
The Unity of the Spirit

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"In the Bond of Peace"

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Dear Fellow-believers,

The early Christian believers of the first century church understood their entire existence in the light of all that God had made them to be "in Christ". Because of what Christ accomplished through his life, death and resurrection a new era had begun in God's plan of salvation for mankind. With the giving of the Spirit on Pentecost the "firstfruits" or "first installment" of their future inheritance in God's promised kingdom had *already* been received - "in Christ". The following verses make these truths clear:

And you also were included in Christ when you the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:13-14).

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These things are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ (Col. 2:16-17).

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so

through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (II Cor. 1:20-22).

In short, for the first century believers the resurrection of Christ and the giving of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost meant that the "life of the coming age" had already begun; not in its fullness, but as the "firstfruits" of the final "harvest" that was still to come. According to the Old Testament scriptures, the resurrection of the dead and the giving of the Spirit were both foretold to take place in "the last days" or in the "end-times". This was to be a time when God would establish a "new covenant" with his people and set up a righteous kingdom - a kingdom that would never end - under the rulership of the promised Messiah (Dan. 7; 12; Isaiah 9; Jer. 31:31-; Ez. 36:26-27; Acts 2:17-; etc.).

From Pentecost onwards the entire outlook of the first century church was governed by the truth that the "last days" as foretold and foreshadowed in the OT Scriptures had finally arrived. Christ's resurrection from the dead marked *the beginning* of the resurrection of the end-time because he was the "firstfruits" of those who slept or, to put it another way, the "firstborn" from the dead. In the same way, the giving of the Spirit on Pentecost, which was "poured out" by the resurrected and glorified Messiah, marked *the beginning* of the new covenant era as prophesied by the OT prophets. This Spirit was the "firstfruits" or "first-installment" of the glorious inheritance of God's kingdom that was still

to come. The whole out-look of the first century church was governed by this "already" but "not yet" mind-set. The "first-fruits" of all that the OT had promised had "already" been given, but the final harvest "not yet" arrived.

This way of understanding the events of the "end-times" was something that had not been understood until Christ himself "opened the veil" that had previously been over the reading of the Old Testament scriptures (II Cor. 3:12-16). The "sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow" (I Pet. 1:10-12) had not been previously understood; especially, in the sense of them being two separate events. But this "veil" was removed by *the events* of Christ's life, death, resurrection and the giving of the Spirit on Pentecost. And, it was only *his own explanation of these events* - in light of the Old Testament scriptures - that made them understandable to his disciples. This can be seen in the events recorded in the last chapter of Luke's Gospel:

He [Jesus] said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:44-49; cf. 24:25-27).

This explanation by Jesus threw a whole new flood of light upon the understanding of Jesus' apostles. And it was an understanding that guided their attitudes, lives and writings from that point on.

It is for this reason that if we are to properly understand the scriptures today we must allow the interpretation of the New Testament apostles of Christ to be "our interpretation" as well. We simply cannot read the NT texts as though they were written

directly to us today and as though they used the same vocabulary, thought-patterns and idioms that we use in our own late 20th century environments. Instead, we must put ourselves in the "sandals" of the first century believers and learn to think as they thought and hear as they heard. This is true with *every* subject in the Bible - whether it is about the oneness of God, baptism, the Lord's Supper, biblical prophecy, etc. Yes, the truths of the Bible are certainly the same today as then, but they must first be understood correctly in their original context before they can be properly applied in our own historical and cultural situations today.

All of the terminology and way of thinking of the new covenant believers that we find in Acts and the NT letters must be understood in the light of the "already" but "not yet" perspective that so dominated their thinking. With the resurrection of Christ and his giving of the gift of holy Spirit on Pentecost the "end" has already "begun". Christ is "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." He is "the firstborn among many brethren" and the gift of the Spirit is "the firstfruits" or "first installment" of our glorious inheritance in the kingdom of God to come. "Already" but "not yet" - this is the dominating perspective of biblical Christianity. May it become our perspective as well. The apostle John sums-up:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has **not yet** been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (I John 3:1-2).*

Richie Temple

One Spirit - One Body

by Chuck LaMattina

Chicago, Illinois

What is the church? Many of us are familiar with the child's game where you fold your hands together to form a building with a steeple, and say, "Here's the church, and here's the steeple, and open your hands to see the people." then having said that, you wiggle your intertwined fingers, to indicate the people inside. In the words to this little rhyme, the "church" is the building.

But it is not just children who think this way. Far too many adult Christians mistakenly believe that the "church" is a building. When I tell people that I am a minister for a Christian church, invariably the next question they ask me is, "Where is your church?" What they desire to know is what street the building is on.

I really do enjoy that question, however, because it gives me the opportunity to answer as I do. I respond by saying that on any given day my church is scattered all over the metropolitan Chicago area! Some are at the shop, some are at the office, some are working in medical facilities, some are at school, some are raising their children, but all are bearing witness for Christ.

The Christian church is not a building, it isn't even really an organization. The Christian church is a spiritual organism. It is people, who together compose the body of Christ. The church is made up of people who are bonded together, and enabled to contribute to one another by the gift of the holy spirit. Without the spirit of God dwelling within every believer, and energizing every believer, there would be no church. This is the point that the apostle Paul makes in the second half of I Corinthians 12.

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ (I Cor. 12:12 - all verses cited are from NKJV).

The point of this verse is simple. Your physical body is made up of many parts (or members), yet it is one body. Similarly, the church is made up of

many individuals, with various God given abilities and functions, yet they all make up one spiritual body. In my estimation the last phrase of this verse is profound. In making this comparison, Paul might have said, "... as the body is one and has many members ... so also is the church." But he doesn't! He says, "so also is *Christ*." And the leap of logic that we are asked to make is that every believer together makes up the body of Christ! The church is not *like* the body of Christ, it *is* the body of Christ!

The first thing the verse above tells me is that we all contribute to one another. As we all participate and behave like true believers the world gets to see the life and power of Christ through us. Secondly, it tells me that we have Christ right here in our midst, right here and now!

If Jesus Christ were physically present with me at this very moment I would be thrilled to see him! I would want to listen to him, to talk to him, to serve him. It wouldn't matter one bit if I were asked to place a crown on his head or to wipe his feet. Yet, in all reality, he is present with us every time believers gather together. Together we make up the body of Christ. Therefore, the zeal with which we would serve Christ and the excitement we would have just to be with him, should be ours *every* time we are with one another! Let's go on to verse 13:

For by [or, more accurately, "in"] one Spirit [i.e. the gift] we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit (I Cor. 12:13).

Why are we one body? We have been baptized, or initiated, or immersed, *in one spirit, into one body*. It is the gift of the holy spirit, God's spirit in us, that makes us all one. All of us share the same life force of God, along with Jesus Christ. Filled with God's spirit we are forever united to the Lord as the Bible declares in the following verse.

But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him (I Cor. 6:17).

We all share the same spirit! The same life force that raised Christ from the dead, and declares him to be the Son of God with power (Rom. 1:4), is in us, and binds us together in him. It doesn't matter that we may be from different ethnic or religious backgrounds, or from different social classes, or

even that we are male or female. The gift of the spirit *unites us all* into one body.

When we are born again into the family of God, when we become a part of the church, no one is at any advantage or disadvantage with anyone else. What we may or may not bring to the church due to our natural talents or social background are inconsequential. When we enter the church every believer is filled with the holy spirit of God, and every believer is given new supernatural abilities to share with the whole body of Christ. This makes us all valuable and necessary to one another, as the apostle Paul writes to the believers at Corinth.

