

ELEVEN

Life in the Spirit

Daniel J. Baker – *Systematic Theology* – 2025

Introduction

The Holy Spirit was a central figure as we looked at “the application of redemption,” that set of actions by God which took the redemptive acts of Christ and then *applied* them to us by the Holy Spirit. But the New Testament also presents a life in the Spirit dramatically different from life without the Spirit. It is a life of *experiencing* God and not simply knowing or believing or obeying God, essential as these things are. This experience of God is explicitly connected to the Holy Spirit. Here we explore several areas that are common to all Evangelical Christians but a few that are held by Continuationists in very different ways than Cessationists. The topics explored in this chapter are not typical ones for a systematic theology, evidenced by the number that give only the slightest reference to it. The rationale for this is that life in the Spirit and ethics in general are seen as something separate from systematic theology, and so they are typically treated as isolated disciplines. Yet, since systematic theology is about unpacking the teaching of the Bible in a systematic manner, and since this topic is so prominent in the New Testament, it does not seem right to

exclude it from our study. Ethics is similar, and so we will also give ethics a chapter as well.

Life in the Spirit in the Old Testament

The point in starting here is to show that our new life in the Spirit is not a theme exclusively mentioned by Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament. The Old Testament holds out a broad expectation and longing for an experience of the Holy Spirit far greater than what God's people had at the time.

Now, one thing we should note is that the Holy Spirit was very much experienced by men and women in the Old Testament. At a basic level, the same truths about the order of salvation we worked through in the last chapter are true of saints in the Old Testament. There is no salvation apart from the sovereign activity of the Spirit of God working in and on our souls to take us from death in sin to alive in him. Saints are forgiven in the Old Testament only because of the sacrifice of Christ, though they are saved in *anticipation* of his work, where we are saved by looking back on his work. In Zechariah 4:6 the prophet is addressing a group rebuilding the temple after the captivity. They are doubting their strength for the task, but God speaks to them of his empowering Spirit: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts” (Zech 4:6). Further, there are many incidents where power for some ministry activity is attributed explicitly to the Holy Spirit. In Judges 3:9–10 Othniel the younger brother of Caleb is raised up as a “deliverer” and “the Spirit of the LORD was upon him, and he judged Israel.” In Judges 6:4, “the Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon” and the people followed him as their military leader. Several times in Samson’s life “the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him” for a particular act of power (Judg 14:6, 19; 15:14). Just before Saul becomes king, Samuel tells him, “the Spirit of the LORD will rush upon you, and you will prophesy” (1 Sam 10:6). When Elijah dies, Elishah asks for “a double portion of your

spirit on me” (2 Kgs 2:9), which is an anointing to do miracles and prophesy like Elijah.

There are other occasions where God’s people are empowered to prophesy, like the prophets with Moses (Num 11:24–29) and Balaam prophesying over Israel (Num 24:2–3). Even King David at his anointing by Samuel is said to have “the Spirit of the LORD rush upon him” (1 Sam 16:13). One thing about these anointings with the Spirit is that they appear to be conditional in certain ways. Thus, when David has the Spirit “rush upon him,” the Spirit “departed from Saul” (1 Sam 16:14). Samson’s power in the Holy Spirit was connected to his obedience to the command not to cut his hair. When his hair was cut, the power was gone. David prays, “Take not your Holy Spirit from me” (Ps 51:11). Here and elsewhere, the Spirit was given for very specific ministry acts and to very specific people. It is a picture of what the Spirit of the Lord can do, but it is not a picture of what is true in the church age with the Spirit of the Lord. The great change in the church age is the abundance of our experience of the Spirit and his power.

In terms of the Old Testament anticipating a coming age of the Spirit, a good place to start is a prayer of Moses in Numbers 11:28–29. At this time God has just anointed seventy elders in Israel with the Spirit, and when the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied” (Num 11:25). Joshua does not understand what is happening and cries out, “My lord Moses, stop them” (Num 11:28). But then Moses says, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’S people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” In other words, it is good when God gives his Spirit to people, and they prophesy. May it happen more! The great event at Pentecost in Acts 2 is really an answer to this prayer of Moses.

There are also many prophecies in the Old Testament about a coming age of a “pouring out” of the Spirit of Yahweh. Isaiah prophesies of a future day when “the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest” (Isa 32:15). God says through the prophet a little later, “I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my

blessing on your descendants” (Isa 44:3). And in a later section, ““This is my covenant with them,’ says the LORD: ‘My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,’ says the LORD, ‘from this time forth and forevermore”” (Isa 59:21). We have read of Ezekiel’s prophecy in 36:25–27 where Yahweh says, “I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” Then is the dry bones prophecy, where God’s Spirit gives life and effectiveness to God’s people (Ezek 37:1–12). A few chapters later God says a day is coming when “I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel” (Ezek 39:29). “The house of Israel” is an expression that for us means “the people of God.” Ezekiel 47:1–12 uses the image of “living water” flowing out of the temple in Jerusalem to capture the effectual work of the Spirit extending outwards from that city. In Zechariah 12:10 God says, “I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a Spirit of grace,” and in 14:8, “living waters” are said to “flow out from Jerusalem,” an image like Ezekiel 47’s river of living waters flowing out from the temple in Jerusalem to the nations of the earth. These passages make it clear that the prophets of the Old Testament expected a future day when God’s Spirit was on God’s people in an entirely new way.

The most vivid of all Old Testament prophecies, however, is Joel 2:28–32a, the prophecy that is fulfilled at Pentecost and quoted by Peter in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:16–21). When seen in light of the passages we just listed, it is clear that Joel is not alone in his expectation of what is to come. He is simply the most complete in what he says. His prophecy occurs after detailing a coming day of destruction for God’s people as punishment for their disobedience and unfaithfulness to the covenant. But then the book returns toward promises of restoration: “I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten....You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel” (Joel 2:25, 27). In the midst of this section on restoration, God says,

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.²⁹ Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.³⁰ “And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke.³¹ The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.³² And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” (Joel 2:28–32a)

There are several things to note briefly in this passage. First, we need to see the basic picture presented of *a coming age of the Spirit* when God “pours out” his “Spirit on all flesh” (v. 28). The “all flesh” idea gets expanded in the passage. It includes “your sons and your daughters,” “your old men” and “your young men,” and “the male and female servants” (vv. 28–29). Where the Spirit of God fell on particular people at particular times for particular reasons in the Old Testament (like Gideon to save his people), now the promise is that God’s Spirit will be on *all God’s people*. No longer is the anointing tied to prophets, priests, kings, or judges. Now the anointing is for “all flesh” (v. 28). Second, note *the diversity of spiritual gifts* described. Prophecy, dreams, visions, and “wonders” are described as being exercised by God’s people (vv. 28, 30). Third, *Peter utilizes this prophecy on the Day of Pentecost*. When the onlookers assume the disciples are drunk after the Spirit falls on them, Peter explains what is happening by quoting Joel 2:28–32a. He says that this great day of the Spirit “is what was uttered through the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16), and then he quotes the entire passage. He will make a few modifications in line with the prophecy itself (e.g., Joel’s “afterward” becomes Peter’s “in the last days” from Isa 2:2). Fourth, Luke’s explanation for the great outpouring of the Spirit in Acts is Joel 2:28–32a. When people prophesy later in the book (Acts 11:28), when God’s people do “signs and wonders”

(Acts 4:30; 6:8), or when any other manifestation of the Spirit occurs (Acts 19:2–7), it is a fulfillment of the Joel prophecy. Fifth, the picture given in this prophecy is of God’s outpouring of the Spirit “*until the great and awesome day of the LORD comes*” (Joel 2:31). The outpouring does not stop after a few years or decades. It continues “until the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.” This is a key piece of the prophecy that we should not miss.

Though these prophecies of a coming age of the Spirit are somewhat scattered throughout the Old Testament, it is clear that the Old Testament is leaning forward with anticipation as it looks to a day when God’s Spirit will be on God’s people in a dramatically new way. *The New Testament makes it unmistakable that this day has arrived!*

The Christ and Pentecost

The great change in the way the Spirit operates within the people of God begins with Jesus and is then consummated with the Day Pentecost in Acts 2. Jesus is the forerunner who anticipates a new day of the Spirit to come. When John the Baptist prophesies about the Christ to come he says, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16). Part of Christ’s redemptive work, then, is to “baptize” the people of God “with the Holy Spirit and fire.” The inclusion of “fire” here reminds us that Jesus’s redemptive work always has an element of judgment for those who do not embrace it. What is given as a blessing to God’s people results in further judgment for God’s enemies. The key part for us is this notion that the Christ has as part of his ministry an immersion of the people of God into the Holy Spirit.¹ But the Christ can do this because he himself is the one who

¹ For a good explanation of this phrase “the Holy Spirit and fire,” see Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts: God’s Promised Program, Realized for All Nations*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 215; Robert P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian*

first received the Spirit: “And John bore witness: ‘I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.’³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit’” (John 1:32–33).

At Pentecost, this will be fulfilled. Peter explains the event in his sermon saying, “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing” (Acts 2:33). The Christ ascended to the Father, received the Spirit from the Father in a new way, and then “poured out” the Spirit on God’s people as the multitudes observed who were in Jerusalem. So, not only is the Pentecost event a fulfillment of the Joel prophecy about the last days, but it is also a fulfillment of the redemptive work of Christ. He is the one who brings forgiveness through his crucifixion but also the pouring out of the Spirit through his ascension to the Father’s right hand.

