PAULINE CHARISMATA AND THE 21ST CENTURY

by
D. Vincent Palmer

66The continuance of miracles and spiritual gifts in the Christian Church after the close of the Apostolic Age up to the present time is a difficult subject." However, this paper attempts to wrestle with the problem to determine whether or not the sign-gifts are here today. For some, this is certainly an exercise in futility, since a miracle should be expected on a daily basis. A few have suggested that none of the spiritual gifts mentioned in the NT falls in the category of the miraculous.² I will proceed on the assumption that the gifts of prophecy, tongues, healing and miracles were indeed miraculous.³ One group that has recently come out with an unequivocal position on this issue is the Assemblies of Christian Brethren in Jamaica, some of whose leading Bible teachers affirm the cessation of the so called sign-gifts.4

In the NT the sine qua non of Christian initiation is the reception of the Spirit (Rom. 8: 9b). This is richly illustrated in the book of Acts where we find new converts being associated with the Spirit in one way or the other (Acts 2:38; 8:14ff; 19:1ff). In some instances, the reception of the Spirit was accompanied by signs and wonders. In the case of the Galatian churches, for example, the signs are described as dunameis ('miracles', REB). "This text shows that what Paul elsewhere calls 'signs and wonders' was also a regular and expected expression of their life in the Spirit. What we cannot know from this distance, of course, is all that Paul would mean by the phrase 'works miracles among you.' But the phrasing elsewhere in the corpus suggests a variety of supernatural phenomena, including healing."5

In the lengthy period following the Apostolic era to the present, there have been many claims and counter-claims with reference to the controversial gifts. This is mainly because the

D. Vincent Palmer, M.A., M.RE., is a lecturer at both the Jamaica Theological Seminary and the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology. evidence for their continuance is inconclusive. During the Patristic period, Justin Martyr could talk about the "prophetical gifts [which] remain with us, even to the present time." Iranaeus likewise spoke of some who "drive out devils [and] others [who] have foreknowledge of things to come; they see visions, and utter prophetic expressions [and] others still [who] heal the sick". He even claimed the dead were raised up "and remained among us for many years." By way of contrast, there are those, like Chrysostom in the 4th century, who spoke about the obscurity of First Corinthians 12; such obscurity, asserts Chrysostom, is partially due to the cessation of certain gifts. But what seems clear is that from the time of Montanus until the end of the 19th century, the sign gifts were never a part of any major movement. However, "There is enough evidence that some form of 'charismatic' gifts continued sporadically across the centuries of Church history."

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, which is generally regarded as the starting point of the modern Pentecostal movement, the question of the continuation/cessation of the sign-gifts has been vigorously debated. The Pentecostal and Charismatics on the one hand maintain that all gifts are in vogue today, while many in the mainline churches, on the other, deny this claim. What are some of the key biblical texts that bear on the issue?

There is at least one passage of Scripture that relates significantly to the discussion: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. The passage appears within a chiastic structure which embraces chapters 12 and 14:

- A. The need for diversity/unity 12:1-30

 B. The need for charity 12:31-13:13
- A. The need for charity/unity -14.1-40

The central section (B) may be outlined as follows:

- 1 STANZA I: Love is Pre-eminent (13:1-3)
- 1.1 STANZA II: Love is Perfect (13:4-7)
- 1.1.1 STANZA III: Love is Permanent (13:8-13)

In the "poem," ¹² Paul makes the point that love is of paramount importance, before focusing on some of its qualities that immediately relate to the Corinthian situation (4-7). Finally, the lasting value of this virtue is underscored by contrasting it with the gifts of prophecy, knowledge and tongues and comparing it with faith and hope (8-13). The gifts will cease but faith, hope and love—the greatest of the three—will not terminate. The main thrust, of this pericope then is not to discuss the issue of the permanence of spiritual gifts but the

supremacy of the grace of love. Nevertheless, it does make a worthwhile contribution to the study of the question. Sensing this, Ryrie, based upon his exegesis of verse 8, argues for the cessation of tongues. He writes:

There are positive indications in verse 8 that tongues would cease before prophecies and knowledge. Of prophecies (the oral communication of God's truth...) and knowledge (the special understanding of those prophecies) it is written that they shall be done away (*Katargeo*). Of tongues it is said that they shall cease (*pauo*). Furthermore, the verb "done away" indicates that someone (God) shall make them inoperative. The verb "cease" used in connection with tongues is middle voice, indicating that they would die out of their own accord. ¹³

But when will these things be? According to verse 10 "when perfection comes." The term "perfection" is understood in several ways.