For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? (I Cor. 12:14-19).

The verses above lay out a scenario where believers in the church are belittling themselves because of what they perceive as a lack, of a difference on their part. Christians may say, "I'm not like so and so, therefore, I am not really a part of this group." This is self deprecation, due to a lack of knowledge of the goodness and wisdom of God. In God's wisdom we are all different, we all have a different function to play in the church, yet we are all essential, and are all a part of the body.

No believer should ever feel unimportant because he is unlike another. Using Paul's comparison, just because you are a foot and not a hand doesn't mean that you are disposable. I suppose we could all learn to walk on our hands, but why when God gave us feet? The tendency of our natural, fallen logic is to think that unless we are all the same we are valueless. But rather than complain about what we are not, we need to glorify God for what He has made us to be. Each of us has a gift of God's grace to share with one another and the Apostle Peter tells us it would be good to get busy sharing it!

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen (I Pet. 4:10-11).

Whatever ability God has given to you, share it with his whole church, to the glory of God. In His wisdom, God has called you to a wonderful function in the church that only you can perform. God has equipped and commissioned you for the role you are to play!

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness (Rom. 12:4-8).

The thrust of this passage is for us to get busy serving in whatever capacity we are called. The tragedy in the church is not that we are all so different in personality or spiritual gifts, but that so few of us are *actively sharing* the special abilities that God has given to us. Many times the church is like a bus with the Pastor being the bus driver and the rest just going along for the ride. If anything we need to be like an orchestra with all of us doing our part under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God has called us to one body. We are unified "in Christ". But you can have unity in uniformity, or you can have unity in harmony! In uniformity the whole orchestra plays the trumpet, in harmony there are various instruments, with various parts to play, who together make wonderful music. What does it matter if you play the violin during most of the symphony, or you crash the cymbals at the very end? What is important is that *you play*, that you do your part to make the music great. The same is true in the church.

If we were all teachers, who would labor in prayer? If we were all especially adept at discerning of spirits and raced around casting out demons, who would encourage and who would show mercy? If we were all pastors, who would evangelize? The point is not that we all can't share God's Word, or all show mercy, or all cast out demons. But like the orchestra, someone must specialize in the violin, and someone must be skilled on the trumpet, and someone must learn percussion if the orchestra is to make its full impact. All of us need to think of ourselves as essential to the cause of Christ no matter the part we have in the church.

On the other hand, not a one of us should ever say to a believer with a different role, "I don't need you!"

But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have not need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it (I Cor. 12:20-26).

A Christian ministry or church usually begins when a man, or a group of people, see a need for a fellowship and to make known the gospel of Christ. They have a godly goal and vision. Soon others catch the vision and join. Now we have a *movement*, where everyone sees the goal and everyone plays their part. But if the people are not careful the movement soon turns into a *machine* churning out little cookie-cutter Christians who all talk alike, and dress alike, or all serve alike.

Far too often, rather than encouraging each person's uniqueness in the body of Christ, we discourage it. We want everyone to be on the same page thinking the same thoughts, acting the same way, and serving in the same manner. We say, "If you're not as into evangelism as we are then you are

not a part of this thing." This is wrong! No believer, or group of believers, should ever say to another, "I don't need you," simply because God has called them to serve in a different capacity. For when we do, the church, the body of Christ, loses its God given vitality, it loses the ability to witness for Christ in various ways. When we cut others off, we have made the body of Christ an amputee!

All of us need to recognize each others' special grace gift of God. We need to encourage each other to function to the maximum of our potential for the glory of God. Likewise, when one of us hurts we should rush to heal, and when one is honored, we should all rejoice. Finally, Paul writes,

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way (I Cor. 12: 27-31).

In the church, in the body of Christ, God has sovereignly assigned a role to every believer. He determines the capacity in which we serve, and when and where. Even though we can all manifest the gift of the spirit in many ways, God determines who may have a special gift in one or more of the nine areas in which the manifestation profits us. In the process of our gathering together for fellowship, God determines when the spirit will be energized. When we gather as the body of Christ, not everyone in the church functions as an apostle, not everyone is a teacher, not everyone speaks in tongues in a worship service or interprets. But this does not make anyone more or less valuable than anyone else.

Despite our different abilities, we should all desire the best gifts. We should all desire to bring what is best to the church. And what is the best? The best gifts are those which are the most needed at the time. If the church is in need of physical healing, gifts of healing would be the best gifts. If we needed more knowledge, then we would need a teacher.

Yet, Paul says that there is even a better way than simply desiring the best gifts, and that is walking in love.

Love never fails ... (I Cor. 13:8).

When we are all walking in the love of God, our eyes will be open to every need and every possibility that is before us, and we will be motivated to act. Love never fails!

Many times people ask, "How can I know what my special gift is to the church?" The best answer I can give is to find a need and get involved. Have a desire to serve and walk with your eyes open. Then act on what God has put on your heart. What idea has God inspired in you? Act on it. Who needs prayer? Pray for them. Who needs mercy? Give it. Where is there a need for someone to administer, to lead, to give financially, to witness? Get involved! As you begin to serve, God will show you your special place and open doors of opportunity for you to give. As the wise writer of Proverbs says,

A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men (Prov. 18:16).

The church is not a building or a business organization. The church is the body of Christ composed of many people who are filled with the spirit of God and minister to one another, and to the world, all to the glory of God.

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Especially recommended: two teachings by Chuck on one tape for \$6: *Render Unto Caesar: Romans 13:1-7* and *The Conquest of Evil: Romans 16:20*.

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Cessationism

by Bill Wachtel

Wenatchee, Washington

The title of this article is a term used by Bible students and is based on the word "cease" in I Corinthians 13:8 (KJV). In that text the Apostle Paul is talking about the supernatural "gifts" [Gr. *charismata*] of the Spirit - this being the main theme

of I Corinthians chapters 12-14. These gifts are set out in I Corinthians 12:

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge, by the same Spirit; to another faith, by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing, by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will (I Cor. 12:7-11 KJV).

The term "cessationism" is used to denote the teaching that those gifts, or manifestations, set out above have now "ceased". This school of thought teaches that with the death of the apostles - or shortly afterwards - such gifts were no longer needed and were, therefore, taken away from the church. Some think that by the end of the first century the charismatic gifts became inoperative, and thus they should not be sought by anyone today. If cessationism is correct, any charismatic gift that is claimed to be from God in modern times must be regarded as fraudulent, the result of error or deception.

A close look at Paul's statements in I Corinthians 13:8-10 makes it clear that in fact he *did* expect the gifts to cease someday. The question, then, is not *whether* the gifts would cease, but *when*!

Cessationism, as a teaching, declares that they have already ceased and are not to be expected any more. On the other hand, Christians whom some call "charismatic" believe that the gifts were intended to continue throughout the church age and that both New Testament and church history demonstrate that this is so. For believers who demand Biblical proof, only a sound exegesis of the relevant texts can provide satisfaction. Although the subject of the charismatic gifts is controversial, sincere truth-seekers and "Berean" (Acts 17:11) types of Bible students will not allow anyone's prejudices or abuses of truth to keep them from arriving at valid conclusions.

Since it is in I Corinthians 13 that the term "cease" is found in connection with charismatic gifts, it must also be in the same text that we find

some clue as to the *time* of their ceasing. In the context, Paul is declaring that faith, hope and especially love are superior to the gifts. By comparison, the gifts are temporary and imperfect. He envisions a time when these transitory gifts will no longer be needed and will "pass away" (v. 8). He states that "when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears" (v. 10 NIV). Or as the KJV renders this, "When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." Such gifts as "knowledge" and "prophecy" are described as being "in part" (v. 9).