Pentecost marks a new era of salvation history. It is the age of the Spirit. When Peter sees Cornelius the Gentile baptized with the Spirit, he grasps something of its significance. Explaining to those in Jerusalem what occurred in Acts 10, he says “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 11:15–16). Note Peter saying this happened “at the beginning” (ἐν ἀρχῇ). “The beginning” of what? “The beginning” of a new era in salvation history. A great new chapter has begun with the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost, it is a chapter we might call “The Age of the Spirit.” From Acts 2:17–21 and Ephesians 4:7–13, we know this age of the Spirit will continue until Christ returns—what Peter calls “the great and magnificent day” (Acts 2:20) and what Paul refers to as the time when “we all attain to the

Pneumatology with Special Reference to Luke-Acts, JSNTSup 54 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 144.

unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph 4:13).

Richard Gaffin is a Cessationist with respect to some of the gifts of the Spirit (prophecy, tongues, miracles), but he nonetheless has some rich reflection on the meaning of Pentecost. He says,

The Spirit is now present and active in the covenant community on the basis, and as the climax, of the finished redemptive accomplishment of Christ....Further, the gift of the Spirit is nothing less than the gift of Christ himself to the church, the Christ who has become what he is by virtue of his sufferings, death, and exaltation. In this sense the gift (baptism, outpouring) of the Spirit is the crowning achievement of Christ’s work. It is his coming in exaltation to the church in the power of the Spirit....Without it, the work that climaxes in Christ’s death and resurrection would be unfinished, incomplete.²

Then he adds, “Pentecost is nothing less than the establishing of the church as the new covenant people of God, as the body of Christ. The Spirit given at Pentecost constitutes the body of Christ as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph 2:22), as the temple of God in which the Spirit of God dwells (1 Cor 3:16). Accordingly, all who have been incorporated into that Spirit-baptized body and have a place in it share in the gift of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).”³ Gaffin is right: Pentecost is an eschatological moment, bringing about a new day in salvation history; and it is a new ecclesiological moment, bringing about a new change for the church of God. As a side note, we will see below that while everyone is baptized by the Spirit into Christ (1 Cor 12:13), not everyone has necessarily been baptized by Christ with the Spirit (Luke 3:16).

² Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1979), 20.

³ Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 21.

Spiritual Gifts

One of the changes that marks the age of the Spirit is the way God disperses spiritual gifts on his people. In the Old Testament, we saw a sprinkling here and there on various individuals, but with Pentecost God's Spirit is poured out on "all flesh" and Paul can now say, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7). I will say a few things about spiritual gifts in general and then define some of the ones that are mentioned in the New Testament.

First, God is the Giver of all spiritual gifts, and we learn that it really is a work of the whole triune God:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same
Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is
the same God who empowers them all in everyone.
(1 Cor 12:4–6)

There is fascinating rhythm in this paragraph with the repetition of and emphasis on "varieties" but also the repeated phrase, "the same." The source of the gifts is "the same," God himself, and yet the result of God's giving is a huge "variety" of gifts. We call "spiritual gifts" "*gifts*," because that is exactly what they are. They are individual and specific "gifts" that are given by a generous and good Giver. They are not spontaneously created within us, they are not the result of our hard work, and they are not ours because of our DNA or natural abilities. They are gifts given by God himself (Eph 4:7–10). Gordon Fee looks at the vocabulary of "gifts," especially when *charisma* (χάρισμα) is used, and calls them "a concrete expression of grace."⁴ *Charis* (χάρις) is the Greek word for "grace" in the New Testament. He defines gifts more fully as "*gifts of God*

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 606.

which are *effectively brought into the life of the community by the Spirit.*"⁵

Second, spiritual gifts are given to all believers, and thus they are given to each believer. If you are a believer, you have a gift. That is the meaning of passages like Ephesians 4:7, "Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift." Similar is 1 Corinthians 12:7, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Notice that idea that gifts are given "to each" of us.

Third, spiritual gifts are given according to God's sovereign design. They are given according to the need of the moment and his perfect designs and plans for his church: "All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills" (1 Cor 12:11). The Spirit wills for some to have one gift and some another. Some will have a small amount of a gifting and others a larger amount. All this is according to God's will.

Fourth, spiritual gifts are given to build up the church and to glorify God. Throughout 1 Corinthians 14 there is a repetition of words related to "build up." Prophecy and tongues *with interpretation* are for "upbuilding" (*oikodomēn*) (1 Cor 14:3–5). With "manifestations of the Spirit," we are to "strive to excel in building up (*oikodomeō*) the church" (1 Cor 14:12). When we gather as the church, we are to bring whatever spiritual gift we have and exercise it "for building up" (1 Cor 14:26). But spiritual gifts also have a God-ward purpose as well. Peter says, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet 4:10–11). We are again to use gifts "to serve one another," and yet all this is "in order that in everything God may be

⁵ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 607.

glorified through Jesus Christ.” The Giver will always be glorified when his spiritual gifts are rightly used.

The Gifts in the New Testament

There are several “gift” lists in the New Testament, and none of them is identical to another one. This underscores the “varieties” of “gifts” we saw in 1 Corinthians 12:4–7. In fact, that paragraph is useful in pointing to the kinds of things we see in all these lists. Paul mentioned the “varieties” of “gifts,” “services” (or “ministries”), and “activities” (or “workings”), and the various lists will reflect such categories of the Spirit’s work in Christians.

Here are the “gift” lists in the New Testament in their order of appearance:

| “Spiritual Gift” Lists in the New Testament | |
|---|--|
| Romans 12:3–8 | prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy |
| 1 Corinthians 12:4–11 | utterance of wisdom, utterance of knowledge, faith, “gifts of healings,” “working of miracles,” prophecy, the ability to distinguish between spirits, speaking in tongues, the interpretation of tongues |
| 1 Corinthians 12:28–30 | apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healings, helping, administration, various kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues |
| Ephesians 4:7–11 | apostles, prophets, evangelists, “shepherds and teachers” |

Peter (1 Peter 4:10–11) divides the gifts very broadly into speaking gifts (“whoever speaks”) and serving gifts (“whoever serves”). This is helpful and reminds us that sometimes our desire to define a gift clearly is counter-productive. The important part of the gift is that it is either a *speaking* or *serving* gift. How *exactly* one speaking gift differs from another is often times unimportant. Additionally, it is interesting that in Paul’s writings he often mixes a position (or office) a person might hold in the church (apostle, pastor) with a gift a person might exercise (interpretation of tongues, prophecy). Of course, for some gifts, God might empower a person to hold a position where the position is defined by the exercise of a particular gift. Examples would include the relationship between a prophet and the gift of prophecy or a teacher and the gift of teaching. How do you know a prophet? *They have the gift of prophecy*. How do you know a teacher? *They have the gift of teaching*.

With these general observations, now I want briefly to define the gifts listed in the New Testament. I will start with roles (or offices) and then define gifts a person might exercise.

Apostles (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11): Paul says apostles were “appointed in the church first” ahead of other roles like “prophets” and “teachers” (1 Cor 12:8). Apostles, like other “gifts,” are “given” directly by God and are part of the set of offices given “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). The word “apostle” (Grk. *apostolos*) is connected to the verb *apostellō*, which means to “send.” An apostle in essence is one “sent” by a particular person for a particular purpose, like an “ambassador” or official “delegate.”⁶ The Twelve disciples are specially chosen and sent by Jesus to be his “eyewitnesses” (Acts 1:8, 21–22). They are uniquely set apart as “a witness to his resurrection” (Acts 1:22) and referred to as “the Twelve” (Acts 6:2).

⁶ ἀπόστολος, BDAG, 122.

Paul is sent as an “apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom 11:13). Yet, others are sent in the New Testament as well, though they are sent by the church instead of being directly sent by Christ. Barnabas is sent by the church in Antioch (Acts 13:2) and Silas is sent by the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22). Timothy and Titus are sent out by Paul at various times for various purposes (1–2 Tim; Titus). Silas, Barnabas, and Timothy are called “apostles” explicitly in the New Testament (1 Cor 9:5–6; 1 Thess 2:6). Titus is called a “messenger of the church” in 2 Corinthians 8:23, but the word “messenger” in the Greek is from *apostolos*. Titus is one of the “apostles of the church,” in other words.

Apostles in the New Testament vary in what they are tasked to do, their overall spiritual “power,” and whether they write Scripture or not. Most do not write Scripture, so we do not want to think of writing Scripture as a requirement for apostles. Further, some who write Scripture are not apostles (Mark, Luke). Some saw the resurrected Christ, but many did not, so we do not want to think of seeing Christ as a requirement for apostleship. *What all apostles are involved in doing is laying the foundation of churches throughout the world.* Some are tasked with laying the foundation of the whole church, like Paul refers to in Ephesians 2:20. And yet, others are involved with laying the foundation of local churches in various places, like Timothy and Titus as evidenced by the epistles written to them. A helpful phrase used by Paul is in 2 Corinthians 10:13, where he speaks of “the area of influence God assigned to us.” In this context, the Corinthians are part of *his* “area of influence” that God assigned to him. Yet, the implication is that others have other areas of influence assigned to them. Timothy’s might be smaller, but it is nonetheless an apostolic assignment. Barnabas’s might be smaller than Paul’s, but it is real nonetheless. Once again, the key work of apostles is that they are laying the foundation for churches. Travel is often included in this calling. A modern equivalent is being a “church planter,” but there is a spectrum of gifting with that role that can go from receiving the basic call as a pastor to the more extra-local call as an apostle. In

contemporary writing there is a desire to separate the “gift” of apostleship from the “office” of apostle. This does not seem helpful, and churches would be much better off to embrace both the role and the office of apostleship. Thinking along these lines is usually connected to an inability to see an apostle in any other way than as another apostle Paul or member of the Twelve or the few men who are Scripture-writing apostles. Yet, the New Testament does not equate apostleship with Paul and the Twelve. They are a sub-group of apostles in the New Testament and not the exclusive bearers of that name. Churches would be helped if they embraced apostles on the order of a Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and Titus.

