

Sermon Series on the Holy Spirit

BUT WAIT THERE IS MORE

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1. The Word Alone Is Not Enough

When Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to his disciples and in that time they began to understand the truth about him. The Bible says - Luke 24:45-48: "Then Jesus [original: he] opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures [the old prophecies about him]. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ [the one anointed with the Holy Spirit] will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.'"

Great! No seminary or Bible college could have taught these first Christians better. Jesus himself opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, search out the Word of God and grasp the truth of God. They seemed to be in good shape - also spiritually - Luke 24:50: "... they worshiped Jesus ... they stayed continually at the temple, praising God."

The mind full of knowledge and the heart full of praise - what would we do in such a situation? Well - with all half-hearted, uncommitted and unmotivated feelings gone - we would get down to business, do what Jesus said: start preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations including Toowoomba. Full of enthusiasm we most probably would go to the Christian bookshop and load ourselves up with plans and programs: Alpha course, 40 Days of Purpose, friendship evangelism, city connect groups, ... and furthermore - since we are on fire - we would most probably also devise our own home-grown action plans: Living Grace serving Toowoomba and the world.

Yes - what a church, what a bunch of Christians we would be! Is that right? Is a mind full of God-knowledge and a heart full of praise for God, is the perfect grasping of the truth: we are justified by faith through grace, is all of that with much enthusiasm enough to do what Jesus commissioned us to do: preach forgiveness in his name, reach anyone with the saving news of forgiveness?

No, it is not enough - even though we sometimes tend to forget. At least that is what an Anglican priest thinks. He said: "If the Holy Spirit [-and maybe that's the one we may tend to forget-] were taken completely from the church 90 percent of the work of the church would go right on as if nothing had happened." A Chinese House Church leader said: "... We feel the Church in the west is bound by traditions and programs and therefore cannot follow the Holy Spirit's leadings ..." Do we tend to forget the Holy Spirit?

Maybe that is not quite right but Jesus said to the first Christians who had grasped the Word of God so completely and worshiped God with so much joy - Luke 24:49: "... stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." "... stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." Why should they wait? After many hours with Jesus and so much teaching they would have been able to preach a sound sermon. What should slow us down? There are souls to be saved.

Wait for something else. John the Baptist, who came before Jesus, he said about him - Luke 3:16: "... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit ..." And Jesus himself also spelled it out clearly to the first Christians - Acts 1:4-5: "... Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait ... in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Acts 1:8: "... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

In other words Jesus said: "Wait to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Without him and his power you cannot be in mission despite knowing the Word of God and despite knowing him." Have we been baptized with the Holy Spirit? I know. That question alone has the potential to make us angry. Many of us here may never have been asked that question before in their life. Have you been baptized with the Holy Spirit?

One reason why we may not expect to be asked and why this may even make us angry is that we say: "What do you want? I have been baptized with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and in that baptism everything from God has been given to me." However, that needs unpacking. We do indeed receive the Holy Spirit in baptism and as we - under the power of the Holy Spirit - repent, believe and are baptized we are saved and

regenerated to eternal life. 1 Corinthians 12:3: " ... no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" and 1 Peter 3:21: " ... baptism . now saves you ... " Yes - God makes a commitment to us at our water baptism and he grants us the wonderful gift of salvation when we believe in him.¹ That much is right and yet the baptism with the Spirit - as the phrase is understood in the Bible - the baptism with the Spirit may in some cases not be automatically tied to the water baptism.²

The Catholic priest Francis MacNutt does make a good point when he says: "In the early Church, adults who were baptized expected, at the same time, to be baptized in the Spirit; they regarded the two experiences as the same event" (Francis MacNutt: *The Nearly Perfect Crime. How the Church Almost Killed the Ministry of Healing*, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2005, p62). There is also truth in the statement: "For those baptized as infants, the Spirit's indwelling cannot manifest itself in the same way as for adults. In some cases it appears that the Spirit's influence

¹. This statement seeks to clarify that all believers receive the Holy Spirit in baptism for their justification and subsequent sanctification. The Bible states: " ... But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11); " ... God saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5); "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:4).

Therefore the Lutheran Confessions rightly teach: " ... There's no better way of grasping this than from Christ's words quoted above: 'Whoever believes and is baptized will have eternal joy' (Mark 16:16). The simplest way to think of it is this: The power, effect, benefit, fruit, and aim of Baptism is that people have eternal joy ... Eternal joy, as we well know, is nothing else than to be set free from sins, death, and the devil, and to come into Christ's kingdom, and live with him for ever" (Luther's Large Catechism, translated by Friedemann Hebart, Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1983, p170).

" ... For without the Word of God the water is merely water and no baptism. But when connected with the Word of God it is a baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit, as St Paul wrote to Titus (3:5-8), 'He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life' ... " (Luther's Small Catechism).

"Finally, we have to know what Baptism means and why God laid down just this outward sign and ceremony for the sacrament by which we are first taken into the Christian church. This is the action or ceremony: We are dipped into the water which completely covers us, and then we are pulled out again. These two things: to go underwater, and to come out again, point to what Baptism can do. It is simply the killing of old Adam and the rising up of the new person. Both of these actions are to keep going in us as long as we live. So a Christian life is nothing else than a daily Baptism. Baptism once had a beginning, and we always continue it. For we can never stop cleaning out what comes from old Adam ... " Luther's Large Catechism, translated by Friedemann Hebart, Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1983, p181).

Thus, as stated above, all believers receive the Holy Spirit in baptism for their justification and subsequent sanctification. Furthermore, this means that all believers have received the fullness of God for their salvation and therefore become heirs of all the promises of God which find their fulfillment in this life and the life to come.

². D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Joy Unspeakable. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1984, p20-32: " ... It is obvious that no man can be a Christian at all apart from the work of the Holy Spirit ... It is the Holy Spirit who regenerates us, it is he who gives us new life ... I take it that that is therefore abundantly clear - you cannot be a Christian without having the Holy Spirit in you. But - and here is the point - I am asserting at the same time that you can be a believer, that you can have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, and still not be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Now this is the crucial issue. Why do I say this? Let me give you my reasons ... [after dealing with many Scriptures especially the Acts passages Martyn Lloyd Jones writes] So I give you my last bit of evidence, which is in Ephesians 1:13. Paul is here reminding these Gentile Christians of how they became Christians. 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye hear the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.'

'All right,' you say again, 'Authorized Version once more, and again they have made exactly the same mistake: *In whom also after that ye believed*. It should not be that.' 'What should it be?'

Well, as the Revised has it - 'In whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit.' But you see once more that it does not make any difference to the meaning and to the truth. It is only the believer who is baptized with the Holy Spirit or receives the seal of the Spirit. 'In whom, having believed, were sealed.'