Paul says that now "we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am known" (v.12). We have here a contrast between what is "now" and what is "then." The "then" is obviously future to the time Paul wrote those words; a time when he says he will know "fully" and will see "face to face." Again, the question is: when is this future time?

We have already seen that verse 10 describes it as a time of *perfection*, or "when that which is perfect is come." We may ask ourselves at this point whether the Bible ever mentions a future time of perfection which will allow believers to know things "fully;" to know even as they themselves are known; to see "face to face" and no longer a poor reflection as in a mirror (and the mirrors of Paul's day were crude indeed!). In fact, there is such a mention in Scripture. In Hebrews 11 - the celebrated "faith" chapter - the writer concludes with a promise of the future perfection of believers - from both Old and New Testament periods (Heb. 11:39-40). In context, the obvious reference is to the future resurrection, the resurrection that will be "better" than the ones in Old Testament times (v. 35).

Paul knew that at the future resurrection he would be made like Christ (Phil. 3:20-21). He knew that all the believers will share Christ's "glory" when he "appears" (Col. 3:4) the "second time" (Heb. 9:27) to bring them salvation. If this is not the future time that Paul was thinking about in I Corinthians 13, when he and all other perfected believers will "know fully," will know as they are "known," and will "see face to face," we must certainly wonder what other time could have been in his mind!

It is at this point that some cessationists have theorized that what Paul had in mind was the soon-

to-be-perfected New Testament. They believe that when the New Testament stood complete, around the end of the first century, the "perfect" had arrived and that the charismatic gifts were no longer needed, and so "ceased." This ingenious theory sounds plausible and has many supporters. The problem it faces is that there is nothing in the context to suggest that Paul has such an idea in mind.

On the other hand, there *is* clear evidence in the context to support the view that Paul is thinking about the future perfection and resurrection of the saints - at Christ's second coming. In fact, chapter 15, following immediately after the three chapters on the charismatic gifts, is totally occupied with the theme of resurrection! This writer is convinced, therefore, that I Corinthians 13 does not support the cessationist view, but rather the view that the gifts were intended to continue throughout the present age, until the return of Christ and the resurrection of His people.

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In Memorium

In March, 1997, Marcin Frankowski, our dear brother and friend in Christ, fell asleep in Jesus. All of us who knew him and were touched by his life will cherish the memories of our times together - until the day when we will see him again "in the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

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"Now Concerning Spiritual Matters ..."

I Cor. 12:1 -

The subject matter of I Cor. 12:1 - 14:40 is, in the Greek, *ton pneumatikon*. These words which literally mean "spirituals" can be translated "spiritual persons", "spiritual gifts", "spiritual manifestations" or, more generally, "spiritual matters." The primary focus of this section of scripture is on how "spiritual people" are to properly utilize the manifestations of the Spirit in the gathered church or fellowship (i.e., *ekklesia*) of believers. Surely, there can be no real doubt that Paul expected these spiritual manifestations, or gifts, to be manifested in the lives of Christian believers until the time of Christ's return. In the interest of clarification of some of these terms we offer some comments by Gordon D. Fee, Professor of New Testament at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia. Fee, who is a firm believer in the present availability of spiritual gifts, is widely recognized as one of the leading NT scholars in the world today. Highly recommended are his books on the subject of the holy Spirit including: *The New International Commentary on the NT: The First Epistle to the Corinthians*; and, *God's Empowering Presence: the Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Hendrickson). Following are some of his comments on the subject of "spiritual matters":

I think it is fair to note that if there is one thing that differentiates the early church from its twentieth-century counterpart it is the level of awareness and experience of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Ask any number of people today from all sectors of Christendom to define or describe Christian conversion or Christian life, and the most noticeable feature of that definition would be its general lack of emphasis on the active, dynamic role of the Spirit.

It is precisely the opposite in the New Testament. The Spirit is no mere addendum. Indeed, he [it] is the *sine qua non*, the essential ingredient, of Christian life. Nor is he a mere datum of theology; rather, he is *experienced* as a powerful presence in their lives. Whatever else may be said of the early church, it was first and foremost comprised of people of the Spirit [Gordon Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, p. 111, Hendrickson].

The Term "Spiritual Gifts"

Speaking in regards to the term "spiritual gifts" in I Cor. 12:4-11, etc.:

Given the flexibility of language ... one should probably not overanalyze the different words used to describe the individual activities of the divine persons: "gifts," "services," "workings" [v. 4-6]. They are simply three different ways of looking at what in v. 7 Paul calls "manifestations" of the Spirit. This is supported by the fact that both "gifts" and "workings" occur again in the list [of v. 8-10] (associated with "healings" and "miracles" respectively).

[In v. 7-10] what "each one" is given in this case is not a charisma [gift], but a "manifestation of the Spirit." One should not make too much of the change of words, as if the following items would be wrongly called "gifts" because they are now called "manifestations." Most likely, the change reflects Paul's own emphasis throughout these chapters, which is on the Spirit himself, not on the "gifts." Thus each "gift" is a "manifestation," a disclosure of the *Spirit's* activity in their midst [Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, p.163-164].

Thus, it seems evident that for Paul the manifestations of the Spirit listed in I Cor. 12:8-10 are also called "gifts" because each "manifestation" is "given" to the believer.

Speaking in Tongues

Speaking in tongues is certainly the most controversial of the manifestations of the Spirit listed in I Corinthians 12:8-10. However, what the Bible has to say about it is quite clear - at least for those who are willing to look at what the text says in an unbiased manner. As in all biblical subjects we have to let the text speak for itself and not pre-judge the issue. Certainly, this manifestation has been greatly abused in many charismatic circles but that does not detract from God's original intent for its godly usage in prayer and praise.

Paul's actual term is "different kinds of tongues." Enough is said in I Cor. 12-14 to give us a fairly good idea as to how Paul himself understood this phenomenon. (1) Whatever else, it is Spirit-inspired utterance; that is made plain by I Cor. 12:7 and 11 and 14:2. This in itself should cause some to speak more cautiously when trying to "put tongues in their place" (usually meaning to eliminate them altogether) in the contemporary church. Paul does not damn

tongues with faint praise, as some have argued, nor does he stand in awe of the gift, as apparently the Corinthians had done - and some contemporary proponents of tongues do. As with all Spirit-empowered activity, Paul held it in high regard in its proper place. (2) The regulations for its community use in 14:27-28 make it clear that the speaker is not in "ecstasy" or "out of control." Quite the opposite; the speakers must speak in turn, and they must remain silent if there is no one to interpret. Therefore the mind is not detached; but it is at rest, and thus fruitful. (3) It is speech essentially unintelligible both to the speaker (14:14) and to other hearers (14:16), which is why it must be interpreted in the assembly. (4) It is speech directed basically toward God (14:2, 14-15, 28); one may assume, therefore, that what is interpreted is not speech directed toward others, but the "mysteries" spoken to God. (5) As a gift for private prayer, Paul held it in the highest regard (14:4, 5, 15, 17-18; cf. Rom. 8:26-27; Eph. 6:18) [*ibid.*, p. 889-890].