Close-of-the-canon view

Vine, for example, believes it is a reference to the completion of the canon. ¹⁴ For him there is no evidence of the continuance of sign-gifts after apostolic times. Since the Holy Scriptures provide the people of God with all that is necessary for guidance, instruction, and edification, there is certainly no need for these spectacular gifts. A problem with this view is that it does not accord well with the context and it gives to "perfection" a meaning that is not attested elsewhere. (Cf. Eph. 4:13; Phil. 3:15; Col. 4:12, etc).

Completion-of-the-early-church-period view

According to Dillow, the NT writers viewed the gifts of tongues only in connection with the "infancy" period of the church. This means that the gift would cease once the church reaches maturity. Support for this view is sought in verse 11: "... When I become a man I put childish ways behind me" (NIV). When Paul used <u>nepios</u> (child) and <u>aner</u> (man) he was illustrating the transition of the church "'shaking off'... the parental restrictions... and former dependent status..." on Judaism. But with the destruction of the temple in AD 70, all this was changed, marking the cessation of tongues.

Dillow approaches the problem from still another angle when he writes:

A careful reading of the ancient prophecies leaves one with the definite impression that the miraculous as a way of life [will be] characteristic of the believer only during the Kingdom when

Christ returns... Since they were intimately related with God's Kingdom, and since we are not yet in that Kingdom, the miracles of the first century, including tongues, must be viewed as temporary irruption of the Kingdom and not a norm for this non-Kingdom age.

Dillow's first argument, while having an element of plausibility, breaks down at verse 12 where the "perfect" is somehow related with seeing God "face to face." His second line of reasoning seems convincing in my estimation but it suffers from a truncated understanding of the Kingdom. As Erickson suggests, the Kingdom is not just a realm (in the future), it is also a relationship (in the present). Therefore, there might be more "irruptions" than Dillow cares to believe.

Cessation-of-life view

In wrestling with the same problem, Mare leaves room for another possibility: "It seems more normal to understand **teleion** in v. 10 to mean that 'perfection' is to come about... when the Christian dies and is taken to be with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:1-10)." Even if one accepts that 2 Corinthians 5 is dealing with the intermediate state, it does appear incongruous to speak about this period as "perfect." Moreover, **teleion** is not used in this connection elsewhere. ²⁰

Consummation-of-the-ages view

Still another suggestion comes from John MacArthur who posits a post-millennial understanding of "perfection." One wonders, though, why the apostle would be concerned at this point with the eternal state when he seems to say in I Corinthians 15 that the church age will close at least a thousand years before. 22

Coming-of-Christ view

A more adequate position is defended by Blomberg and Turner,²³ that is, teleion is a reference to the parousia. Carson also points out that verse 12b "entails a state of affairs where my knowledge is in some way comparable with God's present knowledge of me."²⁴ While this position may not be without difficulty itself, it does seem to do justice to the context.²⁵ The difficulty is felt by all; thus Edgar, a cessationist, confesses: "No Bible verse specifically states that tongues, signs, and wonders will continue.... Nor is there a verse that specifically states they will cease.... [My emphasis]."²⁶

If the question is approached from a theological angle, one that reflects the New Testament eschatological orientation, there is promise of more progress. For the NT writers, the apostle Paul in particular, "the decisive era in the fulfillment of God's promises has been reached or inaugurated in Christ, so that in some sense the fulfillment is already present. But the consummation has yet to come and significant events in God's program are eagerly expected in the future.²⁷"