It is the same order again. The believing is the first thing, but being baptized is something that does not of necessity happen at the same time. It may - it may not. But it is distinct and separate, so the Apostle does separate them ... " Cf. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Joy Unspeakable. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1984, p146-163.

gradually grows in us as we ourselves grow physically ... " (Francis MacNutt: The Nearly Perfect Crime. How the Church Almost Killed the Ministry of Healing, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2005, p63). Thus, there is good reason to see water baptism and the baptism with the Holy Spirit as being closely linked to each other. They are both meant to come together at the beginning of our Christian life. However, all of that does not guarantee that every time there is a water baptism there is also the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

When the first Christians brought the good news of Jesus into Samaria, people believed and they were baptized with water in the name of Jesus. However only later did they receive a fuller immersion in the Holy Spirit. I read from the Bible - Acts 8:14-17: "When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." Even though they were baptized with water the Spirit had not yet come upon them in fullness and only came when the church leaders placed their hands on them and prayed for them. Thus - even though the two belong together - there is no automatic Spirit baptism with every water baptism (cf. Acts 19:5-6).

Likewise the Bible reports a case where the Spirit baptism actually came before the water baptism - Acts 10:44-48: "While Peter was still speaking ... the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message ... the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out ... Then Peter said: 'Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have ..." Again: In this case the Holy Spirit baptism came before the water baptism. The two did not coincide.

I have laboured the point and maybe we needed to do that because the suggestion that we may not have been baptized with the Spirit - even though we were baptized with water - that may make us angry. We may want to insist - against the Bible - that the two always coincide. End of story. Leave me alone with this.

What else has the potential to make us angry or opposed or defiant or unenthusiastic about any "Holy Spirit baptism stuff"? Well - the list is long. There is the fear of losing control. Aren't we seasoned church people? Don't we know the ropes by now? We love to plan and program, research and study, write and script Bible commentaries and worship liturgies, administer the finances and print bulletins. After a while we seem to get a handle on this - even without much prayer - but doing all of that supposedly in synch with the movement and the power and the guidance of the Spirit that seems a little less grounded - measurable - predictable - and the like. Jesus himself said - John 3:8: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." That's difficult. We may plan and attempt to control a nice church set-up - have a good five-year plan - but then the Holy Spirit blows wherever he pleases and changes everything. Do we want that?

Then we may react to any emphasis on the Holy Spirit because we think that this is spooky. What will the Holy Spirit make me do? Swing from chandeliers? Speak in tongues - words given by the Spirit that I don't even understand? Be a constant over-the-top smiley face - even hugging people? Be a Bible-basher? What will happen to me? How spooky is it and how deep will it go? How much deep-seated stuff does the Holy Spirit want to bring up, cleanse and bring under his lordship? I may not be prepared to face all of the skeletons in my cupboard. What if the Holy Spirit makes an exception with me and I will not get what some of these other people seem to have? Will I be disappointed?

Friends invited an Australian woman from the Plymouth Brethren to come with them to their church. This woman writes: "... I had never darkened the doors of a charismatic church and had never read a book supporting the charismatic viewpoint, but I had a fair idea what this church would be like. I knew in advance I would not like it! I had met some of those charismatic people - very superficial, of course! Always saying, 'Praise God,' and smiling a lot. I had heard that some of them even raised their hands in church! How embarrassing! That was definitely taking the Psalms

too far altogether. There was sure to be a lot of noise and show. What about all the speaking in tongues? How would I possible cope with that? And the emotional outbursts that would be going on ... I was prepared to make allowances for the sub-standard teaching, because they probably weren't well taught in the Scriptures.

I would go. Yes. I would go and have a look ... to see things first hand would undoubtedly support my skeptical viewpoint. On the other hand, the secret realization that my own Christian life was not satisfying was easily suppressed. I had practiced this art over many years ... There was nothing left to give, and still no answer to this hungering void for reality in God ... " (Royree Jensen: Plymouth & Pentecost, Printed by El Shaddai Marketing, Brisbane, Australia, 1988, p100-101).

In this woman's case a solid dose of pride made her reluctant to learn anything new. Was it justified though? She did not even have the answers for her own life. She continues to write: " ... Slowly, I began to observe what was happening ... These people were truly worshipping God. I could see that much ... absolutely no one, was rolling on the floor ... We drove home in silence. My friends very wisely said nothing. I had received a stern and long overdue rebuke just by attending this church. Judgements formed on second-hand opinions deserve a rebuke. Obviously, I needed to at least look at this whole thing ... (Royree Jensen: Plymouth & Pentecost, Printed by El Shaddai Marketing, Brisbane, Australia, 1988, p102-103).

At a later stage this woman talked to someone in the church and in the course of the conversation she was questioned: " Are you asking for the baptism of the Holy Spirit?" She writes: " Oh, no! I don't want anything but God. No falling on the floor; no goose bumps or other funny feelings; and definitely, absolutely definitely, I do not want tongues." The church person said to her: " When you come to God, you do not dictate the terms. He does! If the Holy Spirit chooses to manifest His presence, then there is nothing to fear. He will only exalt Jesus Christ. If you would like, I will pray for you." The woman writes: " I was fairly desperate. Could it possibly be that the 'baptism of the Spirit' was what I needed? Reminding myself that a loving Father does not give his children scorpions instead of fish, or a stone instead of a loaf, I said: 'Yes, please pray. I will take whatever God has for me.' Much to my relief, God had nothing of the scary variety for me that day. I just knew somehow that God had heard my heart's cry and it was in His hands" (Royree Jensen: Plymouth & Pentecost, Printed by El Shaddai Marketing, Brisbane, Australia, 1988, p103).

This continues in an interesting way. She writes: " The following days were terrible. The deep, convicting power of the Holy Spirit moved over me. I recognized that over the years I had become like a Pharisee ... arrogant ... had failed to walk humbly ... I had criticized ... I had assumed superiority ... I was proud and legalistic, and had covered up my unbelief ...

I did not sleep well. Late into the nights I read the Scriptures. Thank God for verses which tell us, 'Repent you therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.' - Acts 3:19 ... Late one night, long after everyone else in the household was asleep, I knelt before God. 'Oh God, forgive me. I have been so wrong. I need the breath of your Spirit to bring life to me and to the Scriptures. I want to worship you. I am so tired of stuffy religion.' I began to worship God and as I did so, the presence of God became very real. In fact, I had an encounter with the Almighty such as I will never forget.

I dared not to open my eyes. God is so holy. God is awesome. God is light. How does one describe God? What a beautiful presence filled that small room! I was overcome. Bathed in the reality of God's love, I began to speak to God in a new language whelming up from deep within. A beautiful release. I talked with God for a long, long time. His presence was so real. So alive. God's presence is cleansing and healing, liberating and beautiful.