Interpretation of Tongues

This manifestation of the Spirit requires only a few words of explanation:

This is the obvious companion to "tongues," precisely because of the unintelligibility of the latter. Although this term could mean something close to "translation," it can also mean "to put into words"; in this context it probably means to articulate for the benefit of the community what the tongues-speaker has said. The evidence from 14:5, 13, and 27-28 indicates (a) that this, too, is a "Spirit-inspired" gift of utterance and (b) that it may be given either to the tongues-speaker or to another [*ibid.*, p. 173].

Prophecy

This manifestation requires a good deal of comment and I will allow Fee to speak for himself:

(a) Although prophecy was an especially widespread phenomenon in the religions of antiquity, Paul's understanding - as well as that of the other NT writers - was thoroughly conditioned by his own history in Judaism. The prophet was one who under inspiration of the Spirit spoke to God's people (e.g. Mic. 3:8). The "inspired utterance" came by revelation and announced judgment (usually) or salvation. Although the prophets often performed symbolic acts, which they then interpreted, the mainstream of prophetic activity, at least as it came to be canonized, had very little to do with "ecstasy," especially "frenzy" or "mania." For the most part the prophets were understood only too well! Often the

word spoken had a futuristic element, so in that sense they also came to be seen as "predictors"; but that was only one element, and not necessarily the crucial one.

(b) With the outpouring of the Spirit at the end of the age, the early Christians understood the prophecy of Joel 2:28-30 to have been fulfilled, so that "prophecy" not only became a renewed phenomenon, but was also potentially available to all, since all now possessed the Spirit in fullness (cf. Acts 2:17-18). This especially fits what we learn in the Pauline letters. It appears to have been a widespread phenomenon (cf. I Thess. 5:19-22; 2 Thess. 2:2; Rom 12:6).

(c) The evidence in I Cor. 14 indicates that it consisted of spontaneous, Spirit-inspired, intelligible messages, orally delivered in the gathered assembly, intended for the edification or encouragement of the people. Those who prophesied were clearly understood to be "in control" (see 14:29-33).

(d) Although some people are called "prophets," probably because they were frequent speakers of "prophecies," in I Cor. 14 the implication is that it is a gift widely available - at least potentially - to all.

(e) Although the prophetic tradition of the OT probably lay behind Pauline understanding, at no point does he understand the prophet to be speaking anything other than an ad hoc word [i.e. words spoken to specific situations]. This is evidenced by the fact that for Paul it must be "weighed" or "tested." Thus, there is never any sense that a prophetic word was to be raised to the level of "inspired text."

(f) There is no Pauline evidence for the phenomenon known in contemporary circles as "personal prophecy," whereby someone prophesies over another as to very personal matters in their lives. Where such might appear to be the case (e.g. I Tim. 1:18; 4:14), there is community affirmation (testing?) by way of the laying on of hands of the elders. Otherwise prophecy seems to be a strictly community affair, for the sake of the community's corporate life [*ibid.*, p. 169-170].

[See Fee's books for his insightful comments on the other manifestations, or gifts, of the Spirit]

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Authority in the Church

by Mark Mattison

Kentwood, Michigan

Many of us have come to see that the office of the one-man pastor has no Scriptural support. Nowhere does the New Testament ever imply that one man is to have authority over a local church. On the contrary, the earliest house churches enjoyed the ministries of multiple elders whose job it was to pastor the flock (cf. Acts 20:17, 28; I Pet. 5:1, 2).

Many churches correctly eschew the one-man pastor and ordain multiple pastors of the local body. However, the nature of the pastoral office and its authority remains unchanged. In fact, many churches with multiple leaders are, paradoxically, even *more* authoritarian than ones with single leaders. The purpose of this article, therefore, is not to argue for the multiplicity of pastors within the local church. That case has been made in other articles.¹ In this article the multiplicity of pastors, or elders, will be assumed. The point of this article rather will be to argue against the traditional (worldly) view of authority in the church bound up in the concept of the church "office".

"Offices" Unscriptural

That subtitle might sound strange at first. After all, didn't Paul write to the Romans: "inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office"? (Rom. 11:13 KJV). And in his first letter to Timothy did not Paul write of "the office of a bishop" and "the office of a deacon" (I Tim. 3:1,10,13, KJV)?

Those words certainly do appear in the King James Version of the Bible. But what is truly astonishing is how foreign to the Greek text those terms are. In the Romans text it is his *diakonian*, i.e., his "ministry" or "deaconship," which Paul magnifies. In I Timothy 3:1 it is *episkopes*, which means an "oversight" which is sought. This may or may not bear the traditional connotation of "church office." Most interesting of all is how the King James Version translates a single Greek verb,

¹cf. Steve Jones, "The Traditional Pastor Reexamined," *Wisdom & Power*, June/July 1993, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 8,9,11; also, "The Pastor: Is He Biblical?" *Christian Perspectives*, Feb. 1995, Vol. 1, No.2, pp. 1-3.

diakoneo ("to serve"), with the clumsy phrase "use the office of a deacon" in I Timothy 3:10,13.

Are these matters mere semantics? Does it matter whether or not we regard elders and deacons as holding "offices"? I believe it matters insofar as it presupposes a worldly authority structure in which man dominates man. *This* type of authority has no Scriptural sanction.

"Obey Your Leaders"

But is not this type of authority implied in the New Testament's exhortation of believers to "obey" our leaders? "Obey your leaders and submit to them," wrote the author to the Hebrews, "for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing - for that would be harmful to you" (Heb. 13:17). We might note also the basic meaning of the term "bishop" (*episkopos*) which literally means "overseer."

At first blush this concept seems to create an immediate tension with the concept of *diakonia* which means "deaconship" or "service" or "ministry." In fact, these two terms, "deacon" and "bishop," evoke contradictory images. Yet we know that all elders are deacons (i.e., servants).² How can these two concepts be reconciled? How can the same people both rule and obey?

Spiritual Authority

I believe the key to unraveling that tension is to be found in passages such as Matthew 20:25-28 and Mark 10:42-45. In these passages Jesus clearly points out that spiritual authority is exercised in an entirely different way from worldly authority. To rule or "oversee" the church means to *serve* the church. In the household of God, the concept of

²This includes even the apostles: Cp. I Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 11:23; Eph. 3:7. The distinctions between "deacons" and "bishops/elders" in Philippians 1:1 and I Tim. 3 indicate not that elders aren't deacons, but rather that deacons aren't *necessarily* elders. This observation is strengthened by the fact that nearly all of the stated qualifications for "deacon" or "servant" in the church are also qualifications for elders, whereas the reverse is not true. To serve in the church does not make one an elder; but to be an elder is to serve in one of the servant roles of the church. For more information on "deaconship" see Steve Jones, "The Traditional Deacon Re-examined," *Wisdom & Power*, Sept./Oct. 1993, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 9,10,17.

"oversight" is radically transformed and interpreted entirely in terms of "deaconship" or "ministry" or "service." Peter states this explicitly in I Peter 5:1-5: "I exhort the elders ... to pastor the flock of God among you, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly" (vv. 1,2, my translation). Furthermore, they are not to exercise authority as "lords" but as "examples" (v. 3). "*In the same way*" younger Christians are to accept the authority of the elders (v. 5a); "and all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another" (v. 5b, NRSV).

Note that key phrase in verse 5a, "in the same way," as well as the sentiment in the remainder of the verse and the context of the passage. Yes, younger Christians are to submit to the older and wiser Christians in the church; but the elders in turn submit and defer to the interests of others. Pastoral authority must not be taken out of the context of the *mutual* business of submitting and serving in the church.