If all this is granted, what good or purpose would sign-gifts serve today? After all, if they only served to authenticate the preaching of the Word as This We Believe²⁸ affirms, why would there be any need for these spectacular endowments today? We may begin to answer this question by pointing out that nowhere in the NT is it stated that the signgifts were only intended for such a purpose. In fact, I Corinthians 12-14 places these gifts along side non-miraculous endowments which are given to the church for edification.²⁹ In addition, they may be used in carrying out the task of completely evangelizing the world while at the same time serving to convince each generation of the reality of God. 30 On a more practical level it could also be pointed out that some of the forces which hinder the process of edification may need the assistance of such sign-gifts of miracles and healing to effect their removal. For example, when Fred Dickason released his first book on angels, 31 he felt pretty certain that Christians could not be demonized (at least in the sense of being possessed). But in that same year he encountered his first case of "possession" and, "since that time," he testifies, "I have encountered more than 400 cases of demonization..." Certainly in situations like these the gifts of miracles and healings are not superfluous.

In conclusion, I think Abraham's counsel recorded in Luke 16:29-31 is still very applicable today. But while miracles are not necessarily needed in an evangelistic setting, a brother³³/sister with pertinent gifts may be called upon occasionally to minister accordingly; and the sovereign Lord may choose to intervene in an unusual way ("Already") though His full demonstration of power still lies in the future ("Not Yet"). The Kingdom, then, inaugurated in the First Century,³⁴ may very well be consummated in the Twenty First, with all its gifts and blessing.

NOTES

- 1. R. E. Davies, I Will Pour out My Spirit (Kent:Monarch Publications), 230; also J. I. Packer, Concise Theology (Leicester:IVP, 1993), 226-28.
- 2. Arnold Bittlinger, Gifts and Graces (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 70-71;

Ted Edwards, Let Us Reason Concerning Tongues (Kingston: Hallmark, 1978), 7.

- 3. In this essay, a gift is defined as miraculous if it is dependent on direct divine power/revelation for its operation. For a classification of Spiritual gifts, see Appendix Cf. "God's Spirit possesses individuals and empowers them, through the endowments of gifts. Some of the gifts are sensational, e.g. healing, working of miracles, tongues (1 Cor. 12) while others are ordinary...." (George Mulrain, "Baptism and Belief in Spirits" Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies 7 April 1986: 39).
- 4. The article is essentially a revision of chapter 6 of a thesis submitted to the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology; D. Vincent Palmer, Spiritual Gifts: An Appraisal of Positions of Christian Brethren in Jamaica (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International), 1989.

Charles Ryrie, The Holy Spirit (Chicago:Moody, 1965), 118-19, feels that believers today are indebted to Plymouth Brethren for drawing attention to the presence and power of the Spirit in the Church. According to J. I. Packer, Keep in Step with the Spirit (New Jersey:Revell, 1984), 24, they also proclaimed the universality of gifts and full participation among pew members.

"Luther recovered the doctrine of justification by faith, Baptists believers' baptism, Wesley assurance of salvation, Brethren NT forms of worship and participation, Pentecostals the baptism and gifts of the Spirit [and] Charismatics the sense of being the body of Christ...." (N. C. Wright, "Restoration and the House Church Movement, "Themelios 16 Jan/Feb 1991, 6). "One distinctive feature of Pentecostal worship is the emphasis of expression among members... and patience exercised by worshippers..." (Ashley Smith, Pentecostalism in Jamaica, Mandeville:Eureka Press, 1993, 12-13).

- 5. Gordon D. Fee, God's Empowering Presence (Peabody, MA:Hendrickson, 1994), 384. "Paul is not simply referring to something which the Galatians had witnessed once for all when they believed the gospel;" (F. F. Bruce, Commentary on Galatians, Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1982), 151. This is the force of the participles epichoregon ("supplies") and energon ("works").
- 6. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds; The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 1:240, 409.
- 7. Robert Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 16-17.
- 8. Davies, I Will Pour Out My Spirit. The followers of Montanus (2nd Cent.) "revealed a tendency to exalt the special charisms in Church at the expense of

the regular offices and officers," (L. Berkhof, The History of Christian Doctrine, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975, 54).

