, work and purpose of the Holy Spirit have been debated *ad nauseum* and show no sign of letting up any time soon. The fighting is perhaps fiercest when the issue of the charismata (the miraculous gifts) comes to the fore, with battle lines between those who believe the gifts still exist today in the same way as they did in the first century and those who do not, very visibly drawn.

I describe my position on the charismata as one of open scepticism. I don't think that the NT ever states unambiguously whether or not the miraculous gifts like prophecy, tongues or instantaneous healings will endure permanently or cease at some stage in history. That said, what I do believe is that there are strong lines of textual evidence that the miraculous gifts experienced in the ancient church are not standard for the life of the church. We should remain open to the idea that the Spirit will do as He pleases - let's not put the Holy Spirit (HS hereafter) in a box as if He is bound by anything, even the Scriptures; but at the same time let's not treat Him as a wildcard to justify any and every behaviour.

This is how I will proceed:

1. Offer some biblical perspectives on the key teaching of classic neo Pentecostalism – the so-called baptism of the Spirit.
 2. Demonstrate why the activity of the Spirit in the ancient church served a purpose that does not demand that the gifts operate in the same way today.
 3. Suggest a more rounded NT framework for how the Spirit works in the life of the church.
 4. Conclude with a word about the modern charismatic experience and how we might maturely respond.
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1. Classic Pentecostal doctrine holds (though NOT all Pentecostal groups or even scholars see it the same way) that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is an event subsequent to and therefore separate from the reception of the Holy Spirit at conversion, and that the evidence

of this subsequent filling is speaking in tongues, and in what follows I want to suggest why I think that the view is incorrect.

- The phrase ‘baptized in the Holy Spirit’ appears seven times in the NT – five of which are in the gospels and six of which are explicit references to the Pentecost. The only other occurrence of it is Paul’s only use of the phrase in 1 Cor 12:13. Note that the phrase never appears as the noun ‘baptism of the HS’ – only the verb form ‘*baptised* in the HS’.
 - *12The 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. 13For 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 (1 Cor 12:13). NOTE THE FOLLOWING: Paul states that we were ALL baptized by the Spirit INTO the body – this can only be a reference for conversion for it is then that we come into the body and not following some subsequent HS experience.*
 - The context of 1 Cor 12 is that everyone is an equal member of the body irrespective of their gift – if Paul were suggesting that there was some elite group that had experienced the HS in a particular post conversion context, he would not only be undoing his own argument in 1 Cor 12, but indeed the whole of 1 Cor.
 - To be sure we are commanded to be filled with the HS to do all the work of God – Ephesians 5:18 – the issue is not how much of the Spirit one has as if there are levels. We seek the empowerment of the Spirit to be disciples – it is possible to have the indwelling of the Spirit as per conversion and yet not be ‘Spirit filled’.
 - The baptism of John was the immediate precursor of Christian baptism – at Jesus’ baptism he was anointed by the Spirit. Interestingly, John himself had the Spirit from birth (Luke 1:15) but never performed a miraculous sign (John 10:41). Acts 2:38 describes the normative position for initiation-conversion.
 - Thus we should conclude that the normative position is that the baptism of the HS occurs at conversion, that is, when someone is baptised in water. Whilst we seek always to be filled with HS, the only baptism is at conversion.
2. The Endurance of the Gifts. The biggest debate, of course, to stem from the Pentecostal position is whether or not the miraculous gifts of the HS or the charismata have persisted throughout the history of the church and indeed are still in existence today. As I’ve already stated, no unambiguous biblical text answers the question.

Attempts to answer the question by making recourse to 1 Cor 13:8-10 have only yielded stalemate amongst scholars.