Ramifications

The ramifications of this fact are far-reaching. It means that the elders are *not* the primary decision makers in the church, contrary to popular practice. In the early church it was on the contrary the holy Spirit operating through the context of the *entire body* which made decisions on behalf of the church (cp. Acts 13:2,3; 15:22; I Cor. 1:10-15).

To illustrate this point we need look no further than Jesus' great disciplinary outline of Matthew 18:15-20. Of course it is the duty of any member of the body, not just a (serving) leader, to approach the one who has sinned; and in any case a member who has been sinned against must approach the offender to reconcile (cp. also Luke 17:3,4). If reconciliation and/or repentance is not achieved, does the case *then* go to the elders? Not necessarily. A third party is brought in, but Jesus doesn't indicate that the third or fourth parties need to be elders. If *that* effort is unsuccessful, does it *then* go to the elders. No. On the contrary, it then goes straight to the entire church body for prayerful resolution.

Just where are the elders in all of this? If they truly are the "rulers" and decision-makers of the church, surely they would figure prominently in this passage. But they don't.

This is what strongly implies that the oversight of the church is not an office but a function. Leaders lead by example and by submission. Elders are just that: older and wiser people in the church who are known, trusted, admired and imitated; whose opinions, insights and advice are sought; and whose character and spirituality are beyond reproach. This pastoring is a role or function, but it is *not* an office invested with certain powers or political authority.

So it isn't enough to do away with the one-man pastor. We must do away with the very pastoral "office" itself and replace it with the *true* pastoring of our older, wiser brothers and sisters whose lives we seek to emulate in our discipleship.

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Books in Review

How to Read the Bible for All its Worth

by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart

Few people would disagree that the single most important principle for understanding the Bible is to read and read it so as to gain an overall knowledge of its content. In doing this the reader is able to gain a "feel" for its overall scope and message. However, the fact that many people through the centuries have endeavored to do this while still coming to widely divergent interpretations of many biblical topics should make us all seek further help in understanding the Bible. *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart is a book written specifically for this purpose.

The authors maintain that the fundamental "control" for all biblical studies must be the *original intent* of the biblical writers themselves. In addition, they stress that this is not only necessary for so-called "problem verses" but for *every* verse in the Bible. In short, they stress the importance of reading

each section of scripture in the light of its historical, cultural and language background.

The chief emphasis in this book, however, is the necessity of reading each book or section of the Bible in the light of its literary *genre* - i.e., its literary form. Many examples are given of these literary forms (e.g. narrative, poetry, prophecy, apocalyptic, etc.) and the proper principles for reading and understanding them. In addition, the first two chapters of the book: "The Need to Interpret"; and, "The Basic Tool: A Good Translation" are themselves more than worth the price of the book itself.

It is, of course, the application of biblical truth to life that is the ultimate goal of all biblical study. Because of this a great deal of time is spent in this book emphasizing the need to apply biblical principles in the light of their original intent. The authors emphasize that for a biblical principle to be applied today in exactly the same way as it was in biblical times the situations must be exactly comparable today. Otherwise, the principles must be applied, if at all, in new ways - according to the changes that have occurred both historically and culturally since that time.

This book is a "thinking-man's" book. It does not give instantaneous or magical solutions to every biblical problem. In addition, it may not fit in neatly or comfortably with many notions that have been nurtured in conservative or fundamentalist circles about how the Bible is supposed to be read and understood. Nevertheless, I would maintain that its approach is correct and that every serious student of the Bible could benefit from the insight offered by these authors. The methods for study and application as set forth in this book are the same methods that are widely agreed upon, and utilized, by most biblical scholars around the world today. I highly recommend this book to anyone seeking to better understand, and apply in their lives, the wonderful truths of the Bible.

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The Language and Imagery of the Bible

by G.B. Caird

This book by G.B. Caird, late Professor of Biblical Exegesis at Oxford University, is a classic in the field of biblical studies. Though it is much more detailed and difficult to read than the book reviewed above, whatever effort is required in reading and understanding it will be richly rewarded. Almost every page seems to be loaded with insights that are a help for the student of the Bible. Below are a few samples of the wisdom conveyed by Caird:

In dealing with the words of the Bible we are bound by evidence ... we have no access to the word of God in the Bible except through the words and minds of those who claim to speak in his name. We may disbelieve them, that is our right; but if we try, without evidence, to penetrate to a meaning more ultimate than the one the writers intended, that is our meaning, not theirs or God's. [p. 61]

It is possible to read the Bible, or indeed any other book, in a meditative fashion so that it becomes a stimulus to our own thinking. But when that happens, the thoughts are our own and are not to be confused with the meaning of what we have read. [p. 40]

There is a world of difference between allegorization and allegory. An allegory is a story intended by an author to convey a hidden meaning, and it is correctly interpreted when that meaning is perceived. To allegorize is to impose on a story hidden meanings which the original author never intended nor envisaged; it is to treat as allegory that which was not intended as allegory. Here, as in all questions of meaning, the intention of author or speaker is paramount. [p. 165]

Hyperbole or overstatement is a figure of speech common to all languages. But among the Semitic peoples its frequent use arises out of a habitual cast of mind, which I have called absoluteness - a tendency to think in extremes without qualification, in black and white without intervening shades of gray .. It is characteristic of Semitic style to express ideas absolutely and to leave the listener to fill in for himself the implicit qualifications. [p. 110, 57]

[Each of these books is available from CBD]

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Notes & Quotes on the Bible

Baptism

Baptism is a subject that has unfortunately caused tremendous divisions within the Christian church over the last two thousand years and remains as a stumbling block in the quest for Christian unity today. Finding a resolution to this problem is certainly not easy. Differences in baptism include differences over: the meaning of baptism; the qualifications and age of those to be baptized; who can administer baptism; mode of baptism (immersion, pouring or sprinkling); formulas in the baptismal procedure; and, pre-baptismal instruction. In fact, rather than being a unifying factor, as it probably was in earliest Christianity, agreement on baptism has been one of the greatest obstacles to Christian unity over the centuries. As Donald M. Lake states in his article "Baptism" in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (p.100),

In the sixteenth century, baptism along with the Eucharist became one of the major divisive issues not only separating reforming groups from Catholicism but also dividing the rival sects.

Because of the historical divisions in Christianity over the subject of baptism, the topic is best approached today as an issue of *interpretation* - not, of *obedience*. To present water baptism today as an issue of obedience - thus calling into question the commitment of those who disagree with oneself on this subject - misses the obvious point that disagreements over baptism today are plainly matters of misunderstandings and differences in interpretation that have arisen over time. Surely it is evident: if all sincere believers in Christ agreed on the correct interpretation of baptism there would be no disagreement at all - we would all simply "be obedient" to that correct *interpretation*.

As with all biblical topics, if we are to overcome the divisions today due to our different understandings and practices of baptism our thinking and actions must be governed by the "mind of Christ". That is to say, we must proceed in our quest

for the correct understanding and practice of baptism "in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code" (Rom. 7:6).

All Baptized in One Spirit into One Body

In the New Testament two distinct types of baptism are spoken of and, normally, experienced: (1) water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:12, 16, 36-38; 10:47-48; 19:5; etc.); and, (2) baptism in holy Spirit (Mark 1:8; Acts 1:5; I Cor. 12:13; etc.). New Testament believers clearly distinguished, and contrasted, the efficacy of being "baptized in the Spirit" and being "baptized in water". This was true of John the Baptist (Luke 3:16, etc.); Jesus (Acts 1:5); Peter (Acts 11:15-17); and, Paul (I Cor. 12:13). Although water baptism continued throughout the New Testament as a meaningful way of expressing the faith of new *converts* into the household of faith, it is clear that the baptism in holy Spirit was *God's* means of showing *His* acceptance of believers into his family. The following verses, among many others, make this clear:

I [John the Baptist] baptize you with water, but he [the Messiah] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8).