Prophets (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11) and prophecy (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:10): The gift of prophecy has a significant emphasis in the New Testament, likely because of the way it is emphasized in the Joel prophecy featured so prominently at Pentecost (Acts 2:17–21). It is also a gift that has a long history among God’s people. Abraham is even called “a prophet” (Gen 20:7), Miriam is a “prophetess” (Exod 15:20), and Moses even prays, “Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” (Num 11:29). Once the kings are raised up in Israel, alongside them are numerous prophets who act as a check to the king’s power and speak as their conscience. With Saul is the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 3:20), with David is the prophet Nathan (2 Sam 7:2; 12:25), Elijah and Elisha function in this way with various kings of Israel (1 Kgs 18:22; 19:16). In the original Hebrew arrangement (*Tanak*) of the Old Testament, the *Torah* (“law”) or five books of Moses was first, and this was followed by *Nevi'im* (“prophets”) and then the *Ketuvim* (“writings”). Within the *Nevi'im* or “Prophets” were the “Former Prophets” (histories of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) and the “Latter Prophets,” which included Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and “the Twelve” (Minor Prophets). These writing prophets were both men who functioned with the gift of prophecy and men connected to specific books of the Bible.⁷

⁷ Köstenberger and Goswell, *Biblical Theology*, 68.

One interesting element in the Old Testament is the mention of “prophets” where no record is given of what they actually said. Saul meets a group of “prophets” who are “prophesying,” and yet no record is left of the content of their prophecies (1 Sam 10:10–12). Such an event will happen later in Samuel (1 Sam 19:20–21). Jezebel kills many “prophets of the LORD,” though Obadiah saves one hundred of them (1 Kgs 18:4). The point in mentioning these unnamed and numerous prophets is to show that the Old Testament knows of prophets who are not connected in any way with writing Scripture. They are still speaking God’s Word, but it is not the inerrant, normative Word meant for all God’s people for all time.

In the New Testament, there are figures identified explicitly as “prophets.” Agabus (Acts 21:10), the daughters of Philip the deacon (Acts 21:9), and Anna (Luke 2:36) are all called “prophets/prophetesses” (see also Acts 13:1). Zechariah is said explicitly to “prophesy” (Luke 1:67). Ephesians mentions “prophets” as given by God for the equipping of the saints for ministry (Eph 4:1–12), and then in 2:20 Paul writes that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” “Apostles and prophets” are also presented in Ephesians 3:5 as “now” revealing the gospel “by the Spirit”. Clearly, then, the “prophets” in Ephesians 2:20 are new covenant figures and not the Old Testament prophets. How exactly *prophets* build the foundation of the church is not easy to determine, but one way is certainly the writing of Scripture done by men like John Mark (who wrote the gospel of Mark), Luke (who wrote Luke and Acts), the anonymous author of Hebrews, and Jude. These men are not identified as “apostles” and clearly their revelation is foundational for the church.⁸ Yet, perhaps Paul knows of others who

⁸ For “prophets” in Eph 2:20 being a group distinct from the apostles see Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 180; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 398. For “prophets” here to be a group identical with the “apostles” (“apostles who are also prophets”) see Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of*

prophetically spoke the Word of God to the early church in a foundational manner that helped solidify a right understanding of Jesus Christ and his gospel (Eph 3:5).

We have yet to define prophecy. Clearly it is a *speaking* gift and one where what is communicated is from God in a more direct manner than something like teaching or having the gift of wisdom. D.A. Carson's definition is a good one to capture the way prophecy is modelled in the Bible: "**Prophecy** is the reception and subsequent transmission of spontaneous, divinely originating revelation."⁹ The idea of "spontaneous" distinguishes prophecy from "teaching," since a teacher might study and prepare extensively to organize his material before speaking it. A prophecy has a more spontaneous origin. There is something "divine" about it, meaning that God is the source of what is given to the prophet and then spoken by the prophet. The New Testament presents other important aspects to note about prophecy. One is that it is meant to be a part of meetings when the church gathers. Paul says that "when you come together" (1 Cor 14:26) there is an expectation of prophecy, even "two or three prophets" (1 Cor 14:29). Second, "the others" present are to "weigh what is said" (1 Cor 14:29). In other words, it is not automatic that just because someone identified as a "prophet" is speaking that his or her word is necessarily from God for the people gathered. Elsewhere Paul says something similar: "Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thess 5:20–21). Third, prophecy is not an ecstatic gift or done in an uncontrolled manner, since "the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets" and "God is not a God of confusion but of peace" (1 Cor 14:32–33). Fourth, prophecy is to be pursued by the church in a special manner, likely connected to how edifying it is to the church: "Pursue love, and earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially that you

Prophecy in the New Testament and Today (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 333–45. Others, like John Calvin, see "prophets" to be a reference to the OT prophets (*Commentary on Ephesians*). The position of prophets and apostles referring to two different *new covenant* groups of people seems strongest.

⁹ D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 93–94.

may prophesy” (1 Cor 14:1); “Earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues” (1 Cor 14:39); “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies” (1 Thess 5:19–20). Fifth, though it is not easy to draw lines, it seems that there is a point where a sometimes-occasional spiritual gift of “prophecy” becomes more frequently exercised in a person and it becomes natural to call them a “prophet.” We know Agabus was called a “prophet” in Acts 21:10, but what we do not know is precisely why the church felt so comfortable referring to him in that way. Examples like Zechariah (Luke 1:67) remind us that a person can prophecy occasionally and not be a “prophet,” and references to “prophets” (Eph 4:11) remind us that God is still giving this gift in such abundance to some people that they are rightly given that name.

Teachers (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11) and teaching (Rom 12:7): In the New Testament there are over 200 occurrences of words related to “teach” (*didaskō*), “teacher” (*didaskalos*), and “teaching” (*didaskalia*). This speaks to the great emphasis on God’s people being good recipients of God’s truth and then faithful to accurately and diligently pass along that truth to the next generation. The Old Testament elevates such teaching as well, as when “Ezra the scribe” and a group of others “read from the book from the law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading” (Neh 8:8). Families were also to be dedicated to this task: “You shall teach them diligently to your children” (Deut 6:7). You can hear this emphasis in 2 Timothy 2:2, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” Also, 1 Corinthians 15:3, “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received.” Of course, here we are not talking about the kind of “teaching” we must all do in the context of serving those we are responsible for in our families and churches but the spiritual gift of teaching that some have and others do not. ***Teaching*** is the spiritual gift where a person skillfully and faithfully communicates God’s truth to God’s people. Such teaching can be done in a small setting, as when “Priscilla and Aquila...took [Apollos] aside and

explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26). Teaching can also be done more publicly when the whole church gathers: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13). Christian doctrine is a massive body of truth to be communicated, so the church can never afford to minimize this gift and this task. Paul refers to his time with the Ephesian church and the way “for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears” (Acts 20:31). Teaching is central to the Great Commission task given to Christ’s church: “Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them..., teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19–20). Our sex determines how we might teach in the church, since teaching is part of how the “older women” are to help disciple the younger women (Titus 2:3–5), and within the church women are not to teach men (1 Tim 2:12–14).

Evangelists (Eph 4:11): Only one person in the New Testament is explicitly identified as an evangelist, “Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven” (Acts 21:8). Yet, apostles are to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim 4:5), and “evangelists” are one of the gifted persons given by God to the church “to equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph 4:11–12). The word itself gives away what is meant by this spiritual gift. The English “evangelist” is connected to the Greek *euaggelistēs* (εὐαγγελιστής) by way of the Latin. The root of the word is the word for “gospel,” *euaggelion* (εὐαγγέλιον), which is also the root for the word “evangelize” (*euaggelizō*, εὐαγγελίζω). An “**evangelist**” is someone especially gifted to “evangelize,” which means to preach the “*evangel*” (the “good news”). Though all are called to participate in the Great Commission and “make disciples” (Matt 28:19) and all are called to “let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt” (Col 4:6) and all are to “always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15), God does gift certain men and women with the unusual ability to freely and fruitfully share the good news of Jesus.

Typically, such a person has an uninhibited way about them and an unusual number of testimonies of getting a positive response when they share the gospel.

“Shepherds and teachers” (Eph 4:11): We will say more about pastors—“shepherd” and “pastor” are the same Greek word—when we look at the church below, here we want to acknowledge that it is one of the giftings that God gives to men in his church. A pastor is himself a gift given by God to the church (Eph 4:11), and the marker of such a man is that he has the spiritual gift(s) that goes along with the calling. Ephesians 4:11 joins “shepherds and teachers,” so that the role is really “shepherd-teachers” in this verse, but elsewhere “teachers” are identified separately (1 Cor 12:28) and “elders” are said to govern and yet not always teach (1 Tim 5:17). Elders must be “able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2), so while all elders will teach in some capacity, not all teachers will be elders. In Acts 20, Paul is addressing the Ephesians “elders” (Acts 20:17), and he speaks of them as “overseers” (Acts 20:28) who “shepherd” (Acts 20:28) the church. In 1 Peter 5, the apostle speaks to “the elders among you” (v. 1) and calls them to “shepherd the flock of God that is among you” in faithful and good-hearted manner (v. 2). In Titus 1:5 Paul says to “appoint elders” and then refers to them as “overseers” in 1:7. Passages like these make it clear that “elder,” “overseer,” and “pastor” all refer to the same office in the New Testament church. **“Pastors” (shepherd-teachers) are the ones specially gifted and called by God to govern and teach a local and committed gathering of God’s people (Acts 14:23; Phil 1:1).**

Service (Rom 12:7; 1 Peter 4:11): Paul’s list of gifts in Romans 12 includes “service.” He has just said we all have different gifts “according to the grace given to us,” which is an expression of the fact we are “members” of the “one body in Christ” and “members do not all have the same function” (Rom 12:4–6). A gift some “members” are given is identified as “service” (*diakonia*, *διακονία*). Peter also refers to “serving” in 1 Peter 4:10–11 using the related verb *diakoneō* (*διακονέω*). Douglas Moo notes that “words from the root *diak-* were originally used to denote ‘waiting at table,’

a connotation that was preserved into the NT period.”¹⁰ Serving is a call for all Christians, for we are commanded, “through love, serve one another” (Gal 5:13). “Serve” in that verse is from *douleuō* (δουλεύω). The author of Hebrews commends his readers, because they so clearly “serve the saints” (Heb 6:10). Jesus identifies himself as a “servant” (Mark 10:45) and so does Paul (1 Cor 3:5). At times our service is identified and somewhat formal as with those who are given a designated “ministry” (Acts 6:1–7), and yet all of us are involved with “the work of ministry” (Eph 4:12). Clearly, as Paul says, “there are varieties of service” (1 Cor 12:5). Once again, though, we are dealing with the spiritual gift of service, the unique and specialized gifting by God for a particular activity in the body of Christ. Based on the above, we can say, *the spiritual gift of service is the unique ability to bring aid in a timely and effective fashion to those in various places of need*. Those with this gift are not just generally active in serving others, but they seem to have a special awareness of the needs of others and a ready response to see that the need is met.