- Those who simply assert that the gifts are around today by a cursory reading of Acts naturally run into certain problems which we'll go into further when we discuss the purpose of the gifts. There are some who assert that the absence of any text stating that the gifts should cease or change means that they should simply continue in the same fashion as they did in the very early church. But should we really believe that, say, the Pentecost will happen again? To be sure the HS still empowers the church for her life and mission, but should we expect that He does so by appearing as tongues of fire amidst the sound of a rushing wind? If someone held back on his contribution and you challenged him, should we expect that he should drop down dead, swiftly followed by his wife (like Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5)? Do people need to have blinding visions of Jesus in order to believe that he is the Messiah? [Indeed in some sense Jesus has already answered this question – Rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:31 – if they don't listen to Moses and the prophets they will not believe even if someone rises from the dead]. Thus, it would seem more than likely that the HS would work in somewhat different fashion to the way He did in the apostolic age. It is to this we now turn.
- The Purpose of the Gifts – there are some clearer statements regards what the gifts were for – perhaps Hebrews 2:2-4 is key in this respect: *2For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 3how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will* (Heb 2: 2-4). The charismata testified to the apostles' confirmation of the gospel of Jesus. Note that the salvation *was* confirmed and that God *testified* to it with the gifts – all past tense. This was the very purpose for which Paul acknowledged the gifts in his own ministry to the Gentiles:
 - *8I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— 19by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. 20It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel*

where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation (Romans 15:18-20).

- Indeed, Paul goes on to say that such activity was the very thing that marked the apostolic presence: *11I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the "super-apostles," even though I am nothing. 12The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance.* (2 Cor 12:11-12).
- The picture painted by the book of Acts is a miraculous ministry exercised by the apostles and a few others associated with them who shared in the prophetic proclamation of the gospel (like Stephen and Philip).
- What seems undeniable to me is the pre-eminence of the apostles (especially the 12) and the era of the apostles in establishing the foundation upon which the church was built. There are, for example, two healing miracles in the book of Acts where the intervention of the apostles was specifically sought out, which again points to something particular and unique about the about the apostolic ministry and the work that the HS did through them – works that the rank and file disciples did not typically exhibit:

12The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. 13No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. 14Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. 15As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. 16Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed (Acts 5:12-16).

36In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. 37About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. 38Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" 39Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

40Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. 41He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. 42This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord (Acts 9:36-42).

This leads me to my final observation.

- Some say quite plainly that the mission of the church is the same as it was and consequently the gifts given to help the church's mission must, therefore, be the same, but such overly simplistic rationale compromises the uniqueness of the apostolic age. Now to be fair the term 'apostle' is not used with crystal clarity in the NT (in 2 Cor 8:23 Paul refers to his whole entourage as apostles, though spotting the difficulty many English translations read 'messengers' here; Heb 3:1 – even Jesus is an apostle), but there was clearly a relatively small circle of people who were uniquely authoritative representatives of Jesus. Notably, **these were most likely the people whose link to a written text had to be established for that text to be deemed authoritative for the church and eventually became the NT.** If the revelations offered today in modern charismatic contexts through prophecy and tongues are of the same quality, *what does this say for the place of the Bible? Must we consider that new revelations on par with biblical revelation exist?* Some Pentecostal scholars have tried to argue that modern prophecy and tongues is of a kind of 'second division' revelation, not on par with apostolic revelation, which could well be true, but surely that would beg the question of its existence in the first place. Why does the church need new, 'second rate' revelation?
- Furthermore, the office of apostle is *itself* cited as a 'gift' to the church in the same way as other gifts as the following two texts show: *28And 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. 29Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? (1 Cor 12:28-30); 7But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and*

*gave gifts to men."9(What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? 10He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) 11It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Eph 4:7-12). Even most Pentecostals accept that the role of apostle is no longer in existence – there are no longer living witnesses to the Resurrection (Acts 1: 21-22). If then the gift of apostle that Christ gave to the church is no longer here, then clearly, the presence of gifts in the church *has* changed – the gifts *have not continued in the church in the same way even though as some assert the mission of the church has not changed.**

3. I hope then I have demonstrated reasonably that there is sufficient Biblical evidence to suggest that the miraculous gifts had a role that need not have persisted throughout the church's history. How then should we think of the Spirit? Again, allow me make some observations.
 - Our chief NT commentators on the person and work of the Holy Spirit are, of course, Luke and Paul. Their emphases, though clearly linked, are very different. For Luke, ***The HS is supremely the One who empowers the church for mission***, most notably in Acts (just in chapter one of Acts we see this in 1:2, 8, 16, see also 4:8-12, 31, etc). Even in Luke's account of the temptation narratives, he is the only evangelist who says that Jesus entered the wilderness and left 'in the power of the Spirit'. For Paul, the HS is primarily:
 - **Identity marker of the new covenant people of God:** *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ (Romans 8:9); 14because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children (Romans 8:14-16); 19Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body (1 Cor 6:19); 21I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you*

receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? 3Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? 4Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? 5Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? (Gal 3:2-5).