- 9. D. A. Carson, Showing the Spirit (Grand Rapids:Baker, 1987), 166.
- 10. Gromacki, The Modern Tongues Movement, 27.
- 11. "Many Dispensationalists and Reformed interpreters hold to this Traditional claim, but there is nothing in either system that forces one to accept it. For example, a dispensationalist, Philip R. Newell, could write,

Many Christians today, though often quite 'Bible students' – practically forget or ignore the immediate presence of the Holy Ghost, with his all necessary gifts saying, 'These belonged to the early days; but we have the written Word now, and do not need the gifts as the Early Church.' And this self-sufficiency is leading to the same form of truth without power, that the Jews had in Christ's day. [His emphasis]

Reformed pastor, James M. Boice, admits that 'healing and miracles could exist but occur infrequently.... We dare not put God in a box on this matter, saying that he cannot give the gifts of healing or miracles today. He can.' "(Palmer, Spiritual Gifts, 84. Cf. D. K. Lowery, "The Theology of Paul's Missionary Epistles," in Roy B. Zuck, ed. A Biblical Theology of The New Testament Chicago: Moody, 1994, 289).

12. This section is a rhetorical digression with a stylistic focus designed to challenge the "loveless" Corinthians, by placarding the beauty of <u>agape</u>; (Ben Witherington 111, Conflict and Community in Corinth (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995, 264-73). The literary genre is not at all agreed upon by NT scholars. Is it really a poetic piece, some kind of exalted prose or a paradigm of classical Greek device? Gordon D. Fee, First Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 626; J. Smith, "the Genre of 1 Corinthians 13 in the Light of Classical rhetoric," Novum Testamentum 33 (July 1991): 193-216.

Whatever it is, there is no denying the apostle's artistry at this point. It appears, then, that much work needs to be done in answering queries like, Is agape (v.4-8, including the elliptical lines) a metonym for Christ? (S. V. McCasland, "Some New Testament Metonyms for God," Journal of Biblical Literature 68 [June 1949]: 99-113); or a Pauline personification? (Aida B. Spencer, Paul's Literary Style [Jackson:Evangelical Theological Society, 1984], 302-3; F. F. Bruce, Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free [Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1977], 120). And how do the particles of 12:31-13:1-13 as well as the tense/aspectual features affect the overall structure and style of the pericope? (Katherine Callow, "The disappearing de in 1 Corinthians," in D. A. Black, ed; Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation [Nashville:Broadman, 1992], 185; Buist Fanning, Verbal Aspect in New

Testament Greek [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990], 208-54).

According to Eugene Nida we employ language in thinking (cognitive function), to give injunctions (imperative function), to make emotive gestures (expressive function), to maintain inter-personal relationships (integrative function) and to effect a change in someone else's status (performative function); ("Paradoxes in Translating, "The Bible Translator 42, April: 8). All of these features (except the last) are more or less present in the pericope. For the integrity of the entire epistle, see H. D. Betz an Margaret M. Mitchell, "First Epistle to the Corinthians" in the The Anchor Bible Dictionary (New York:Doubleday, 1992 1:1139-1147).