Exhortation (Rom 12:8): “Exhortation” (*paraklēsis*, παράκλησις) and the verb “exhort” (*parakaleō*, παρακαλέω) are rich words in the New Testament. The translations used include “exhortation/exhort” (Heb 3:13), “comfort” (Matt 5:4), “encouragement/encourage” (Acts 14:22; 1 Thess 5:11), “plead” (Matt 18:29), and “appeal” (Jude 1:3). This diversity helps us see something of the nature of the spiritual gift itself. *The spiritual gift of exhortation is the unique ability to discern the state of a person or group of people and then speak words that will bring fresh courage and faith*. When you encounter an exhorter, they are calling you upward and outward, wanting you to trust God and move ahead with faith and confidence.

Giving (Rom 12:8): Paul here identifies some in the body of Christ who are specially gifted as “givers.” They are to do this giving with “generosity” (Rom 12:8). “Generosity” is from *haplotēs*

¹⁰ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 784.

(ἀπλότης), a word also translated “sincerity” (2 Cor 1:12). BDAG connects “sincerity” and “generosity” by saying the intent is to communicate an openness and “no strings attached” attitude in the giving.¹¹ The giving, then, is not reluctant or stingy or given with the expectation of reciprocity. What is given is given to bless and honor God, not to win approval or impress others. This is the widow giving her “two small copper coins” in humble generosity, not “the rich” giving in a showy display (Luke 21:1–2). And as Jesus said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them” (Luke 21:3). One thinks of Paul commending the Macedonians for their “generosity” (2 Cor 8:2; 9:11, 13) and the way they gave out of their poverty and not their wealth. *The spiritual gift of “giving” is taking our resources and generously giving them to others when a need is identified.* The one with this gift is gifted in both her awareness of the need and her willingness to personally meet that need by giving of her own finances and material things.

Leadership (Rom 12:8): The word used here is rare in the New Testament (*proistēmi*, προΐστημι) but is a compound that means to “stand before” or “stand above,” and thus “to exercise a position of leadership.”¹² The word is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:12, “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you.” Paul does not specify whether these are elders or some other type of leader. If we consider what God’s church is and what leaders are seen to do throughout the New Testament, we can say that *the spiritual gift of leadership is a God-given skill in bringing a group of Christians together and bringing them along in the unique purposes God has for them.* In Romans 12:8, the gift of leadership is to be exercised “with zeal” or “with diligence” (NASB). One thinks of Paul’s encouragement to Archippus, “And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord” (Col 4:17). Receiving leadership or a ministry position in the church is a high calling. And

¹¹ ἀπλότης, BDAG, 104.

¹² προΐστημι, BDAG, 870.

since this calling is one given by the Lord and no mere man, it is a calling that requires energy, faithfulness, focus, and sincere commitment.

Mercy (Rom 12:8): “Mercy” in Romans 12:8 is the verb, “show mercy” (*eleō, ἐλεῶ*), a word Paul has used many times in Romans. In Romans 1:31, unbelievers are condemned because they are “without mercy,” in chapter 9 Paul says the determining factor of our salvation is God’s “mercy” in choosing us and not our will in choosing him (9:15, 16, 18) and so we can rightly be called “vessels of mercy” (9:23). Christ’s saving work among the Gentiles is “in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy” (15:9). Clearly, then, our obligation to show mercy to others (Matt 5:7; 9:13) is only a reflection of the God who has been so wonderfully merciful to us. Such mercy we might define as showing kindness to those who do not deserve it, and thus *the spiritual gift of showing mercy means a unique ability to extend the very mercy and kindness of God to others*. In Romans 12:8 the call is to “show mercy with cheerfulness.” Just as “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7), so the one gifted in “showing mercy” is to be “cheerfully merciful.” The mercy extended is not to be begrudging or given with a bitter heart or even as act of mere duty, but instead the mercy is to be a delight for the giver, because of a deep awareness of mercy received from God.

“The Utterance of Wisdom” (1 Cor 12:8) and “The Utterance of Knowledge” (1 Cor 12:8): In 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 Paul provides a suggestive listing of many spiritual gifts, a brief sampling of the “varieties of gifts,” “varieties of service,” and “varieties of activities” that he mentioned in 12:4–6. The first gift he lists is “the utterance of wisdom,” followed by “the utterance of knowledge.” There are various opinions on what “the utterance of wisdom” is and especially about how to distinguish between this gift and the next one, “the utterance of knowledge.” Some see them as interchangeable (Carson); Grudem says “the word of wisdom simply means the ability to speak a wise word in various situations, and word of knowledge is the ability to speak with knowledge about

a situation”; and then is the historic Pentecostal or Charismatic idea that “the utterance of wisdom” is “supernatural application of knowledge” while “the utterance of knowledge” is “the supernatural revelation of facts past, present, or future that were *not learned through the efforts of the natural mind*” (Bennetts).¹³ Given the uniqueness of these phrases, it is not possible to be dogmatic. Yet, the basic approach of Grudem and the Bennetts is helpful. Thus, *“the utterance of wisdom” is the ability to speak with unusual insight about how a person should think or act in a given situation, and “the utterance of knowledge” is having factual knowledge about a person or group that is matched with a spoken word from the Lord in light of this knowledge.* The NLT translation is not far off: “To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge.”

Faith (1 Cor 12:9): “Faith” here is the gift of faith and not saving faith. Of course, saving faith is indeed a gift (Eph 2:8–9; Rom 10:17), but Paul has in mind something different. Fee and Carson rightly see here “the faith that moves mountains” Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 13:2.¹⁴ Sam Storms vividly describes it as “that *mysterious surge of confidence* that rises within a person in a particular situation of need or challenge and which gives an *extraordinary certainty and assurance* that God is about to act through a word or an action.”¹⁵ The faith here is faith to pray for the miraculous, and so it overlaps with other spiritual gifts like “gifts of healings.” Yet, *what distinguishes the spiritual gift of faith is that it is faith to pray for and expect from God manifestations of his power and answers to prayer in a variety of different ways.*

Gifts of Healings (1 Cor 12:9): Notice that the phrase is not “the gift of healing,” where both words are singular, but “gifts of

¹³ Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 38; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1080; Dennis Bennett and Rita Bennett, *The Holy Spirit & You* (Newberry, FL: Bridge-Logos, 1998), 159.

¹⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 658; Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 38.

¹⁵ Storms, *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2002), 55.

healings,” where both words are in the plural. Commentators agree that the plurals underscore the sheer variety of ways this gift might be experienced.¹⁶ It could be that a person has more ability to pray for one type of illness than another, or even that answered prayers for healing happen by different people at different times. Certainly, a Christian should never be hesitant to pray for the sick, simply because he does not feel he has the “gift of healing.” Yet, the mention of the gift in 1 Corinthians reminds us that some will have a **gift of healing**, which means an unusual ability to pray for and see healing from sicknesses of the body and soul.

Working of Miracles (1 Cor 12:10): “Miracles” and “gifts of healings” certainly overlap, for all divine healings are miracles. And yet, miracles is a larger category. As Sam Storms writes, “Whereas all healings are displays of power, not all displays of power are healings.”¹⁷ Carson says such works of power “may include exorcisms, nature miracles, and other displays of divine energy.”¹⁸ “Nature miracles” would include things like Jesus calming storms and walking on water or cursing the fig tree (Matt 14:22–29; Mark 11:13–21). Men struck blind (Acts 13:11) would fall into this category as well. *The spiritual gift of the “working of miracles” means the ability with some regularity to pray for miraculous events to occur with visible success.*

Distinguishing between spirits (1 Cor 12:10): A “spirit” in the Bible can refer to a human spirit, an angelic spirit, or a demonic one (Luke 23:46; Matt 1:20; 8:16). The spiritual gift of “**distinguishing between spirits**,” then, means the ability to discern whether some activity is occurring through the influence of a person’s spirit, an angel, or a demon. D.A. Carson observes that since Moses watched Egyptian sorcerers do miracles and Jesus spoke of those doing miracles in his name who were not of him

¹⁶ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 659; Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 39; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1067.

¹⁷ Storms, *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Gifts*, 71.

¹⁸ Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 40.