- **The Divine Energy behind ethical demands:** *16So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 17For 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. 18But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. 19The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (Gal 5:16-26); 9Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor 6:9-11); 7Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, 8will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? 9If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! (2 Cor 3:7-9).*

With this in mind then, we should observe the following regarding the Spirit in the life of the church:

1. We should pray always to be filled with the Spirit to be empowered to live the life that God requires and preach powerfully (Acts 4:31; Eph 5:18; 6:18).
2. The fruit of the Spirit, that is, the evidence of the Spirit's presence, is not tongue speaking, but rather Christ likeness (Gal 5:22-23).
3. The One Spirit unites all true believers, and thus we should strive to maintain a unity that reflects the Spirit's oneness (Eph 4:3-4).
4. Does God still do miracles through the Spirit? Consider what Jesus said in John 14:12, 15 - *I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father... If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth.* Jesus forgave sins during his earthly ministry by a word; he went through the final resurrection ahead of time and commissioned Saul – we are not going to be able to perform such feats, but that the HS should reconcile men to God through ordinary men and women, is a greater feat. When we share the gospel with someone, and they respond, Paul says that the Spirit 'circumcises their heart' (Romans 2:29), that God 'pours love into our hearts by the HS' (Romans 5:5), the HS gives us 'rebirth and renewal' (Titus 3:5), and this He does when people respond to the gospel that *we* preach! Every time someone is born again God does a miracle through His Spirit! And let us not think that God will not miraculously heal through prayer and fasting (James 5:14-15); and what is more, God is not just healing physical sickness, He is by His Spirit healing rifts and healing hurts to bring people close to Him. God's desire is to have a relationship with all His creation, and that He is using sinners like you and I to achieve this end is in and of itself, a miracle!

In conclusion, then, how then might we respond to our Pentecostal cousins and should we seek more spectacular religious experiences to buttress our faith?

1. It is pointless trying to argue with people's experiences – if they are convinced that some ecstatic experience or other has helped them in any way, then it would be arrogant to stand in judgment of it, and you could never hope to prove it one way or another. In our engagement with people who see the Christian faith in ways very different to us, let all matters and experiences be tested against the Bible with all humility this is godly wisdom (James 3:13-17).

2. We should pay heed, however, to the ample warning given in the scriptures to not be taken in on the evidence of miraculous witness alone. Matthew 7:22-23 records a saying of Jesus that some who have performed such deeds will be condemned at the judgment; Paul stipulates that the coming of the 'lawless one' will be earmarked by all manner of 'signs and wonders' whose origins are demonic in 2 Thess 2:9-10; there are a number of warnings in the Johannine epistles about 'testing the spirits' on the grounds of many false prophets having gone into the world, e.g. 1 John 4:1.
3. With regards to the specific commands to be zealous about (a better translation than 'eagerly desire') the gifts let me note the following: 1 Cor 12:31 – Paul called for people to strive after the greater gifts – to this end he singles out prophecy (though there is debate as to the precise meaning of this term) and specifically downplays un-interpreted tongues (1 Cor 14:1-3, 12). 1 Cor 14:39 – Paul says that the church should be zealous for prophetic speech, but simply that tongues 'should not be forbidden'. It seems futile in my mind to argue from any of these texts that we should be actively seeking spectacular experiences.
4. Whilst we should never be patronising and relegate all of modern charismatic religion to mindless emotionalism, we should also pay attention to Paul's conclusion when he faced the issue of abuse of the gifts in 1 Cor 14 - the mind must be engaged (vv 14-19); religion that sacrifices rationality in favour of some perceived 'spirituality' is not from God. Once more, let the scriptures be the acid test. Ask not what signs one displays, but rather what message one carries – is it consistent with the gospel? Does it promote righteousness and Christ-likeness?