On one occasion, while he [Jesus] was eating with them, he gave them this command: Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).

As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them [Cornelius and his household - Acts 10] as he had come on us at the beginning [i.e. Pentecost]. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God? (Acts 11:15-17).

Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles

might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith (Acts 15:7-9).

For the new covenant church the Spirit of God in the life of each believer was the single most important unifying principle of their existence. It was God's "seal" of acceptance into his new covenant people (Eph. 1:13-14, II Cor. 3; etc.) and gave each individual believer direct "access" to God as their own personal Father (Eph. 2:18-22). In I Corinthians 12 Paul clearly states his understanding of how Christians come to receive these blessings and become "one in Christ Jesus":

For we were all baptized by [in] one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink (I Cor. 12:13).

According to this verse *all* believers in Christ are "baptized in one Spirit into one body." This does not mean, as the context clearly shows, that only those who speak in tongues are "baptized in the Spirit". That is an unfortunate misrepresentation of this text that has been promoted widely by the wider "charismatic movement". The effect has been to cause an immediate and deep division amongst those who speak in tongues and those who don't - as though those who speak in tongues are the *only* ones who have been "baptized in the Spirit".

Now though it is true that speaking in tongues is *one* of the "manifestations" of the Spirit, the context is crystal clear in I Cor. chapters 12-14 that *all* believers in Christ are baptized in the one Spirit into Christ's body, and, that *not* all of these believers spoken of in I Cor. 12-14 spoke in tongues. This doesn't mean that a believer should not desire tongues, or any of the other spiritual gifts or manifestations (I Cor. 14:2), but it certainly does mean that no particular manifestation of the Spirit - aside from the Spirit inspired confession "Jesus is Lord" (I Cor. 12:3) - should be seen as *the* proof that a person is "Spirit baptized". In the new covenant era *all* Christians are "Spirit baptized" - since a Christian, by definition, is one who has the

Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:1-9; Eph. 1:13-14; I Cor. 12:3; etc.).

It must be emphasized that there is no biblical evidence whatsoever for saying that I Cor. 12:13 has anything at all to do with water baptism. In the NT the Spirit is received through faith in Christ - not through water baptism (Gal. 3:1-5; 3:14; Acts 15:6-11). In fact, as James Dunn states,

There is nothing to suggest that an equation between baptism and new birth existed for any NT writer ("Baptism", *New Bible Dictionary*, p. 123).

God is the "heart searcher" and it is he who does the "baptizing" with the Spirit through his exalted Messiah, Jesus. This being "baptized in the one Spirit" is a direct result of faith in Christ (Acts 15:6-11). It has no direct relationship to water baptism. In the NT the gift of the Spirit was received at times before the baptism of converts (Acts 10), sometimes after the baptism of converts (Acts 8; 19) and sometimes totally apart from any water baptism at all (Acts 2:1-4, etc.).

New Testament Water Baptism: the Baptism of Converts

As with any biblical subject, we must in our study of water baptism: (1) determine the original biblical meaning and practice of baptism as closely as possible; (2) determine how that meaning and practice should be applied today - i.e. given the differences in the historical situation that exists between "then" and "now". In addition, we must also beware of imposing on the first century believers an anachronistic understanding of their terminology or an arbitrary system of interpretation that breaks, alters, or even nullifies, *the original intent* of the first century biblical writers.

What is most important to understand is that in the first century church water baptism was understood to be for "converts" to the Christian faith - those who through repentance and faith accepted Jesus as their Lord and Messiah. In short, in the first century church there was originally a common understanding of the meaning and practice of water baptism - at least in the early years. Baptism with water "in the name of Jesus Christ" was seen as a simple "expression of faith" in Christ - but not, as "faith" itself. It was a way of initiating, and

showing acceptance of, new "converts" into the household faith.

Today, however, when one reads the word "baptism" in the New Testament it is extremely difficult to not anachronistically read back into that word the same beliefs and practices with which one is accustomed today. If one grew up in a predominantly Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or Lutheran environment one usually thinks in terms of "infant baptism". However, if one grew up in the "Bible Belt" of the United States one normally thinks of "believer's baptism" - the baptism of young adults once they reach an age of accountability and then wish to make a public confession of belief in Christ. Of course, all denominations also baptize new converts to their faith.

However, in the New Testament the baptism of converts is the *only* type of water baptism that is ever recorded or spoken of. The baptism of converts was probably based upon its Judaic usage in Jewish proselyte baptism as well as in the light of John the Baptist's and Jesus' practice. In all of these cases baptism was for those who were making a public expression of their repentance and conversion to a new way of faith and life. And, importantly, in Jewish proselyte baptism children who were later born to these converts were not themselves baptized. Instead, they were considered to be born into Judaism. This same understanding, as seen in I Cor. 7:14, was carried over into the Christian faith (i.e. the true Israel of God). G.B. Caird, the late Professor of New Testament at Oxford University, points this out in his book *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (p. 80-81):

Up to this point we have only been looking at semantic changes which took place during the thousand years in which the books of the Bible were being written. But for the student of the Bible it is equally necessary to be alert to the changes which the biblical words have undergone in the ensuing centuries of Christian history. In what follows I shall not be attempting either to solve or to dissolve with a wave of the linguist's wand all the outstanding differences of Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox theology and churchmanship, but simply to illustrate the linguistic hazards of which Christians of differing traditions must be aware before they ever can converse with one another at all. It is precisely when theologians have claimed biblical authority for their own beliefs and practices that they have been

peculiarly exposed to the universal temptation ... of jumping to the conclusion that the biblical writer is referring to what they would be referring to were they speaking the same words themselves ...

Consider, for example, the long and still continuing debate about baptism, whether it is right to baptize infants or only consenting adults. Both sides have claimed scriptural authority, and both have fallen into the trap of assuming that biblical writers are referring to what we refer to when we speak of baptism, i.e. a rite administered to all who themselves seek, or whose parents seek for them, membership of the church. **But in New Testament times baptism was administered only to converts, who were baptized with their whole household. Children born to parents already Christian were not baptized either in infancy or later in adulthood, because they had been born into the household of faith** [editor's emphasis].

This understanding which is recognized by many NT scholars was also expressed many years ago by the 16th century Unitarian Faustus Socinus.

[Socinus] held that an external baptism with water was not enjoined or even always practiced by the apostles. Socinus saw in it therefore solely a rite, analogous to Jewish proselyte baptism, and argued that, though probably useful for marking the entry of ancient pagans into the New Israel, it had no present utility amongst those born in a Christian environment, except as it might formalize the occasional conversion of a Jew or Turk to Christianity. Born Christians, wrote Socinus, regardless of the communion out of which they may come into the ... Church, need not be baptized, and surely should not be rebaptized (Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, p. 757-8).

It is absolutely important to remember, as James Dunn states, "that any and every statement of the gospel in the NT is historically conditioned and context specific" (Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the NT*, p. xxi). It is clear that the New Testament concept of water baptism was for "converts" only and had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the post-biblical idea that infants or children of believers were to be baptized with water, thus, becoming members of the church.