The joy of the Lord flooded my soul so much that I began to laugh. Praise! Real, spontaneous, heartfelt praise flowed from a deep well within me ... I stayed awake for the rest of the night ... After one real encounter with God's love, power and holiness, we can never be the same again ... " (Royree Jensen: Plymouth & Pentecost, Printed by El Shaddai Marketing, Brisbane, Australia, 1988, p104-106).

From fear to repentance to the baptism with the Spirit. In case we have missed it, the Holy Spirit worked conviction in this woman and then came in fullness after this prayer: "Oh God, forgive me. I have been so wrong. I need the breath of your Spirit to bring life to me and to the Scriptures. I want to worship you. I am so tired of stuffy religion." Then there was an experience of God's holiness, light, beauty, power, love and joy. As in the Bible the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a wonderful encounter with God that can be experienced and makes us live in a new way with God. For instance, releases us in worship.

Closer to home. What about this experience of a Lutheran church leader. He writes: "... My dear wife ... always seeking a closer walk with Jesus, . joyfully submitted to prayer for the infilling of the Holy Spirit from a girl friend who had returned from America saying, 'There is something more'. Judith received a wonderful release of the Holy Spirit ... overflowing with joy and love. Opposition quickly surfaced. Although the pastor preached against charismatic renewal, some people sought Judith out to ask her what had happened to her. Within months, five or six families received this infilling of the Holy Spirit ...

I was confused, uncertain, and rather negative [-that's how we Lutherans can be sometimes-]. I hoped it would all go away ... One night at a local men's fellowship meeting we discussed a paper critical of the practices and beliefs of charismatics. One point made was that these people roll around on the floor ... I thought, 'I've been married to one of these charismatics for a year and I have never seen that.' ... While the meeting continued I looked up the proof text used to condemn these practices - 1 Corinthians 14:40. It says, 'All things should be done decently and in order.' I noticed the previous verse says, 'Be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.' So I quickly skimmed through 1 Corinthians 12 to 14 [which Judith had repeatedly asked me to do, but in my stubbornness I hadn't].

I realized then that all this talk of gifts of the Spirit was in the Bible. In my ignorance I had spoken against what God had written. How ashamed I felt.

A dear brother in the Lord spent many hours with me, opening the Scriptures, encouraging, exhorting and explaining the work and person of the Holy Spirit. Gradually God gave me a longing for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Inherent resistance began to crumble. Fears disappeared. Eventually I asked God to give me the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Obviously the Holy Spirit was present in my infant baptism and had in fact always been present in me, but I knew that the Holy Spirit had certainly been quenched in my life. Since God filled me with his Spirit or released the Holy Spirit in my life, I have had a deeper relationship with Jesus, a richer appreciation for his Word, a sensitivity to act according to his will, and a fuller, more complete life" (Glen Heidenreich: A Lutheran Perspective, in: Church On Fire, Geoff Waugh editor, Melbourne: JBCE, 1991, p117-118).

This testimony and the previous one may encourage all of us to let go of any opposition to the Holy Spirit. God is good and his gift of the Holy Spirit is also good. Jesus even said - John 16:7: "I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage [-it is better for you-] that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor [- the Holy Spirit -] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

Are we becoming more open to this? We may be ready to hear more but at this point of time we could be excused for being still a little unclear as to what precisely this baptism with the Holy Spirit actually is. We have heard two testimonies but they were not exactly the same. Then the Bible nowhere gives a definition of what happens.³ There are only descriptions of experiences. Acts 2:2-4: "Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and

³ Francis MacNutt: The Nearly Perfect Crime. How the Church Almost Killed the Ministry of Healing, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2005, p63: "My friend the late Reverend Tommy Tyson defined the baptism with the Spirit as an 'event in our lives through which we become more continually aware of the presence, the person and the power of the risen Christ.' These words and phrases are packed with meaning. *More continually aware* indicates that the person before the Spirit baptism may have already been aware of Christ's presence. Others seem to receive the power of the Spirit for the first time. The baptism brings a great increase in this awareness ... "

began to speak in other tongues ... " Acts 10:44-46: " ... the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the message ... heard them speaking in tongues and praising God ... " Acts 13:52: "And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Spirit." Acts 19:6: "When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied."

Thus, among other occurrences there was worship and joy and prophetic words. Jesus himself said that with the Holy Spirit would come power from God (Luke 4:49; Acts 1:8) which could be expressed in all sorts of ways - for instance, boldness in the face of persecution - Acts 4:31: " ... and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." Then there is the symbolism of a mighty wind, tongues of fire, ... In one instance Jesus describes the Spirit as an internal "spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14).

Is this getting any easier? One consolation may be that when the baptism with the Holy Spirit comes we will usually know that it happened. People experience this.⁴ The word "baptism" does not mean to be dipped into something. It means immersion so that when this immersion with the Holy Spirit comes - with power and the presence of God - we are completely covered by him, submerged in him, drenched by him, touching all of us. That's an experience.

A Catholic priest writes: " ... I have prayed for hundreds - maybe thousands - of people to receive it ... the baptism with the Spirit is usually accompanied by external signs ... " For instance, if I may quote another evangelist at this point. He says: "Physical heat sometimes accompanies the filling of the Spirit and people experience it in their hands or some other parts of their bodies. One person described a feeling of glowing all over ... " (Nicky Gumbel: Questions Of Life, Colorado Springs/Paris: Cook Communications Ministries, 1993, p152). This need not happen but it can.

Now the Catholic priest continues: "Emotionally, it usually leads to an overflow of great joy. Spiritually, some of the Spirit [original: charismatic] gifts - especially praying in tongues - usually accompany it ... different parts of our being are touched by the Spirit: Our minds are enlightened. People who once felt that reading Scripture was a chore now find delight in reading it ... We often receive guidance about what to do or not to do ... We will notice a change within our spirit: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit will come and live within us, and we will know and love them in a deeper way. Jesus will love us and show Himself to us (see John 14:21). We shall be protected from the evil one (see John 17:15). Jesus' love, joy and peace shall be with us (see John 14:27; 15:9,11) ... "

Maybe we have listened now to these descriptions and compare them to ourselves. If we have already been baptized with the Spirit, could it be that it was different for us? Yes, that's possible and likely. The Catholic priest shares this important insight: " ... There is no one list of things that always happens to every person. It is as if God tailors the outpouring of the Spirit to each person individually" (Francis MacNutt: The Nearly Perfect Crime. How the Church Almost Killed the Ministry of Healing, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2005, p62-63). God is not into anonymous mass productions but will pour out his Spirit on each one of us individually with tailored care and love. Receive it.