(Matt 7:21–23), “there is ever a need to distinguish demonic forces from the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹

Speaking in tongues (1 Cor 12:10) and the Interpretation of tongues (1 Cor 12:10): “Speaking in tongues” (λαλῶν γλώσσαις), sometimes referred to as “*glossolalia*” because of the Greek for “tongues” (*glōssa*, γλῶσσα), is last on our list of spiritual gifts and likely the most controversial of them all. We read about people speaking in tongues on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:3, 4), where it seems to have included speaking in known languages (Acts 2:11). In Acts 10:46 and 19:6 the new converts are also said to “speak in tongues,” and there is no mention of the “tongues” being known to anyone present—including those who are doing the speaking. In 1 Corinthians 14 we get an extensive treatment of speaking in tongues, and this seems to be a reaction to what is happening in the Corinthian church. The assumption by interpreters is that he is emphasizing issues that have become problematic in one way or another. Based on what he says in 1 Corinthians 14, it seems that Corinth has elevated speaking in tongues *without interpretation* to be some kind of religious status symbol. They have elevated manifestations of the Spirit over Christian love, which is why chapter 13 is placed where it is in Paul’s argument. Their use of tongues is an evidence of this misplaced priority. Paul’s approach is to present the superiority of “prophecy” to *uninterpreted* “tongues.” A simple statement of his argument is in 1 Corinthians 14:5, “The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.” Why the need for “the interpretation of tongues”? Because the “tongue” is not known to the speaker or the hearers. Note that “interpretation” is not *translation*. Paul is not speaking of the gift of translating a known language. To translate in this way simply means you know two languages, the speaker’s language and one you are translating into for a group of hearers. But this would not be considered a spiritual gift specially given by God for the

¹⁹ Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 40.

building up of his church. It is a skill acquired through natural means.

Gordon Fee has an excellent summary about “speaking in tongues” as it is presented in 1 Corinthians 12–14.²⁰ First, tongues is “a Spirit-inspired utterance,” clear from 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11; 14:2. In other words, it is not natural speech like that utilized where the speaker or hearer simply know multiple languages. Second, because of the directives in 1 Corinthians 14:27–28, it is clear “the speaker is not in ‘ecstasy’ or ‘out of control.’” The spiritual gift does not “come upon” someone like the Spirit came on Saul when he prophesied (1 Sam 10:10). Third, “it is essentially unintelligible speech both to the speaker (14:14) and to others (14:16).” The unintelligibility is why the need for the complementary gift of “the interpretation of tongues.” Fourth, “it is speech directed basically toward God (14:2, 14–15, 28).” Where prophecy is primarily a message from God to us, tongues is an inspirational or timely message from us to God. There is a confirmation of this idea even in Acts 2 where what was heard was said to be “the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11).

A final point to make about speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 is the two-dimensional aspect of it, one corporate and the other private. Most of the chapter is devoted to times when “you come together” corporately as a church (1 Cor 14:26). In the public gathering when there are “outsiders or unbelievers” (1 Cor 14:23) present, interpretation is required. Yet, this implies that if the church gathers and it is known that “outsiders or unbelievers” are not present, then interpretation is not required. The chapter also points to a private use of the gift. Paul says that in the corporate gathering of the church where no interpreter is present, the tongues speaker “speaks to himself and to God” (1 Cor 14:28). Further, there is evidence for the private gift in Paul himself, who refers to himself as speaking in tongues “more than all of you” (1 Cor 14:18) and yet, “in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order

²⁰ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 172–73.

to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue” (1 Cor 14:19). The picture implies Paul spoke in tongues a lot when he was alone and not very much when he was in meetings where the church gathered.²¹

At times a person believes in speaking in tongues by conviction but rules out any modern expression of tongues because we cannot know if our practice of it is exactly like the early church’s practice. The first thing that can be said in response to this is this is true of a great many aspects of church life now and church life then. Our use of singing and preaching and collection of money have developed over the centuries by a combination of the clear teaching of Scripture and God giving wisdom to his people at a particular place and time. The way we utilize biblical practices in worship is to make sure that what God has said about them is reflected in our current approach to them. We do not know if our sermons are anything like those preached in the church in Antioch, and yet, we can fulfill passages like 2 Timothy 3:16–4:2 as we do preach. Tongues is similar. We do not know if our practice is exactly like that in Corinth, but we can make sure that how we do practice tongues follows the fairly extensive guidance God has given us in 1 Corinthians 12–14. This leads to a final point about tongues and prophecy, which is simply that the Lord lays out so much clear instruction about these gifts it seems reasonable to think he expects us to practice these gifts.

Continuationism Defended

When it comes to spiritual gifts and the church today, there is much debate about which gifts “continue” in the present and which have “ceased.” The debate largely hinges around the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and healing/miracles. In fact, those who feel these gifts

²¹ For good defenses of and discussions about the private use of tongues see Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1328; J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Christian Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 2:232; Storms, *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Gifts*, 151–98.

“continue” in the present are called “Continuationists,” and those who feel these gifts have ceased are called “Cessationists.” Within the Continuationist traditions, there are other divides. Some hold to a Spirit baptism that can occur *after* conversion, and other says Spirit baptisms happened this way only in the first generation of the church as it is recorded in Acts but now it always occurs at conversion. Another divide among Continuationists is whether the gift and/or the office of apostle continues today or whether it has ceased. It is true that when you frame the differences in these ways, they can feel quite small, since the area of agreement is so enormous. And this is true! Yet, like other differences in theology, at times these small differences end up making a fairly significant difference in how Christians experience their life with Christ individually and also corporately within the church. *The view I will defend is that of **Continuationism**, especially a Continuationism that holds to all the gifts and offices (including apostles) in the New Testament continuing throughout the church age until Christ returns and the possibility of Spirit baptism occurring after conversion.*

How Long do the Gifts Continue?

Above we looked at Acts 2:16–21 in the context of Pentecost. I said that this text provides a profound explanation of what happened at Pentecost and its implications for the church.²² It announces to the world that “the last days” (v. 17) have begun, and the pouring out of the Spirit will continue until “the great and magnificent day” of the Lord comes (v. 20). The writing of the New Testament or the death of the apostles is certainly not “the great and magnificent day” alluded to. The return of Christ is that coming day. The perspective of Acts 2, then, is that the pouring out of the Spirit is evidence “the last days” have arrived, and these “last days” continue until the final

²² For a much more extensive treatment of this passage see Daniel J. Baker, “The Complete Theological Program of Acts 2:17–21 in Luke-Acts,” *Pneuma* 42.1 (2020): 50–67, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700747-04201001>.

day when Christ returns. Unsurprisingly, then, the rest of the book of Acts presents numerous and varied expressions of prophecy and various gifts of the Spirit among the people of God. In fact, when these are not present, it is seen as unusual and God's work somehow incomplete. The church responds by explanation, prayer, and laying hands on those who have yet to experience these dynamic expressions of the Spirit's presence (e.g., Acts 8:14–17; 19:1–7). Another undeniable aspect of Acts is that Luke provides no editorial comment or quotation within his text that the church should expect such gifts will one day cease. Further, while certain apostles are special because they are eyewitnesses of Christ and his resurrection (the Twelve) and Paul is a unique emphasis for his ministry to the Gentiles, there is also no hint that when these thirteen men die some great shift will happen in God's dealings with his people. These thirteen are special apostles because they are first and foundational in their own ways, but they are not special because they are the *only* apostles.

Another crucial text in this discussion is Ephesians 4:7–16, what I call “The Pauline Pentecost.”²³ Paul begins by saying “grace” (*charis*) was given to each of us as a “measure” or allotment from “Christ’s gift” (v. 7). Then in vv. 8–10 he explains “Christ’s gift” by alluding to Psalm 68:18 (67:19 LXX): “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men” (Eph 4:8). He alters the Greek Old Testament text to conform to his intention, but the alteration is minimal. He changes the original “he received gifts among men” to “he gave gifts to men.” The explanation for this is in the fact that the gifts given to the ascended one in Psalm 68 are being given to an ascended king after his triumph over his enemies. He is presented as “leading a host of captives in your train” (Ps 68:18). But what does a king do who receives gifts for his victory? He pours out gifts on his people, especially those worthy of special favor from him. You can see this in 2 Samuel 6:19 where

²³ Baker, “The Complete Theological Program of Acts 2:17–21 in Luke-Acts,” 66.

David has ascended the throne and brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. After such triumph, he “distributed among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins to each one.” After Paul explains Christ’s triumph and distribution of gifts in Ephesians 4:8, he looks at the verb “ascended” he has just quoted and explains that “ascended” means he had previously “descended into the lower regions” (vv. 9–10). Christ’s redemption is presented as descending from the heavens first, which means his incarnation and crucifixion, and then ascending back to the heavens in triumph and glory. At his ascension, though, he “ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things” (v. 10). This is speaking of Christ’s ascension, of course. We know from Acts 1–2 that it is Pentecost that follows the ascension, and Pentecost is where Christ pours out the Spirit on his people. You see how the two accounts line up powerfully, Ephesians 4:8–11 and Acts 1–2.

Ephesians 4:11–13 continues the thought of 4:8–10. When Christ “gave gifts to men” (v. 8), we realize that this includes the gifts of people who are “apostles,” “prophets,” “evangelists,” and “shepherd-teachers” (v. 11). Their role is to “equip the saints” to minister and build up the church (v. 12). But notice the time element that follows: “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of God, to mature manhood” (v. 13). The gifts are given and the ministries continue “until” the time when God’s people are fully unified and fully sanctified. But when does this happen? It happens at the return of Christ when all God’s people are glorified. At that point, unity and holiness will be complete among the people of God. In other words, Paul in Ephesians 4:7–13 is presenting a perspective identical to Acts 2:16–21. *Spiritual gifts continue throughout the age that extends from Pentecost to the return of Christ.*

After Christ returns, spiritual gifts in significant ways will finally cease. We see this in 1 Corinthians 13:8–13. Paul speaks of Christian love in 1 Corinthians 13 to provide a rebuke to the Corinthians who have elevated the practice of the gifts above

Christian love. Paul says no, Christian love is greater. But why? His answer is that where gifts will cease, Christian love never will. “Love never ends” (v. 8) but “prophecies...pass away,” “tongues...cease,” and even gifts of “knowledge...pass away” (v. 8). These disappear “when the perfect comes” (v. 10). On that day, a fullness of knowledge and healing will occur that will make spiritual gifts irrelevant. Who needs the gift of healing when no one is sick? Paul equates the perfect coming with when we see Christ “face to face” (v. 12). That is his return and certainly not when the New Testament is written or the canon closed. Of course, the canon is “perfect.” It is simply not the “perfect” Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 13:8–13. Once again, the New Testament perspective is that spiritual gifts continue until the return of Christ.