Biblically, an infant born into a Christian home was considered "holy" at birth and a part of the household of faith (I Cor. 7:14). If brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord - as every

Christian child should be - there should be no special moment when that child needs to "repent and be baptized" so as to accept Jesus as "Lord and Christ" (Acts 2). In short, the child should not need to "convert" to the Christian faith. Nor does a child, or any other believer, need to be baptized or re-baptized any time it sins or any time it learns a new truth in its Christian growth. If the child is raised as a believer it need only, as with any other believer, "continue in the faith and be not moved away from the hope held out in the gospel" (Col. 1:23). The focus should be on the spiritual growth and development of the child, not on a moment when it is formally accepted "by baptism" into the church.

It is, in fact, the post-biblical corruption of "conversion baptism" into "infant baptism" that can probably account for much of the lack of spiritual vitality in the Christian church for much of its history. The idea that when an infant (or anyone else for that matter) is baptized with water that it automatically receives the Spirit, and is, therefore, forever a member of the church - irregardless of its own decision to believe and continue in the faith - is certainly a great perversion of NT baptism. Gordon Fee comments on this in his book *Gospel and Spirit* (p. 118-119):

First, it needs to be noted that the New Testament documents are for the most part all written to first generation adult converts and therefore simply do not describe or address the needs of the second and third generations. What we have described above as the normal Christian experience was normal for *converts*, those about whom Acts is written and to whom Paul's letters were written. But for a second or third generation, who grow up in Christian homes, conversion is seldom so life-changing - nor would I argue, can it or necessarily should it be. But what happens is that the dynamic, experiential quality of the Christian life, as life in the Spirit, also seems to be the first element to go. Thus, there arose a generation that "never knew about the empowering of the Holy Spirit."

Second, and by far more devastating, was the eventual tie of the gift of the Spirit to water baptism, a tie that one is hard-pressed to find in any of the biblical data. And then, when baptism is eventually transferred from adult converts to infants in Christian homes, which meant that they, too, had received the Spirit, the phenomenological, experiential dimension to life in the Spirit was all but eliminated.

Believers today may certainly decide to baptize their children - and it may certainly be meaningful and significant - but it should not be thought that by doing so that they are "baptizing" in the same manner as the first century church. Nor should it be thought they are fulfilling the commands of verses such as Matt. 28:19 or Acts 2:38, both of which are talking about the baptizing of converts who accept Jesus as Lord and Christ. At best, one could argue that they are "applying" the principle of baptism to new situations - either at infancy when the child is born "holy" to a Christian parent(s); but more likely and with more biblical backing, as a young adult when the young believer decides to make a public confession of faith. If this is meaningful to people and if it adds some sense of godliness and significance to the life of an individual or local church or fellowship then may God bless those who do it. But let them not "despise" or "judge" those who do otherwise - or, vice versa!

Misunderstandings About Baptism

Some beliefs about baptism today can actually be harmful to the proper understanding of the gospel. Two such beliefs are: (1) that baptism itself actually *conveys* "forgiveness of sins"; (2) that the "obedience of faith" *to being baptized* brings about "forgiveness of sins". Both of these ideas are based on verses such as Acts 2:38; Matt. 28:19; I Peter 3:21-22; or Gal. 3:26-27. However, here we must be careful to remember the first century context. First, these verses are speaking about *converts* to Jesus as the Messiah - not about Christian children. Second, they are *not intended* to convey a sense that baptism itself is equivalent to faith. This is an idea that the whole Bible would witness against.

Instead, since the water baptism of *converts* in the early church normally took place at relatively the same time as their initial faith in Christ, baptism could, at times, be spoken of figuratively as the moment of conversion itself. This would be similar to a marriage today where the marriage commitment is normally expressed by a wedding ceremony and the exchanging of rings - as the outward symbol of commitment of a man and woman to each other. But would anyone doubt that a marriage could take place without such a formal ceremony or exchange of rings? In conversion as in marriage it is the

commitment of faith that brings about the reality of the new relationship, not the outward symbol.

In his commentary on Galatians Ronald Y. K. Fung speaks directly to certain NT verses that, on the surface, seem to almost equate baptism with faith:

An extreme mechanistic view of baptism would have us believe that [baptism] was, "for Paul and his readers, universally and unquestionably accepted as a 'mystery' or sacrament which works *ex opere operato*," that the moment the believer receives baptism, union with Christ "takes place in him without cooperation, or exercise of will or thought, on his part." Such a view simply ignores the close connection between faith and baptism in the present instance (Gal. 3:26-27); the fact that in this chapter faith is mentioned 15 times and baptism only once would even by itself compel agreement with the dictum that Paul "by no means unconditionally attributes magic influence to baptism, as if receiving it guaranteed salvation."

According to another view, "that which baptism symbolizes also actually *happens*, and precisely through baptism": "baptism is the moment of faith in which the adoption is realized - in the dual sense of effected by God and grasped by man - which is the same as saying that in baptism faith receives the Christ in whom the adoption is effected." Here the emphasis upon a close alliance of faith and baptism is no doubt well placed; but in seeking to do justice to both ideas this view seems to make faith's efficacy dependent upon baptism as though it were only in baptism (as "*the* moment of faith") that faith receives Christ; this would logically lead to the conclusion that baptism is indispensable for the reception of Christ in whom alone salvation is to be found. **Such a position would, however, be clearly opposed to Paul's teaching on the all-sufficiency of faith for salvation in Galatians itself**, as would become immediately obvious if we substituted baptism for circumcision and regarded it as a condition for salvation.

From the standpoint of the practice of baptism in apostolic times, when faith and baptism were not necessarily two distinct experiences separated by a period of time but two inseparable, almost coincident parts of the one single experience of transition from the old existence to the new, the view under discussion could well be a reflection of the actual state of affairs; but as an analysis of the *logical* relationship between faith and baptism it leaves

something to be desired ... the apparent equation of faith and baptism in vv. 26f. may be explained as a natural transference of terms whereby the symbol (baptism) is said to effect that which it symbolizes or as a form of metonymy whereby what is strictly true of faith is predicated of baptism [Fung, *The New International Commentary to The New Testament, The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 173-174].

In the New Testament itself we actually have a situation that occurred for Paul in Corinth where an incorrect understanding of baptism was part of the basis for divisions in that church. Though he normally baptized converts in his ministry, Paul boldly stated in I Cor. 1:17:

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel.

This statement does not mean that Paul did not normally baptize converts - he did, as is clear from the Book of Acts. Nevertheless, it certainly shows that Paul understood that there were "higher principles" and that only the gospel itself was "the power of God unto salvation - for everyone who *believes*" (cf. Rom. 1:16). J.D.G. Dunn comments on the controversy that took place in I Cor. 1:10-17 in his book *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, (p. 119-120):

Just as the abuse of circumcision led [Paul] to dispense with circumcision altogether and to exalt faith, in a similar way, when baptism was abused and its role misunderstood, he turned away from it and put its function in proper perspective by highlighting that which really mattered in the ministering and receiving of salvation. The gospel brought salvation to Corinth, but baptism brought division. Therefore Paul thanks God that he did not baptize, and directs attention away from that which had divided them towards that which had brought them all to the one Christ, pointing out that so far as his mission was concerned baptism had no indispensable role and only the gospel mattered.

Donald Lake also concurs about Paul's view of baptism:

That Paul did not conceive of baptism as an essential saving sacrament is clearly indicated by I Corinthians 1:10-18. For Paul there seems to be one essential baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit by which we are incorporated into the body of Christ (cf. 12:12-13; Eph. 4:4). The rest of the NT corpus does not present a unified picture regarding the

meaning and administration of baptism ("Baptism", p. 99).