In closing I want to return to the beginning. When Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to his disciples and in that time they began to understand the truth about him. The Bible says - Luke 24:45-48: "Then Jesus [original: he] opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures [about him] ... "

Jesus offered good solid teaching to the disciples after his resurrection from the dead. However, we have now gained an understanding that even with Jesus himself teaching the disciples everything about him, this was not enough to do the job of reaching others and

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Joy Unspeakable. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1984, p49-64,140-141. P52-53: " ... the Holy Spirit is always something clear and unmistakable, something which can be recognized by the person to whom it happens ... I want to put the biblical evidence before you because I think the Bible makes it perfectly clear, it makes it quite beyond any doubt, that this is something experimental, which involves a mystical experience, to use such a term. The whole emphasis, in the instances that we are given in the Scriptures, and from what we can deduce from the teaching about the need for restraint and control in the church at Corinth, all this indicates that far from being something quiet and unsensational, it tends to be obvious and patent, essentially experimental ... "

bringing others to repentance. More was needed. Jesus himself said - Luke 24:49: " ... stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." Acts 1:4-5: " ... wait ... in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Acts 1:8: " . you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." There was the need for the Holy Spirit before venturing out.

After we have now in this message talked so much about the Holy Spirit and the baptism with the Holy Spirit let's remind us not to minimize in any way the importance of what Jesus did first. He taught the disciples the Word of God about himself. He immersed them in the message of salvation - that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in Jesus' name. Without that Word we have nothing that reveals the truth about Jesus and we have nothing that the Spirit can empower. We hold the Word and the Spirit together - not playing one against the other and not neglecting the one in favour of the other. We are people of the Word and the Spirit.

And - this is the final point for today - all of this is for mission work. God draws us into what he is doing himself. Jesus said - Acts 1:8: " . you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you ... and [then] you will be my witnesses ... " With the Holy Spirit comes power for mission and - to a significant extent - only when we are in mission will we actually use and experience this power because that's the sphere where it operates. So be prepared. Seek the baptism with the Holy Spirit by understanding the truth about Jesus for mission. Amen.

2. This Is For Everyone

When Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to his disciples and in that time they began to understand the truth about him. The Bible says - Luke 24:45-48: "Then Jesus [original: he] opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures ... This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." The risen Jesus explained his person to the disciples and with these words established himself as the content of the message of salvation. Repentance and forgiveness would be granted in his name.

Later Jesus said to the disciples who were to be his witnesses - Acts 1:4-5: " ... Do not [yet] leave Jerusalem, but wait ... in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Acts 1:8: " . you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and [then] you will be my witnesses ... " Later Jesus introduced the Holy Spirit and the disciples' baptism with the Holy Spirit. Later he emphasized that without the Spirit's power the disciples would not be effective in mission work - but by then the key focus was set: the message of salvation is about him, Jesus Christ, and repentance and forgiveness will be preached in his name. Making a similar point Jesus said - John 16:12-15: " ... The Spirit will not speak on his own ... He will bring glory to me ... "

Jesus is and remains the key focus. This may be important to remember and retain so that we will not get side-tracked as we now explore and get excited about the Holy Spirit. How may the Holy Spirit come upon us? Power for mission, the person of the Holy Spirit, ... The Bible says - Acts 3:33: "Exalted to the right hand of God, Jesus [original: he] has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear." What can Jesus pour out on us and how can we also see and hear?

Before we find answers to these questions we need to make two preliminary remarks. One: There is no one particular method which we could follow and then take possession of the Holy Spirit. There is no manual. There is no control of God. He remains sovereign and creative. For instance, only in Acts 2 is there a report of a "sound like the blowing of a violent wind" (v2) and what "seemed to be tongues of fire" (v3). In Acts 8:16-17 the Holy Spirit comes after water baptism and with the laying on of hands but in Acts 10:44-48 the Holy Spirit comes before water baptism and without the laying on of hands. It simply happened as they listened to the preaching of Jesus. At one time they started speaking in tongues and praising God (Acts 10:46) and at another time they spoke in tongues and prophesied (Acts 18:6). So there is no manual and today's sermon can only uncover some spiritual principles which make us ready to receive in the way that God has intended for us.

The second preliminary remark aims to clarify that we do not only receive the Holy Spirit once and then we are done with receiving him. There is an ongoing need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and therefore there is an ongoing need to apply the spiritual principles - which will be expounded in the course of this sermon. I say it again: The ground which we will cover today applies to us all - the Christian that may not have yet received the baptism with the Holy Spirit and also the Christian who has already experienced that fuller immersion in the Spirit.

Let us unpack this further. After his resurrection Jesus taught the disciples everything about himself. Thus they became people of faith. Then the Bible says - Luke 24:52: " ... they worshiped Jesus ... and . stayed continually at the temple, praising God." Now - did they at that time already have the Holy Spirit? On the one hand the Bible clearly records that they were not yet baptized with the Holy Spirit - had not yet received this fuller immersion in the Spirit. That would only come later on the day of Pentecost but on the other hand there are Bible passages which flesh out that surely even at that time the Holy Spirit was at work in the disciples. The disciples already had faith and they already worshiped Jesus which according to 1 Corinthians 12:3 no one can do without the Holy Spirit. I quote: " ... no one can say: 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."

Let's get this clear. Like the disciples after the resurrection every believer, everyone who confesses Jesus as Lord, already has a measure of the Holy Spirit's power. Without him we could not have faith. However, God intends to give us more - the fullness of the Spirit. On the day of Pentecost the first disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit and this baptism with the Holy Spirit is also promised to every one of us - every Christian without exception.⁵

However - and we need to understand this - once we receive this baptism with the Spirit we do enter into a more empowered relationship with God - but - we do not always remain on the same level of being filled by him. The Holy Spirit may fall on us and manifest his presence in an awesome way - maybe at a worship service or when someone prays for us or when we step out to reach others in faith - but however great the mountain peak experience may be - however great the infilling with the Holy Spirit - we do not stay there.⁶

⁵. Sometimes 1 Corinthians 12:13 is used to argue that every Christian has automatically received the baptism with the Holy Spirit: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body ... " However, Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes a different case: " ... Wuest says: *Baptize means 'to place into' or to 'introduce into' ... The word Spirit is in the instrumental case in the Greek. Personal agency is expressed occasionally by the instrumental case. At such times the verb is always in the passive or middle voice. The Greek construction here follows this rule of Greek grammar. The personal agent in this case who does the baptizing is the Holy Spirit. He places or introduces the believing sinner into the body of which the Lord Jesus is the living Head. We could translate therefore 'by means of the personal agency of one Spirit we all were placed in one body'.*

It is not the baptism with the Spirit, or of the Spirit, in the sense that the Holy Spirit is the element that is applied to us; it is the baptism by the Spirit. This baptism does not bring the Spirit to us in the sense that God places the Spirit upon us or in us; rather this baptism brings the believer into vital union with Jesus Christ. This means that the baptism by the Spirit is not for power, for in this baptism there is nothing applied or given to the believer.