Cessationism Defined and Refuted

Cessationism is not easy to define in such a way that all Cessationists will agree, but the basic perspective they have in common is that prophecy, tongues, and miracles/healings have ceased. Something happened in the first century that brought an end to these types of works of the Spirit, the types of works that were clearly evident with Jesus and the early church. Richard Gaffin is an excellent New Testament scholar and theologian and also a Cessationist. He lays out a strong case for why he is a Cessationist that provides a useful explanation for someone might hold such a position.²⁴ I will present his strongest points and then respond to them.

First, Gaffin says “Pentecost is unique” in “the history of salvation (*historia salutis*),” and so should not be used as a model for an individual Christian’s “order of salvation (*ordo salutis*).”²⁵ He continues, “The primary significance of Pentecost is

²⁴ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “A Cessationist View,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? 4 Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 23–64.

²⁵ Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” 30–31.

redemptive-historical and Christological, not experiential.”²⁶ Our response to this is to say, Yes! The “*primary* significance” is undoubtedly “redemptive-historical” and not about the experience of this or that Christian. Yet, “primary” does not mean “only.” To say Pentecost is *more* about God’s salvation in history is not to say that Pentecost is *only* about God’s salvation in history. The same is true of the cross of Christ. That event is “primarily” about God’s salvation in history. But it is also about the Christian’s “experience” of that salvation. As Continuationists we should not downplay the unique significance of Pentecost, and yet, as God’s people we should not miss the implications it has for our experience of God in the church age. The Joel quotation in Acts 2:17–21 and references back to Pentecost later in Acts (e.g., 11:15) make it clear this event is the *beginning* of a new epoch and not an experience without any echoes in the later church.

Second, Gaffin says, “The whole of Acts is unique”; and (37). There are “unmistakable” markers in chapters 2, 8, 10–11, and 19 of Acts that make it clear Luke is not intending “to establish a pattern of ‘repetition’ of Pentecost to continue on indefinitely in church history.”²⁷ He goes on to say, “It would certainly be wrong to argue, on the one hand, that Luke intended to show that miraculous gifts and power experiences ceased with the history he documented. But it is no less gratuitous to suppose that he was implying that they would continue beyond.”²⁸ Our response is to say once again, Yes! Acts is indeed unique as God’s definitive and authoritative history about the first generation of the church after Christ’s resurrection. It is as unique as the Exodus in the Old Testament. And yet, just like with the Exodus in the Old Testament, such momentous events are filled with myriad ways that later generations are to connect back to those momentous events. The miracles of the plagues and Red Sea crossing are meant to inspire

²⁶ Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” 34.

²⁷ Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” 37–38.

²⁸ Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” 38–39.

faith for more miracles in later generations, the commandments are to be obeyed, the covenant established is to be kept until it is superseded by another covenant, the promises about Canaan are to be believed until they are totally fulfilled. We could go on. Acts is like that. It is unique and momentous, and yet it is also to inform how later generations of the church live as God's people in the new covenant. This is understood without hesitation when we are talking about the role of elders, the commitment to church planting and evangelism, the way the gospel is preached, how baptism is to be exercised in the church, the place of deacons, and even worship on the Lord's Day. In all these areas Christian traditions look back on Acts to get God's normative guidance. We are saying that it is also true with respect to spiritual gifts. I will say more about the Spirit baptisms of Acts 2, 8, 10, and 19 below.

Third, Gaffin says that Ephesians 2:20 establishes that "apostles and prophets" are foundational only, and that foundation is now laid an unnecessary to be laid again.²⁹ He says also that "their inspired, revelatory witness" is what they provided, and this cannot be added to.³⁰ In fact, he says, "to maintain the continuation of the prophetic gifts today stands in tension with the canonicity of the New Testament, particularly the canon as closed."³¹ Our response is to say that he is confusing what *some* of the early "apostles and prophets" did with what they must *always* do. It is true that what we call the New Testament is inextricably linked to some of the first "apostles and prophets" and thus the closed canon. And yet, we have already seen that many apostles *did not* write Scripture, and some were not even commissioned as distinctive "eyewitnesses" of the resurrection (Acts 1:21–22). These other apostles preached Christ, and they taught biblical doctrine (what we would call "apostolic doctrine," since it was consistent with the foundational apostles), but their role does not appear to be receiving and teaching unique

²⁹ Gaffin, "A Cessationist View," 42–43.

³⁰ Gaffin, "A Cessationist View," 43.

³¹ Gaffin, "A Cessationist View," 44.

and spontaneously revealed doctrine. They taught what they received from others. This is what Silas and Timothy and Titus were involved with.

With prophets it is the same. *Some* appear to have been involved with providing the church with unique and foundational doctrine for all time (Eph 2:20). But we have no single recorded instance where this ever happened. Therefore, it is not easy to know what Paul has in mind. I think he could have in mind men like John Mark and Luke who wrote Scripture. But where we do have prophets in the New Testament, *none of them is ever connected to providing the church with unique and special revelation for the church for all time*. Agabus never did this (Acts 11:28; 21:10). The “four unmarried daughters” of Philip never did this (Acts 21:9). The prophets in Antioch left us no record of their prophecies (Acts 13:1–2), unless they were the ones who communicated God’s Word to send out Paul and Barnabas. Judas and Silas in Acts 15:32 are identified as “prophets” and Silas is a co-author of 1–2 Thessalonians. He is perhaps the best candidate for Gaffin’s suggestion.

Paul’s encouragements about how to practice the gift of prophecy does not square with the role Gaffin defines. In 1 Corinthians 14:29, Christians are to “weigh” whether a prophecy is from God or not, something entirely inappropriate if that prophecy is normative revelation. The same is true of 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21, where the church is to “test everything” prophets speak and then “hold fast what is good.” Additionally, Paul commands the church, “pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor 14:1). Is he really exhorting the entire church—all men, women, and children—to “speak normative revelation that will be for all later generations of the church to follow” in the Ephesians 2:20 sense? This is not plausible. It seems far more likely that Paul expects later generations of the church to speak God’s word to a specific group of people that calls that specific group of people to think or do something. As such a local

word is spoken, it is to be “weighed” and “tested” and then acted upon if it is determined to be from the Lord.

Fourth, Gaffin critiques the position that says New Testament prophecy is not adding to Scripture. His basic response is that if prophecy is said to be a word from God, how can it not be adding to Scripture?³² Such prophecy threatens our view of the sufficiency of Scripture.³³ There are two things to say in response to this. One is that not all types of revelation are the same. The Bible is a unique category of revelation, since its revelation is for all God’s people for all time. But it is clear that not all prophecy fits this category of revelation. The groups of prophets in the Old Testament in 1 Samuel 10 or 1 Kings 18:4 have no recorded prophecies of any kind. Therefore, their words cannot be revelation for all God’s people for all time. They speak a different category of prophecy than Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other writing prophets. Philip’s “four unmarried” daughters also have no recorded prophecies, and so their prophecy cannot be for all God’s people for all time. In these cases, prophecy is not adding to Scripture. The Bible calls them prophets, but their prophecies do not add to Scripture. Gaffin is wrong to say, therefore, that prophecy necessarily adds to Scripture. A second thing to say in response to Gaffin is that it seems profoundly strange and inconsistent to say that the Bible is unique as God’s Word and yet then to say that clear commandments in the Bible are not to be obeyed. God’s Word says to earnestly desire to prophesy, but Gaffin is saying we should not. I believe it safer to follow God’s Word.

Fifth, a point Sinclair Ferguson makes is that passages like Hebrews 2:3–4 and 2 Corinthians 12:12 mean that “unusual phenomena” like the miraculous are “confirmatory signs” of the truth of the gospel and the authenticity of the “genuine” original apostles. Such confirmation is no longer necessary since the

³² Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” 46–47.

³³ Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” 52.

foundation of the church has been laid.³⁴ It is true and important to note this aspect of the miraculous. It does confirm the truth of the gospel. What is strange is to think that because we have the Bible we no longer need confirmation of the truth of God's Word. The same hardness and skepticism that was true in the first century remains a part of our world as well. The miraculous adds confirmation and weight to our message, since it presents to the world not only a Word like any other but a God who is fully present in all of his power.

Finally, the resistance of many Cessationists to the miraculous has a lot to do with their view of the Bible as unique and in some ways supreme revelation for the people of God. This reflex is right and good. Therefore, it is important for us who are Continuationists to pursue and practice spiritual gifts in such a way that the full glory and centrality of God's Word is never threatened and always esteemed.

The Spirit and Sanctification

Another dimension of our new life in the Spirit is the way the Spirit sanctifies us or makes us more holy. Here we are speaking of "progressive sanctification" (God progressively making us more holy) and not "definitive sanctification" (a one-time act where God sets us apart to be his). This is appropriate, since the Spirit in us is the *Holy* Spirit. To be a Christian is to have the Spirit in us (Rom 8:9), so it makes sense that when the Spirit moves in he would begin to conform us to his own holiness. The Spirit's sanctifying work is a key part of the Ezekiel promise about the coming renewal the Spirit will bring:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.²⁶ And I will give you

³⁴ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 225.

a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezek 36:25–27)

Ezekiel does not tell us exactly how this works, only that it does. God says the regeneration promised here causes us “to work in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” Where before we lived as if we were king of our own lives and so followed our own laws, with the Spirit in us we instead walk in God’s “statutes” and “rules.” In other words, *obedience is the inevitable result of regeneration*. Our obedience is not automatically perfect (1 John 1:8–10), but it is real nonetheless (1 John 3:7–8).