Such words should speak loud and clear to a generation such as ours where there is such confusion and division over baptism - all of which was "inherited" by those of us born into the 20th century from the "forefathers" our Christian past. And, whether or not one agrees with Dunn's interpretation of this specific passage in I Cor. 1:10-17, the sentiments expressed are still true, not only with regard to baptism, but in many areas of Christian practice. A correct understanding of the OT prophets (Micah 6:6-8), Jesus (Mk. 12:28-34, or Paul (Rom. 2:25-29) could hardly deny this.

Unclear Verses on Baptism

There are also other NT verses about baptism that are widely debated by NT scholars as to their original meaning (e.g. I Pet. 3:21-22 and Heb. 6:2 which is especially notorious in this regard). In truth, no one knows for certain what some of these verses are talking about. There are also some NT verses that could be talking about either water baptism or about being baptized in the Spirit. Gal. 3:26-28 and Rom. 6:3-4 are in this group. Compare the language with I Cor. 12:13:

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 (I Cor. 12:13).

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26-28).

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Rom. 6:3-4).

These verses may be alluding to water baptism as a symbol of what the Spirit actually accomplishes -since the water baptism of converts was normally close in time with their reception of the Spirit in the

first century church. However, given the close correspondence in language with I Cor. 12:13 where the element by which a believer in Christ is said to be "baptized into Christ" is specifically said to be "Spirit", it is just as possible, if not more likely, that Paul is speaking of the same reality here.

We certainly have no right to read the word "water" back into the word "baptism" in these verses when neither the text itself nor the context indicate that it should necessarily be there. And, more importantly, we have no right to read our post-biblical doctrines of the baptism of Christian infants or children back into these texts (or into any other text, such as Matt. 28:19 or Acts 2:38) as though a Christian child becomes a member of the body of Christ at the moment of water baptism. These verses are talking about converts to the faith. They have nothing whatsoever to do with the baptism of Christian children.

The Unity of the Spirit

The study and discussion of any biblical subject must always take place in the light of the "higher principles" of God's word that are set-out consistently in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Certainly, the God who "looks on the heart" and who "desires mercy, not sacrifice" is not a God who accepts or rejects an individual on the basis of a correct understanding of a religious practice such as fasting, baptism, circumcision, etc. (cf. Isaiah 58; Mk. 12:33; Rom. 2:25-27). Instead, throughout the Bible God always accepts an individual on the basis of "faith" - a simple trust in the words of God from a heart of child-like humility. It is this simple child-like faith that not only "pleases God" (Heb. 11:6) but also governs the attitudes and lifestyle of any true believer in Christ (Gal. 5:5; II Cor. 1:24; 5:7).

The example of Abraham as set forth in Rom. 4 also makes it crystal clear that "the faith that justifies" is "wholly independent of an external rite" (G.R. Beasley Murray, *Baptism in the NT*, p.303). As J.D.G. Dunn states,

In Gal. 3 Paul specifically argues that membership of Christ does not derive from physical descent or depend on a ritual act (circumcision), but comes through faith and is dependent on nothing other than faith and on the gift of the Spirit received through faith ("Baptism", *The New Bible Dictionary*, p. 123).

Several sections in the New Testament clearly, and emphatically, summarize this new covenant perspective. In fact, the section Romans 10:8-10 is actually a "definition" of the new covenant "word of faith" which brings salvation to those who believe. Paul's attitude is clearly set forth, among many other places, in Galatians:

But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (Gal. 5:5-6).

Any discussion of baptism today simply must keep in mind the reality of the higher unifying principles of faith in Christ and the seal of God's Spirit. Failure to recognize these principles almost guarantees division and makes the likelihood of coming to a resolution of differences on this subject almost impossible. The New Testament Scholar G.R. Beasley Murray, who is himself a strong advocate of "believer's baptism", nevertheless, states the following cautionary words in his book *Baptism in the New Testament* (p. 301-302):

Allowance must be made for the freedom of God in bestowing the Spirit, since God exercises that freedom. The Day of Pentecost itself provides a supreme example of this freedom ... One point is made abundantly clear by the evidence of Acts, namely that life is more complicated than formulations of doctrine and the Lord is able to look after the exigencies of life outside the range of formulas. This lesson is of incalculable importance for the modern Church, for the Church has become engulfed in a complication of life of such proportions as to make the divergencies of belief and practice in the New Testament Church of small account. For years the Churches have been confused in their thought and practice of baptism; but in the mercy of God the Church is still the Church and not another body! God is still able to take care of the exigencies beyond the formulas! The Apostolic doctrine of baptism remains for our instruction and as our ideal (**we deceive ourselves if we think we reproduce it in our Churches**), but manifestly it is wrong to put a construction on it that can neither take account of the realities existing in the first generation of the Church nor come to terms with those existing in ours.

The truth is that none of us today knows for certain all the details about New Testament water

baptism. The biblical data is simply mixed and unclear and nowhere is its practice explicitly explained. In such cases, the "higher principles" of faith in Christ and the corresponding gift of God's Spirit should govern our relationships with each other - not dogmatism or the pharisaic attitude of "religious correctness" which the entire Bible, especially Jesus and Paul, roundly condemns.

Having been born into and raised in a Christian family and then baptized as a young adult I can use myself as a typical example of many today. Though my baptism may have been somewhat meaningful, it in no way occurred at the time I became a Christian. My faith in Christ and discipleship in following him long preceded this; and, if I had never been baptized I would certainly not be any less a Christian today. Though I've grown in my understanding, sometimes radically, of many Christian doctrines and practices, the fact remains that I've been a Christian from my earliest years - not from the moment of my baptism.

In addition, the home churches or fellowships in which many of us today participate are made up of people who have been baptized at different ages, under the banner of many different denominational labels; and, many have not been baptized with water at all. Yet there is certainly no way that one would know who has, or has not, been baptized with water unless one were to ask. It is simply irrelevant to our fellowships - what binds us all together is our common faith in Christ and the Spirit of God.

If we are to re-capture the vitality of earliest Christianity we simply must recognize that the times in which we live today are vastly different from NT times. It is the "higher principles" that must be exalted; not the imitation of every first century practice. In earliest Christianity there was a common understanding of the practice of baptism; today there certainly is not. In the light of the multiplicity of divergent belief systems and practices pertaining to baptism today could one really believe that the "God who knows the heart" would judge an individual on the basis of his or her practice of baptism? This would hardly be in accord with the character of the God of the Bible - or, with the explicit testimony of the New Testament documents. In the new covenant era *"everyone* who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (I John 5:1). It is only the seal of God's Spirit which each believer in

Christ receives that binds us all together as part of God's family.

In conclusion, I will only say that I do not necessarily expect everyone to agree with me on all of these matters. However, I do urge - as with all matters on which there are honest differences amongst equally committed believers - that each individual, church or fellowship proceed according to that which they believe best exemplifies the "spirit" of the New Testament teaching on this subject. And, let this be without "judging" or "despising" those whose consciences lead them to different conclusions - for those conclusions are born out of each believer's own commitment to Christ as Lord. Ultimately, it is to him, not to each other, that we must one day "give account" (cp. Rom. 14).

[Recommended studies on this topic include J.D.G. Dunn's article "Baptism" in *The New Bible Dictionary* and his very detailed and Greek-laden book *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*. Also, though principally concerned with other issues, *Gospel and Spirit* by Gordon Fee. All are available through CBD, ph. 1-508-977-5000]

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