Then he goes back and compares and contrasts this statement with the statement you have in Luke 3:16 where John the Baptist said to the company: 'But to one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am nor worthy to unloose; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.' And it is the same little word *en* here. Dr Wuest takes that statement and John 1:31, with which we are dealing, and Acts 1:5, and Acts 11:16 and so on and states:

This kind of verb is not found in the passages quoted from Matthew to Acts but is found in 1 Corinthians 12:13. Therefore our rendering 'baptized by means of the Spirit' is correct for the Corinthian passage but not correct for those others commented upon. The phrase 'with the Spirit' therefore defines what baptism is referred to, and the words 'by the means of the Spirit' speak of the fact that the Holy Spirit is the Divine Agent who himself baptizes, the purpose of which baptism is to place the believing sinner into vital union with Jesus Christ and thus make him a member of the body of which Christ is the living Head.

... That to me is most important ... His whole argument comes to this - that here in 1 Corinthians 12:13 there is something quite different from all the other mentionings of baptism with the Holy Spirit. This is not referring to the baptism *with* the Spirit, and he gives his grammatical reasons for saying that.

But there are other reasons, quite apart from grammar, which make this perfectly plain and clear. In every reference to baptism with the Spirit, the Baptizer is the Lord Jesus Christ, and what he does when he baptizes with the Spirit is what we have seen. It is a baptism to give power, to create witnesses, to enable us to testify ... But here the apostle is dealing with something entirely different ... by one Spirit we have all been baptized into one body of Christ ... It is no part of his concern here to deal with the doctrine of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. The illustration is simply to show that all Christians, whether they were Jews or Gentiles, whatsoever they were, are now 'one in Christ Jesus', they are all different members of this one body of which he is the Head. And that, he says, is the action and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now you see the contrast; it is the Lord himself who baptizes us 'with' the Spirit, but it is nowhere taught in the Scripture that the Lord engrafts us into his own body. No, that is the work of the Spirit ... " (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Joy Unspeakable. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1984, p175-178).

⁶. Ephesians 5:18: " ... be filled with the Spirit" does not seem to refer to our need for the baptism of the Spirit and constant refillings but rather refers to the process of sanctification. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Joy Unspeakable. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1984, p138-139: " ... the work of the Spirit in sanctification is always presented in the New Testament in terms of exhortation. Now take that statement again in Ephesians 5:18 - 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess (or riot); but go on being filled with the Spirit.' Now that is an exhortation. The apostle does not urge them there to seek an experience which would put them right; he is commanding them, and telling them what to do; it is an appeal to them to go on yielding themselves to the Spirit that is in them.

He states it negatively also. He tells them not to 'grieve the Spirit'. 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.' Now this again is a command. It is possible for us to 'grieve' the Spirit. Elsewhere, in 1 Thessalonians 5, he says, 'Quench not the Spirit'. Now these are all of them exhortations; they are all addressing us, telling *us* what to do and what not to do. That is the characteristic way in which the New Testament always presents the doctrine of sanctification

The first disciples received the baptism with the Holy Spirit with a "sound like the blowing of a violent wind" and what "seemed to be tongues of fire" (Acts 2:2-3). There was preaching with power and about three thousand converts. However, only a few days later there was a fresh need of encouragement and a fresh need to receive the Holy Spirit with all of his power. In the face of persecution the disheartened disciples gathered to pray together and at the end of the prayer the Bible records - Acts 4:31: "... The place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God with boldness." Again! The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit again which means that after the initial baptism with the Holy Spirit we need refillings because we do not always stay on the same level of Spirit power.⁷ Our relationship with the Holy Spirit is dynamic and not static whereby God remains sovereign and outside of our control.

One more insight into this. Even though we need constant refillings of the Holy Spirit we can actually grow in the Spirit's power. On the one hand the Bible warns us not to - Ephesians 4:30: "... grieve the Holy Spirit .." and not to - 1 Thessalonians 5:19: "... put out the Spirit's fire." On the other hand the Bible encourages us - Galatians 5:25: "... [to] keep in step with the Spirit," and the more we learn to do that - keep in step with the Spirit in faith and obedience - the more we grow in maturity, the more he can use us to achieve even greater things in Jesus' name.

Spirit power also increases in another way. When we are first baptized with the Holy Spirit we can do whatever the Spirit prompts us to do - maybe heal someone or speak a convicting word of truth or even prophecy - but there also seems to be another level of Spirit power where some of these spiritual manifestations become entrusted to us as spiritual gifts on a more permanent basis. The Bible seems to want us have more - 1 Corinthians 12:31: "Eagerly desire the greater gifts" 1 Corinthians 14:1: "... desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy." Then 2 Timothy 1:6: "... fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands."

I hope that this was not too confusing. I summarize: Every Christian who confesses Jesus as Lord has a measure of the Spirit's power in him but then everyone can also experience the baptism with the Holy Spirit where there is a fuller release and infilling of the Holy Spirit in the believer. After this initial baptism with the Spirit and infilling there need to be refillings because the same level of the Spirit's power and manifest presence does not remain with us constantly. Furthermore, we can actually grow in the Spirit's power.⁸

And just a reminder: The point of this preliminary remark is that we do not only receive the Holy Spirit once and then we are done with receiving him. There is an ongoing need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and therefore there is an ongoing need to apply the spiritual principles - which will be expounded in the course of this sermon.

Finally - how may the Holy Spirit come upon us? What are some spiritual principles which make us ready to receive the Holy Spirit in the way that God has intended for us? Number one: Repent and completely turn away from everything that you know is wrong in your life. Jesus said to his disciples - Luke 24:45-48: "... repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in my [original: his] name ..." The disciples took this up and in the first subsequent

... Whereas the whole point about the baptism of the Spirit, as we have seen, is that it is something that happens to us. You cannot do anything about being baptized with the Spirit except to ask for it. You cannot do anything to produce it ... [The baptism with the Holy Spirit] is something that is given; a tremendous experience. It is something that can be isolated, whereas sanctification is a continuing and a continuous process. So, for these reasons I am arguing that it is wrong to identify them, and that indeed we must teach and say that there is no direct connection between them ... "

⁷ Even Jesus himself did not always enjoy the same powerful presence of the Spirit while he was here on earth in human form - Luke 5:17: "One day as he was teaching ... [people] were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick." This verse seems to intimate that the power of the Lord was in that situation present for Jesus to heal the sick but in other situations that same power may not always have been available to him.

⁸ Therefore our worship can also not be static but needs to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's movements and discern when and whether the infilling with the Spirit occurs. We need to seek the presence of the Spirit so that we can minister to each other and the world in his power.

sermon, the apostle Peter said to the crowd - Acts 2:38: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." The number one command is to repent in order to receive. As God draws you to himself and invites you to belong to him, turn away from sin. [Notice also the importance of water baptism in this verse.] Then receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is a serious point. The Bible says - Ephesians 4:30-31: " . do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God ... Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." We cannot be half-hearted Christians, hang on to unforgiveness and anger, worship other priorities ... and at the same time expect to enjoy the presence of the Spirit.