As we turn to the New Testament, we see the Spirit described as doing the same sanctifying work as in Ezekiel. A vivid picture is in Galatians 5:22–23:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Paul has just listed “the works of the flesh” (Gal 5:19–21), which are a long list of vices and abominable acts. The total opposite is this list of “the fruit of the Spirit.” Notice, though, that where our sins are called “*works (ta erga)* of the flesh,” our virtues are called “the *fruit* of the Spirit.” Our “flesh” is actually doing the “work” when we sin, but when we practice virtues like “love” and “kindness” and “goodness,” it is a “fruit of the Spirit.” A “work” is an active, self-directed kind of endeavor. But fruit implies a naturally occurring result of an organic process. Fruit is not produced in an instant but is born over time by a tree which naturally produces that fruit. Remember, Jesus spoke of us as being either good trees that produce good fruit or bad trees that produce bad fruit (Luke 6:43–45). Paul is reminding us that when we are good trees

and good fruit is produced, it is actually the Holy Spirit who produces that fruit. The Spirit turned us from bad trees to good ones, and the fruit we organically bear will be good fruit also produced by the Spirit.

The fact the Spirit is the power and determining factor of the virtues we exhibit does not mean we have no part to play or that we are not involved with our mind, will, and body. It just means that the real power of holiness is from the Holy Spirit and not ourselves. You can hear the personal commitment required to be holy in another text that speaks of the indwelling Spirit of God: “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Cor 6:19–20). The Spirit is in us, but Paul does not call us to a passive, “sit there and do nothing.” Instead, he speaks the imperative, “So glorify God in your body.” Andreas Köstenberger has a good summary of the way the Spirit bears the fruit but we also engage in the work of pursuing holiness. Speaking of “the fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22–23, he writes,

This ‘fruit,’ the results of the Spirit’s continual work in a believer’s life, is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control....Only the Spirit is able to effect a lasting transformation of a person’s character; the law is ultimately powerless to do so. In this process of spiritual growth, the Spirit and the believer work hand in glove: the Spirit leads, guides, and directs; the believer follows, trusts, and obeys. As is commonly the case in Paul’s writings, there is a close connection between the Spirit’s work and the believer’s faith, though it is always the Spirit’s enablement, not the believer’s effort, that remains primary.³⁵

³⁵ Gregg R. Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, Theology for the People of God (Brentwood, TN: B&H, 2020), 111.

Spirit Baptism(s) in the New Testament

Our next topic in exploring the Christian's life in the Spirit is what is sometimes called "the baptism of the Spirit." The name comes from the gospels and Acts where Jesus is distinguished by the fact he will baptize with the Spirit. In contrast to John's water baptism, Jesus as Messiah will bring a Spirit baptism: "John answered them all, saying, 'I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire'" (Luke 3:16). Then in Acts we read, "And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now'" (Acts 1:4–5). This promised Spirit baptism is what occurs at Pentecost in Acts 2:1–11. The Spirit falls on the disciples gathered together, and "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). Pentecost was not the time when the disciples were converted, since they already believed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16). Their faith was no doubt imperfect and needed to grow substantially, but they did truly believe. What changed at Pentecost was that this group of believers received the baptism of the Spirit.

As Acts continues, we see this same pattern repeated but never in a robotic, carbon-copy manner. Always there is variation in what is said and what is experienced. In Acts 8 Philip preaches to Samaritans, and many respond with saving faith and are baptized. And yet, "when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 8:14–16). The apostles Peter and John visit Samaria and "laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit" (v. 17). No mention is made of

tongues or prophecy or any other manifestation. But somehow by what is seen and heard it is obvious that “they received the Holy Spirit.” In Acts 10, the Spirit falls on the Gentile Cornelius with those gathered with him to hear Peter. The fact Peter is preaching the gospel to this group of Gentiles is remarkable enough for the Jewish apostle, so perhaps that is why God orchestrates things so, “while Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word” (10:44). After the Spirit falls, Peter baptizes this group of Gentiles. The event is so historical that Luke records Peter describing the whole narrative against to the church in Jerusalem (11:1–18). Peter explains that the Spirit baptism of Cornelius and his gathering was a fulfillment of Jesus’s word, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (v. 16).

Finally, in Acts 19:1–7 we read of Paul ministering to a group of disciples in Ephesus, ones he believes to be followers of Christ. As the conversation ensues, it is clear they are not. They were only baptized “into John’s baptism” (Acts 19:3). Paul reorients himself and preaches Christ to them (v. 4) and then baptizes them in water in the name of Jesus (v. 5). Then in a very matter-of-fact manner we read that “when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying” (v. 6).

The question with these Spirit baptisms is whether they are unique and unrepeatable or whether there is a model here of a Spirit experience Christians can have and should pursue. Those who say the events are unique see them as marking the advancement of the gospel to the Jews (2), the Samaritans (8), to the Gentiles (10), and then to disciples of John (19). Gaffin calls it “unmistakable” that Luke intends for these chapters to be seen as unique and unrepeatable Spirit baptisms.³⁶ His evidence is that Luke refers to

³⁶ Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” 38. See also John R. W. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1976), 28–46.

“God-fearing Jews” (2:5), “Samaria” (8:14), and “Gentiles” (10:45).³⁷ Since these follow the promise in Acts 1:8 about being witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth,” Luke is telling us that what happens (Acts 1:8) In other words, because Luke has identified the category of the people experiencing the Spirit and because these categories have important redemptive-historical meaning, therefore what is presented is unique and repeatable.

A few things can be said in response. *First*, Gaffin’s scheme has left out the Ephesians in Acts 19:1–7, an event that matches “the ends of the earth” in Acts 1:8, and is thus a duplication of “the ends of the earth” reached in Acts 10 when the Gentile Cornelius is converted. Why is it necessary to have two Pentecost-like encounters with the Spirit for Gentiles when Acts 10–11 have made it so clear that the gospel and the Spirit are here given to Gentiles? What does Acts 19 add to Acts 10 that is not already established? This is no small issue if Luke’s logic is so “unmistakable” as Gaffin claims. Gaffin is claiming that once a new barrier is crossed with the gospel and the Spirit, no further Pentecost-like events can ever be expected. And yet Luke has given us two Spirit baptisms to the same group of people. Given that Luke only includes four such events, this duplication is significant.

Second, it is always important to let an author’s actual wording drive our exegesis and not a framework we impose on top of it. With that in mind, let us look again at Acts 8 and 19. In Acts 8, it does seem important that the converts are Samaritans (8:14) and yet the explanation for why the apostles “prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit” (8:15) has nothing at all to do with the fact they are Samaritans. Instead, Luke says they prayed “for he [the Spirit] had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (8:16). Observing this absence, “they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit” (8:17).

³⁷ Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” 38.

In Acts 19 we get a similar progression. Paul observes “disciples” (19:1) and assumes they are Christians. Assuming they are Christians, he asks them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (19:2). This is a remarkable question that interpreters often minimize. Asking the question *assumes that it is possible to believe and not receive the Holy Spirit*. Paul is not asking them if they are Christians. He is asking if they received the Spirit *when they believed* in Jesus. This question makes no sense whatsoever if the Spirit is always experienced in power at conversion. They answer that they did not know there was a Holy Spirit (19:2). From here Paul determines they need Christ and so he preaches Christ. They believe and are then water baptized (19:5). And then in a very matter-of-fact manner, Paul “laid his hands on them” and the Spirit “came on them,” and “they began speaking in tongues and prophesying” (19:6). Once again, as in Acts 8:14–17, a group of people experienced faith first and a period of time follows before they are Spirit baptized. Whether that time is short (here) or longer (8:14–17; the disciples in 2:1–11) is of no consequence. *The critical fact is that there is any amount of time at all.*

With respect to Acts 19:1–7, Luke gives us absolutely no indicator this is a unique redemptive-historical moment. But if it is not unique, then this calls into question the whole framework laid on top of the book of Acts by Gaffin (and Stott and others). A different framework is needed. A better framework for Acts is to see that yes, Acts 2, 8, 10, and 19 are exemplary moments for the church at large. The fact that Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles experience the Spirit in such similar ways is Luke’s way of saying what he said in Acts 2: *This experience of the Spirit is for “all flesh” (2:17) and not simply a privileged few*. Whether you are a Jew or Gentile (or Samaritan) is no matter. It is available to all. Luke’s narrative becomes a powerful reinforcement of Jesus’s promise: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13).

Among Pentecostals, the view is common that Spirit baptism is evidenced by speaking in tongues. Without speaking in tongues there is much doubt that Spirit baptism has actually occurred. This occurs in Acts 2, 10, and 19. But it is not mentioned in Acts 8. Further, there are fillings of the Spirit like Acts 4:31 and Paul's own Spirit baptism in Acts 9:17–18 where no mention is made of tongues or prophecy (though Paul says he does speak in tongues; 1 Cor 14:18). These fillings have some equivalence to Acts 2, 8, 10, and 19, since the Spirit falls on a group of people and there is visible and audible evidence of the fact. Tongues is not part of that evidence. It is better, then, to say that the testimony of Luke-Acts is that *Spirit baptism can occur after conversion and it will include visible and audible evidence of the Spirit's work, but this may or may not include speaking in tongues.*

But what about the rest of the New Testament? How is such a reception of the Spirit presented? One passage often discussed with this topic is 1 Corinthians 12:13, which on the face of it appears to be speaking of the Luke-Acts Spirit baptism experience: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” The Greek reads more literally, “in (ἐν) one Spirit we all into one body were baptized.” James Dunn and others have pointed out that “in one Spirit” is the same prepositional phrase as Luke 3:16, “with the Holy Spirit” (ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ), and so the Luke 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 12:13 are referring to the same work of the Spirit. Since 1 Corinthians 12:13 refers to all Christians, then Spirit baptism in the mind of Paul is something experienced at conversion when we become members of the body of Christ.³⁸ So goes the logic. Yet, while Paul's grammar does relate closely to Luke 3:16, his theology is not so similar. A key difference is that in Luke 3:16 the Agent doing the baptism is Christ and he immerses the person “in the

³⁸ James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Spirit: A Re-Examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1970), 128.