- 13. Ryrie's understanding of the middle voice is now seriously questioned by recent grammarians; see for example Stanley Porter, *Idioms of The Greek New Testament* (Sheffield:Sheffield Academic Press, 1992, 92) and H. K. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1991, 125), who says, "Regardless of one's views on the topic of spiritual gifts, we feel this is an incorrect use of the middle.... When one looks at the other eight occurrences of the verb, it is seen that the verb is a middle deponent and not reflexive. The best example is Luke 8:24... 'Jesus rebuked the wind and calmed the water and they ceased....' The wind and water certainly did not cease in and of Themselves."
- 14. W.E. Vine, <u>The Epistle to the Romans</u> (London:Morgan and Scott, 1976, 179). Pace This We Believe, 14.
- 15. Joseph Dillow, Speaking in Tongues (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 108-11, 98; Also Robert Thomas, Understanding Spiritual Gifts (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 110-114, 199-204. "If the full maturity of the church were in view, this would be an acceptable interpretation ... [but] if some lesser form of maturity is meant... this interpretation faces insurmountable difficulties" (Jack Deere, Surprised By the Power of the Spirit, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993, 141); and Fee's "It is perhaps an indictment on Western Christiamity that we should consider to be 'mature' our rather totally cerebral and domesticated but bland brand of faith, with the concominatant absence of the Spirit in terms of his supernatural gifts!" (God's Empowering Presence, 207).

Ted Edwards' comment that in 1 Cor. 13:11 the Apostle is dealing with "childish worship" is off the mark; (In Spirit and Truth: A Guide to Church Worship, Mandeville:n.p. [1991], 20).

16. Wayne Grudem, The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today (Westchester, ILL: Crossway, 1988), 231-33. See also Grudem's Systematic Theology (Leicester: IVP, 1994, 1049-61), in which he responds to his critics.

- 17. For a more balanced treatment of the concept, see L. J. Kreitzer, "Kingdom of God, "in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, ed.* G. F. Hawthorne et al (Leicester:IVP, 1993), 524-26.
- 18. Millard Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids:Baker, 1985), 1164; Also Alister E. McGrath, Christian Theology: An Introduction (Oxford:Blackwell, 1994), 469-70; and G. E. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament, 2d.ed (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1993), 603-4.
- 19. W. Harold Mare and Murray J. Harris, 1 & 2 Corinthians (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1995), 97. Cf. "When perfection comes in heaven;" B. Winter, "1 Corinthians" in The New Bible Commentary (Leicester:IVP, 1994), 1181.
- 20. J. P. Louw and E. Nida, eds. Greek Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 2:658; H. Balz and G. Schneider, eds. Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2:342-44; Harold K. Moulton, The Challenge of the Concordance (London: Bagster, 1977), 274-77.
- 21. John MacArthur, The Charismatics (Chicago:Moody, 1978), 165. MacArthur's second attempt to evaluate the movement (Charismatic Chaos [Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1992]) is reviewed by G. N. Cadogan and D. V. Palmer, The Sunday Gleaner (April 18, 1993, 6d); see also Wayne Grudem's "Does God give Revelation Today?" Charisma (September 1992): 38-44.
- 22. Max Turner, "Spiritual Gifts Then and Now," (Vox Evangelica 1985: 7-64) has also shown that part of the language of verse 12 (prosopon pros prosopon, "face facing face" [Palmer, Spiritual Gifts, 53]) is alliterative rhetoric for a Theophany. This virtually assures us that Paul had in mind the Parousia. Cf. eidon gar theon prosopon pros prosopon, "for I saw God face to face," (Genesis 32:31-32a) and, eidon ton aggelon kuriou prosopon pros prosopon, "I saw the angel of the Lord face to face." (Judges 6: 22b-23); Alfred Rahlfs, ed. Septuaginta (Stutgart:Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979), 52, 431.
 - These two citations are conspicuously absent from the indices of quotations, allusions and verbal parallels in Barbara Aland et al, *The Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart:Deutshe Bibelgesellschaft, 1994, 887-901).
- 23. C. Blomberg, First Corinthians: The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 262-63; Turner, "Spiritual Gifts," 7-64.
- 24. D. A. Carson, Showing the Spirit, 70.
- 25. C. S. Keener, *The Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, ILL:IVP, 1993), 480.