Maybe sometimes we think that this is possible. For instance, we lapse into a time when we don't worship - either on Sundays or in daily devotions. We drift away and then when we come back we are a little surprised that everything is not as it was before. It feels like hard work to get into the songs and their lyrics and prayer. That's not surprising. We have filled our lives with things that offend God's holiness - sinful thoughts, words, TV programs, and the like. But God is a jealous God and - as surprising as it may be that he cares so much about us - he wants all of us completely in total surrender and abandonment to his lordship. He does not counsel any compromises but says - with love: "Repent. Turn away from sin and totally belong to me. Then you will receive the gift of the Spirit."⁹

⁹ Cf. John 3:30: "He must increase, but I must decrease." An Anglican scholar writes: "For much of the nineteenth century in England, the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, revivals [special outpourings of the Holy Spirit] were experienced most commonly in the Methodist denomination" (Stuart Piggin: Firestorm Of The Lord, Glasgow 2000, p64). Why the Methodist denomination? Could it be that their emphasis on holiness - which by the way attracted plenty of Lutheran criticism of work-righteousness - could it be that their emphasis on holiness - a radical commitment to abstain from sin - had something to do with God coming in?

The same Anglican scholar writes: " ... revivals ... resulted from an emphasis on believing prayer and fasting not found in our churches today. Church membership was then prized as a privilege and discipline was exercised in the maintenance of its purity ... Sin was taken seriously ... The Gospel preacher sought to bring his hearers under the conviction of sin. Then he let the Holy Spirit deal with the sinner. He did not seek to terminate quickly this period of conviction, for that would short-circuit the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit ... " Food for thought. The cleansing work of the Holy Spirit brings us under the conviction of sin. We allow time to let this happen in a thorough way. Then we receive forgiveness in order to lead a holy life from now on.

Listen to some of the old revival accounts which sound so strange to our modern ears. This one is from a Sydney Methodist church in 1860: "To a congregation which packed the building I preached from 'Quench not the Spirit'. What a time we had. The whole assembly was mightily moved, the power was overwhelming; many fell to the floor in agony, and there was a loud cry for mercy. The police came rushing in to see what the matter was; but there was nothing for them to do. It was impossible to tell how many penitents came forward; there must have been over two hundred. The large schoolroom was completely filled with anxious inquirers" (John Watsford quoted in Stuart Piggin: Firestorm Of The Lord, Glasgow 2000, p65.)

Have you ever seen in any worship service that people were in agony on the floor crying out for mercy? Have you ever witnessed that people became anxious inquirers?

The next account is from Parramatta NSW in 1840: " ... We could hear sighs and suppressed sobs all around us. The old minister ... who had conducted the meeting, was concluding with the benediction, 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God' - here he stopped and sobbed aloud. When he could speak he called out, 'Brother Watsford, pray'. I prayed, and then my two friends prayed, and oh! The power of God that came upon the people, who were overwhelmed by it in every part of the room! And what a cry for mercy! It was heard by the passers-by in the street, some of whom came running in to see what was the matter, and were smitten down at the door in great distress ... How many were saved I cannot tell ... " (Quoted in Stuart Piggin: Firestorm Of The Lord, Glasgow 2000, p166).

Cf. Acts 5:32: "We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." For reflections on this verse see D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Joy Unspeakable. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1984, p203-207. Among other comments D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says: " ... If you merely want gifts from God and are only interested in gifts, you will ask him for them and then you will probably forget all about it, and then ask him again. But if you really want to know him and want to know his love, and want to love him, then you concentrate your relationship to him and that will lead to your obedience ... Love is a great controlling passion and it always expresses itself in terms of obedience ... the positive side of obedience: it is that you put yourself, as you are, and all your affairs and concerns and interests into God's hands ... You show the depth of your desire by the extent of your obedience."

Cf. Acts 10:1-4.

The second spiritual principle which prepares us for receiving the Spirit is to put our faith in the Word of God. The disciples heard Jesus promise them the baptism with the Holy Spirit and they believed him. They stayed in Jerusalem - waited many days - until the Word of God came true and they received what was promised.

That is where we may have the most trouble. In my upbringing I was not taught much about the Holy Spirit and even at the church seminary the Holy Spirit was somewhat the neglected member of the Trinity. How was I to have faith in something that I had never heard?

In the Bible there were Christians that experienced the same predicament. They were asked - Acts 19:2: " ... Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered: "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." They lacked faith because they did not know and therefore they did not receive. Is that even our present condition? Then for them that lack of knowledge was remedied and faith implanted. The apostle Paul placed his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came on them.

God responds to faith. He does not demand that we earn the gift of the Spirit by being hot-shot disciples who in the end deserve the Spirit for their own efforts. No. The Holy Spirit is a gift and is given in response to faith. We do everything by faith (Hebrews 11). Jesus said - Matthew 17:20: " ... if you have faith as small as a mustard seed ... Nothing will be impossible for you."¹⁰

Unbelief, on the other hand, - and this is putting it negatively - unbelief blocks the power of God. For instance, in his own hometown Jesus could not do any miracles because they had no faith - Mark 6:5-6: "He could not do any miracles... and he was amazed at their lack of faith." Martin Luther was convinced that unbelief is the chief sin because it makes God out to be a liar whose promises cannot be trusted. He writes: "Where this faith is missing, there can be no proper prayer ... they get nothing" (Martin Luther: Large Catechism, Explanation of the Lord's Prayer's last petition).

God responds to the faith which trusts that we will receive the Holy Spirit in all of his fullness. May I also add here that God loves to respond to passionate faith which engages the heart, feelings and real desire. He loves it when we pour our whole being into our relationship with him and his promises. He rebuked the church in Ephesus with these words - Revelations 2:4: " . I hold this against you. You have forsaken your first love." Likewise the church in Laodicea gets to hear - Revelations 3:15: "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I

¹⁰ John Arnott: The Father's Blessing, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p87-90: "Carol and I are a study in opposites when it comes to receiving the things of God. As a general rule, when someone prays for me I do not feel anything ... I would be thrilled for her, yet at the same time I would be aware of my own unfulfilled desire for refreshing. I have previously felt God's presence powerfully at my conversion and my Spirit baptism and on one or two other occasions, but until this renewal, I had not felt His overwhelming nearness for many years ... I felt he honestly tried to impart the Holy Spirit to me, but I felt nothing. And he went on. When I opened my eyes, I saw that one other man and I were still standing. That's when a person might think, 'Well, I am just not given to this sort of thing.' All of this caused me to relearn an old lesson: We receive everything from God by faith. When we pray to receive the Spirit, He will often be very gentle, almost so that one may wonder, 'Am I imagining this, or is this really You, Lord?' That is when the step of faith is required. At this point people can resist or submit. This is the time to get out of the boat and walk on the water in childlike trust.