Spirit.” In 1 Corinthians 12:13, the Spirit is the active Agent and he brings the Christian from outside to inside the “one body” of Christ. These are not the same works of the Spirit. Carson rightly says that we run into trouble in our interpretation if we try and make “baptism of the Spirit” in 1 Corinthians 12:13 a technical phrase with a fixed meaning in the New Testament.³⁹ He is right, and Dunn and others seem to be guilty of this.

The concept of a Spirit baptism is, of course, a metaphorical idea which takes the physical idea of being immersed in water and metaphorically ascribes this to an experience of the Spirit. It is not surprising, then, that Paul would speak one way about an immersive spiritual act that differs from Luke discussing a different immersive spiritual act. Metaphors are not typically locked into only one way of using them. Paul speaks of the Israelites being “baptized into Moses” (1 Cor 10:2) and Christians being “baptized into Christ Jesus” (his death, burial, and resurrection; Rom 6:4–6) at conversion. The Israelites were not literally “immersed *into*” the man Moses, and Christians are not physically “immersed into” Christ at conversion. The respective context has to direct us in interpreting the baptism metaphor.

What is happening in Luke versus Paul is that the same idea of Spirit baptism is being used in two different ways. Paul is referring to the conversion event of being grafted “into” the one body of Christ, and Luke is referring to a work distinct from (and sometimes subsequent to) conversion where the Spirit empowers a Christian in a dramatic manner. To see these as equivalent events becomes nonsense if we try and read Paul’s Spirit baptism into Luke’s baptisms in Acts 2, 8, 9 (Paul’s), 10, and 19. Are we really saying that God delayed grafting Christians into the body of Christ in Acts 8 and 19? Surely not. Likewise, it is theological absurdity to say that the Spirit baptism Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 12:13 could ever have the delay apparent in Acts 8. A person is in the body of Christ at conversion without any delay whatsoever.

³⁹ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 45–46.

When we look elsewhere in the New Testament, we do see evidence of Spirit encounters that are dramatic and which can follow conversion. Two clear passages are Galatians 3:2–5 and Ephesians 3:19. In Galatians 3:2–5 Paul speaks of various works of the Spirit. Some seem to equate to conversion: “having begun by the Spirit” (3:3). Others equate to ongoing works of the Spirit’s power: “supplies the Spirit to you” (3:5), “works miracles among you” (3:5). But then there is the reference to “receiving the Spirit” (3:2): “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?” This is a fascinating question, since it maps so closely on to the question on Paul’s lips in Acts 19:2, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” “Receiving the Spirit” is a theological loaded phrase, and is the one most often used by Luke to describe Spirit baptism (cf. Acts 2:38; 8:15, 17, 19; 10:47; 19:2). What is interesting about Galatians 3:2 is that the receiving of the Spirit is said to be “by hearing with faith.” This means it is not the Spirit’s work of regeneration, which produces faith (1 John 5:1). It is a work that must follow after faith. But also, the argument of Galatians 3:2–5 hinges on the obviousness of the Spirit’s work among the Galatians. If this is all by faith, how could they argue that works and not faith are the crux of the issue for salvation (Gal 2:16). We continue as we began, by faith.

Another significant Pauline text is Ephesians 3:19, where Paul tells his readers he prays “that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” This idea connects with what Paul mentioned earlier in 2:19–22 where Christians are said to be “a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (v. 22).⁴⁰ “Filled with all fullness” is not a simple idea and seems to be Paul a bit lost for words and wanting to express the sheer glorious abundance that being immersed in the Spirit can bring. But clearly, this is not a reference to obedience to commandments or a strong faith that weathers storms well. It is an experiential idea that surpasses our abilities of description. Paul is

⁴⁰ Robert L. Foster, “‘A Temple in the Lord Filled to the Fullness of God’: Context and Intertextuality (Eph 3:19),” *NovT* 49.1 (2007): 85–96.

praying that these Christians—readers who have believed and are walking in growing holiness—would experience *something in addition to* that life in Christ. He is praying for an experience they would have in Christ. And then in Ephesians 5:18 he turns this pray for them into an exhortation for them. What he prays for, he then calls them to pursue: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18).

Another text that speaks to an experience in the Spirit that can happen after conversion is Romans 1:11, “For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you.” He is writing to Christians (1:6–7), and he wants them to experience “some spiritual gift” (*ti charisma pneumatikon*) *after their conversion*. The fact he wants to be the human means for “imparting” this gift points to it being something tangible, something audible or visible. As is often the case, laying on of hands is connected to the Spirit imparting gifts, and maybe Paul has this in mind.

Finally, we can look at two texts which need to be read together:

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. (1 Tim 4:14)

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷ for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. (2 Tim 1:6–7)

In both passages, Timothy is the recipient of a spiritual blessing through the laying on of hands. In 1 Timothy 4:14 it is “the council of elders” who prays for him and he receives “the gift” (*charisma*). In 2 Timothy, Paul alone lays his hands on Timothy and he receives “the gift of God” (*to charisma tou theou*), which is the Spirit “of power and love and self-control.” The key for us is that there are two events being referred to. 1 Timothy seems to refer to Timothy’s

ordination (perhaps in Ephesus where is serving when 1 Tim is written), but 2 Timothy seems to be a receiving of the Spirit by Paul's laying on of hands, something like what happens in Acts 19:6. Both events occur following conversion. Lest we think apostles must be the one laying on of hands, there is Ananias laying hands in Acts 9:17. Why would Ananias do this and pray this, unless it was a common practice by this point in the life of the church?

We could add more passages, ones that speak of identifiable experiences of the Spirit like Acts 13:52; 1 Thess 1:6; 1 Peter 1:8; Romans 5:5; or Galatians 4:6. In all these passages the allusion is to something experiential and something after conversion.

The New Testament is painting a picture for us that an experiential encounter of God's Spirit is available to Christians. It is not the *most important thing*, which is, of course, the gospel and faith in its message (1 Cor 15:3–5). Yet, it is not an *unimportant* thing that this experience is available to Christians. For the sake of a definition, I think the New Testament data on Spirit baptism can be summarized like this: ***The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a special giving of the Spirit by Jesus to the Christian either at conversion or afterwards. It is separate from regeneration and sanctification, though it is the same Holy Spirit at work. It is an encounter with God that is undeniable and evident to others and accompanied by such things as new boldness, new assurance of God's love, new fruitfulness, new displays of spiritual gifts, a new awareness of God, or even new joy. It is like a personal revival that enables someone to fulfill their callings with much greater spiritual power.***⁴¹

⁴¹ For a new similar to mine, see R. A. Torrey, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit* (NY: Fleming H. Revell, 1897). For a fuller and more technical discussion of what I have presented here, see my Daniel J. Baker, "'Two-Stage' Spirit Reception in the Writings of Paul: Building on the Work of Robert Menzies," *Pneuma* 44.1 (2022): 41–59.

Walking by the Spirit

Our final topic in our look at life in the Spirit is from Galatians 5:25, where Paul says, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” “Live by the Spirit” here points to the regenerating work of the Spirit, when he took our heart of stone and made it a heart of flesh (Ezek 36:25–27). It is when we were born again and began to believe (1 John 5:1). He starts with the indicative, what has happened to us. But then there is the imperative, what we are to do in light of this new event. We are alive in the Spirit. Now the task is to “keep in step with the Spirit.” The verb here implies that the Spirit is to direct and shape how we live. He sets the pattern, and we follow in it. He lays down a set of tracks, and we are to keep in their line. Such a lifestyle will, of course, result in bearing the Spirit’s fruit (Gal 5:22–23) and certainly bring with it deep experiences in the Spirit (Gal 3:2–5). Such a life will also bless many and glorify God, since it will mean we are walking according to God’s personal direction. Even though the Spirit will speak to us through the Word and the commandments of God, for these are not to be separated, this verse reminds us that our relationship to God’s guidance is always that, *a relationship*. He is not a list of rules, but a Person we walk with throughout all our days. Köstenberger provides a great summary of what Paul is getting at:

“Walking” in (or “living” by) the Spirit—a Semitism—envisions a believer’s way of life as guided by the Spirit (thus fulfilling the law’s requirements; Rom 8:4); being “led” by the Spirit may build on the prophetic vision of God’s writing his law on people’s hearts (Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:27; 2 Cor 3:2–6). To “keep in step” means “being aligned with” in the sense of “walking in another’s footsteps” or “living in accordance with a certain standard” (Gal 6:16; Phil 3:16). Thus, Paul here encourages believers who claim to be controlled by and submitted to the Spirit to furnish evidence that this is in fact the case by the way they live, that is,

by exhibiting the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22–23).⁴²

Conclusion

The above discussion on our life in the Spirit has not been comprehensive, but it has pointed to some of the richness and dynamism of what a life in the Spirit means for us. God is in us! We are in him! His very Spirit is working in us and wants to work in us even more. May we always lean into his ever-present Spirit and always be anticipating what profound experiences of the Spirit he has in store for us. As Jesus said,

“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13)

⁴² Allison and Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, 110.