- 26. Thomas R. Edgar, "Cessation of the Sign Gifts, "Bibliotheca Sacra 145 (October-December): 374. William DeArteaga provides a very helpful survey of the history of cessationism (Quenching the Spirit: Examining Centuries of Opposition to the Moving of the Spirit [Lake Mercy, FL: Creation House, 1992]), but his classifying of cessationists as belonging to a modern day Pharasaic class is too strong.
- 27. Buist Fanning, "A Theology of Hebrews," in R. B. Zuck, A Biblical Theology of the NT, 404.
- 28. This We Believe, 14. Virtually all the framers of this document are cessationists, with the exception of Ted Edwards, Let Us Reason Concerning Tongues (Kingston:Hallmark, 1978), and Lance Henry, who appears to be a partial cessationist. According to him, apostles and prophets are "foundation gifts and in this restrictive sense they have ceased. But in a Subordinate sense they are to be found in the Church today; "The Gift and Gifts of the Holy Spirit," paper delivered at the Elders and Workers Conference [Summer 1985], 5. Henry's position seems to be at variance with that of Kevin Dyer's, "Where Have all the Prophets Gone?" (Interest September 1982: 6-7).
- 29. Siegfried Schatzman, A Pauline Theology of Charismata (Peabody, MA:Hendrickson, 1987), 78.
- 30. Palmer, Spiritual Gifts, 8.
- 31. Fred Dickason, Angels: Elect and Evil (Chicago: Moody: 1975).
- 32. Dickason, Demon Possession and the Christian (Weschester III: Crossway, 1987), 188-91. I personally doubt that a true believer can actually be possessed by demons, but whether the needed deliverance is from "obsession", "oppression" or "possession" we should use all of the spiritual resources at our disposal.
- 33. See, for example, the report of the work of Evangelical exorcist, pastor Donald Stewart, in *The Daily Observer* (May 23, 1995), and a response by a Satanist in the same print medium on June 20 [p. 22].
- 34. Whereas the Corinthians believers of the first century were guilty of "an over-realized" eschatology (Anthony Thiselton, "Realised Eschatology at Corinth," New Testament Studies 24 [July 1978]: 510-26) many theologians on the threshold of the 21st appear guilty of an "under-realised" expectation. This a non-Christian physicist like Frank J. Tipler finds quite strange: "It is... surprising to me that theologians have ignored the ultimate future of the cosmos.... I have been interacting with theologians and professors of religious studies for some six years now, and I have gotten the impression that, with a few exceptions, they are quite ignorant of eschatology." (The Physics of Immorality [New York:Doubleday, 1994], xiii).

APPENDIX

CLASSIFICATION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-31; 13: 9-12; 14:26-32; 1Pet. 4:10f)

1. **DEFINITION**

- a. Source >> God's grace (charisma [grace-bestowal]; 1 Cor. 12:4)
- b. Focus >> God's people (diakonia [service]; v. 5)
- c. Effectiveness >> God's power (energema [energy]; v. 6)

Spiritual gifts are God-given abilities to serve the body of Christ effectively.'

11. DESCRIPTION

- a. Gifts of Revelation (power to know)
 - * Discernment revelational ability (RA) to sense the divine/demonic
 - * Knowledge RA to gain vital information
 - * Wisdom RA to give prudent, practical advice
- b. Gifts of Administration (power to lead)
 - * Apostleship pioneering ability in the area of church-planting
 - * Faith exemplary and extra-ordinary reliance on God
 - * Helps special ability (SA) to serve
 - * Pastor SA to care for God's people
 - * Leadership SA to influence people for God's glory
- c. Gifts of Inspiration (power to say)
 - * Evangelism SA to proclaim the gospel
 - * Exhortation SA to counsel
 - * Interpretation SA to translate tongues
 - Music SA to "speak" in psalms, hymns, etc.
 - * Prophecy RA to express the divine will
 - * Teaching SA to impart contents and claims of Scripture
- d. Gifts of Demonstration (power to do)
 - * Celibacy SA to serve in this state
 - * Giving gift of generosity
 - Healings super/natural therapeutic abilities
 - * Intimacy SA to serve family and others
 - * Mercy SA to bring comfort and cheer
 - * Miracles SA to conduct exorcisms, etc.

Adapted from Dennis Bennett's <u>The Holy Spirit and You</u> (Eastbourne, Sussex Kingsway Pub. 1974).