I had to start receiving that way - by faith instead of by feelings ... So after I started exercising my faith, I got to the point where experiencing the manifestations and feelings was not important to me, which is a good place to be. Everybody could fall except me, and I really did not mind. I was receiving the things of God, whether I felt I was or not.

If you are one of those who are frustrated because you don't seem to be feeling much of anything, you must accept this fact. When you ask, you receive the Spirit of God whether you feel anything or not because the things of God are received by faith ... I love to tell the story about Jim Robb ... Jim stayed three or four days and nothing much happened ... Twenty-three days later he went home discouraged because his perception was that he did not receive an anointing or refreshing from God. He had felt or manifested nothing.

Sunday and Jim said to himself, 'I will pray for the people anyway, as I always used to do.' But when he went into ministry time at church, the Holy Spirit hit like a tidal wave. It was incredible. People were strewn all over the floor - some laughing, some crying. It was so wonderful and totally unexpected by him ... God had filled his life. It became obvious when he ministered in his church. To fall, shake a bit or to laugh was not the issue. He had really received by faith ... "

wish you were either one or the other! [I don't like any of your lukewarmness.] ... " God wants us to be hot with passion exercising a fervent faith which hungers and thirsts for all of him - including the fullness of the Spirit.¹¹ You and I - have that kind of faith and believe that God continues to pour out his Spirit into our lives.

One more insight into faith and the Spirit. God has a habit of revealing his will to us - for instance, making all of us sense to increase our mission budget - and then - before we have any solid assurances, before we have the money in the bank - he asks us to step out in faith, adopt the budget, start spending the money - not knowing whether this will work - trusting him. God seems to love responding to that kind of obedient faith action. He seems to love moving in with the power of the Spirit - just in time before we go under.

So it was when Jesus asked the disciples to feed the multitudes with five loaves of bread and two fish - which cannot be done. Only as the disciples stepped out in faith and began the process of handing out the food by faith did the food multiply - just in time (Luke 9:12-17). The same holds true for times of persecution -Matthew 10:19-20: "But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit ... through you [- just in time]." Importantly - for us this means that we do not always wait for the infilling of the Spirit before we attempt to do anything. We do move as soon as we sense that God set us a task.

The third spiritual principle which prepares us for receiving the Spirit is to pray for the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave us great encouragement when he said - Luke 11:9-13: "... Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened ... If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." Everyone who asks will receive the Holy Spirit.

Jesus himself was praying when he received his baptism with the Spirit [which was to launch him into his saving work] - Luke 3:21-22: "... And as Jesus was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove ..." Likewise the disciples were presumably praying together when the Holy Spirit came on them in fullness - Acts 2:1-4: "... they were all together in one place. Suddenly ... all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit ..."

Have we ever prayed for the Holy Spirit to fill us and fill us again? Have we ever prayed for any spiritual gifts? Do we have the faith for that kind of prayer? You and I - Jesus encourages us to pray: "Lord, pour out the Holy Spirit on me. Let the Holy Spirit fall on me." If you have never prayed like this before, maybe do so for the first time now in this worship service. "Jesus, I invite you to fill me with the Holy Spirit."

Again, we can do this with great passion and add fasting to our prayers. Why not strip away all distractions and sacrifice to God all of our wrong priorities and from that place lift up prayers with passion and abandonment? He will listen. The promise is: Everyone who asks will receive.

There is more. When the first disciples received the baptism with the Holy Spirit, they were praying in unity. Especially united prayer avails much. Jesus said - Matthew 18:19: "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." The Holy Spirit is surely attracted by Christian unity because the Holy Spirit does not just become our individual possession but is God's gift to the church - the community of Christians. The Bible says - 1 Corinthians 3:16: "Don't you know that you [together] are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you [together as one community]?" The corporate aspect of the Holy Spirit is key to understanding his movements. When he comes and then manifests himself in us, he does so in order that we serve each other - 1 Corinthians 12:7: "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." I won't even mention the

¹¹. Jack Deere: Surprised By The Power Of The Spirit, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1993, p179-207.

countless passages where disunity, jealousies and unforgiveness grieve and quench the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:17; Ephesians 3:25-32; Matthew 6:21-26, 9-15; 7:1-6).

United prayer avails much because the Holy Spirit wants to take residence not only in individuals but the community of Christians for mutual service and united mission.¹² The fourth spiritual principle of receiving the Holy Spirit has to do with impartation. By this we mean that the Holy Spirit can be passed on from one person to another - usually by the laying on of hands. Again, this is not how it always has to happen but seems to have been the usual practice.¹³ Acts 8:17-18: "Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit ... the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands ..." Acts 19:6: "When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them ..." Also 2 Timothy 1:6: "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands."¹⁴ Why does God want to work that way? I don't know - but maybe it is because he wants us to be his hands and serve each other as one people who together belong to God. May we be encouraged to lay hands on each other and pray for each other.

The fifth and - for today - last spiritual principle which prepares us for receiving the Holy Spirit is simply to wait. Jesus told the first disciples - Luke 24:49: "... stay in the city ..." Acts 1:4-5: "... wait ... you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

A pastor writes: "My search for the Spirit had nothing to do with exposure to the pentecostal or charismatic movements. I had never heard of them. Nor did it have anything to do with wanting some psychological fulfillment. I was not looking for the Spirit to heal me or to fill me with joy.

No one's experience of the Holy Spirit will be quite the same as another person's. Not only does the Spirit work in different ways, but we all begin our search for a deeper life in the Spirit from different perspectives and with different hopes.

This account is no exception ... My search in the mid-1960s came directly from working with the Aboriginal community and then embarking on a course of theological education to prepare for further ministry. I had the sinking feeling that I and the church were quite powerless. This formed a sharp contrast to what I read in the book of Acts.

The New Testament, and especially the Acts of the Apostles, is so obviously full of the exploits of the Holy Spirit. Every page breathes with this divine dynamic. The early Christians were undoubtedly caught up in the slipstream of the Spirit. They had power to cast out demons. They witnessed boldly, loved dynamically, and gave liberally. They turned the world the right way up for Jesus their Lord.

I could not understand why the church of which I was a part lacked this dynamic. The suggested theological explanation that the Holy Spirit had stopped working in this dramatic way at the close of the apostolic era rang untrue, had no biblical basis and was contradicted by history.

The Holy Spirit literally seemed to be the churches' neglected possession. He was more of a stranger than an empowering friend. My search was not a solo effort. Together with my wife, Rita, and fellow theological students, we turned to prayer. The cry of our hearts was that God

¹² Maybe at this point I can also be practical and talk about our worship services. When we come to church the presence of the Spirit is there because we have faith but at the same there could often be more of him and as we worship we long to receive him in greater fullness or - to use different language - to have him further released among us. That is why the traditional liturgy begins the service with a confession of sin to remove anything from us that would distance us from God - and that still needs to happen from the heart at every worship service. Then we find that often the Holy Spirit is - forgive the imprecise language - the Holy Spirit is often ushered in as we together in unity pray to God in our singing.

And maybe that is not so surprising. Jesus said - John 16:14: "The Holy Spirit will bring glory to me ... " Thus, the Holy Spirit finds it easy to join our praises of Jesus and as the Bible says - Psalm 22:3: God "... inhabits the praises of Israel." In any case we can grow in our worship and learn that the relationship with the Holy Spirit is a dynamic one. We want to be open to what is happening. Are we still grieving him? Do we need to wait on him a little longer? We tailor our worship - prayer, singing, preaching, ... - to be sensitive to what is happening spiritually.

¹³ In Acts 10 (verse 44) the Holy Spirit came on all who heard Jesus preached to them.

¹⁴ See also Acts 3:1-13; Acts 5:12-16 (Peter's shadow became a point or instrument of impartation); Acts 19:11-12 (handkerchiefs and Paul's hands imparted healing to many).

would revitalize his body, the church, and use us as his members. We had little idea what this meant and had no idea of the costly consequences.

With 'seek and you shall find' as a divine working principle, we not only prayed but avidly read . books ... These helped us to open our understanding. The key to this New Testament dynamic and power ... was the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This experience of the Spirit turned a cowardly bunch of disciples into bold witnesses to the resurrection of Christ.

My prayer and reading were not immediately rewarded. Nearly two years later a 'chance' meeting with a missionary brought my immediate quest to fulfillment. A simple prayer with the laying on of hands brought about a wonderful encounter with the Spirit.

I vividly remember this experience. It was as if gentle waves of electricity penetrated every facet of my being. I was overwhelmed by the nearness of God and the all encompassing love of Christ. Praise spontaneously burst out and I found myself expressing to God my deepest feelings and thoughts in an unknown language. This initial experience lasted many hours through the night until I lapsed into a quiet sleep ... " (Charles Ringma: The Disquieting Presence Of The Spirit, in: Church On Fire, Editor: Geoff Waugh, Melbourne: JBCE, 1991, p41-41).

Two years! Two years of searching, reading, praying, exercising faith, ... Two years of desire and nothing happened. Then a simple prayer with the laying on of hands was answered with the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Why the wait? One pastor believed in the spiritual gift of healing, started praying for healing in every worship service but nothing happened - for ten months, a wait long enough to reduce worship attendance by more than half (John Wimber). Why the wait? A young pastor received visions of having an international ministry, but one year later found himself selling vacuum cleaners, then as a church minister preached renewal for 25 years which never fully came to the church he served and only now in his seventies the wait is over. He now does have an international ministry which gives evidence of great spiritual power (RT Kendall)..¹⁵ Why the wait?

There are also people in our midst who search the Scriptures, exercise faith, repent and pray for more of the Holy Spirit but have not yet received. Why the wait? While some seem to receive easily - for instance, there are those that do not even want to speak in tongues and yet they receive the gift literally in their sleep - others persevere and persevere and still the infilling of the Holy Spirit has not quite happened. Why the wait?

Some suggest that the time of waiting breaks any gung-ho know-it-all spiritual pride, builds character (cf. Romans 5:3-5) and - interestingly enough - even Jesus taught the disciples before the baptism with the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes, he can be a big distraction to any clear thinking. There may be signs and wonders, healings, prophetic words, being overcome by the Spirit, strong emotions such as holy joy and love, and the like. Just imagine that you get caught up in this. Can this not mess with our heads? Thus, the time of waiting can actually be a good preparation time of getting insights into the Word of God and building a good foundation for dealing with the Spirit's power when it comes.

Important is that we won't get despondent or start thinking that receiving the gift is up to our own efforts. Important is that we don't run ourselves down as the most undeserving Christians who rightfully miss out on the gifts of God or that we begin to doubt the goodness of God and his love for us. No! Everyone who asks will receive. Sometimes we are just asked to wait - like the first disciples.

There is one practical encouragement flowing out of this. Keep praying about the Spirit and keep receiving prayer for the infilling of the Spirit. In church come forward for prayer again even if it didn't work the previous time. You may want to check whether there is a sin blocking the Spirit but you are not necessarily doing anything wrong. You are just meant to wait and keep praying..¹⁶

¹⁵ R.T. Kendall: In Pursuit Of His Glory. My 25 Years At Westminster Chapel, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002, p243-261. Revival in the sense of an increase in worship attendance never came to Westminster Chapel under R.T. Kendall's leadership.

¹⁶ I may add that in any case we can always pray and receive prayers for more of the Spirit as we have said in the beginning. There is an ongoing need to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Quickly - two closing remarks. How will we know that we have received the infilling or refilling of the Holy Spirit and have received his power? This is easy when we begin to speak in tongues, prophesy, feel incredible joy and love, have a tingly sensation all over the body and the like, but what if we do not feel all that much? What if there is no overwhelming experience?¹⁷

One pastor's wife who had an amazing healing gift never felt anything when she prayed for healing. She simply exercised faith and prayed in obedience (Agnes Sanford). However, the outcome was undeniable. In our own life we may want to check whether the Holy Spirit produced any fruit - Galatians 5:22-23: " . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control ... " This kind of fruit may not always show itself in ecstatic outbursts but come with more steady emotions of love and joy and peace and so on. Look at the fruit of your life and maybe look within you. Do you sense the Holy Spirit communicating with you? Do these Bible verses ring true for your own life? Romans 8:14: " . those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." Romans 8:16: "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."¹⁸ Well - if you are not quite sure, then maybe you can expect a greater infilling of the Spirit - maybe for the first time.

This is the last remark. Could it be that in some cases the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not just one big decisive event but happens more gradually as we become more gradually open to receive him? A Catholic priest answers in the affirmative: "For those baptized as infants, the Spirit's indwelling cannot manifest itself in the same way as for adults. In some cases it appears that the Spirit's influence gradually grows in us as we ourselves grow physically ... " (Francis

¹⁷ Watchman Nee: The Spiritual Man, In Three Volumes, New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1977, Volume II, p133: " ... However true it may be that the Holy Spirit does sometimes allow people to so feel Him, it is very damaging for men to seek Him by means of emotion. For this not only can excite their soul life but also may evoke the enemy's counterfeit. What is really valuable before God is not how we emotionally feel the presence of the Lord or how we even feel love towards Him; rather is it how we follow the Holy Spirit and live according to what he has revealed to our spirit ... Not emotion but communion with the Lord in the spirit is what is valuable before God." Watchman Nee: The Spiritual Man, In Three Volumes, New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1977, Volume II, p191: " ... Emotion may be denominated the most formidable enemy to the life of a spiritual Christian. We know a child of God ought to walk by the Spirit. To walk this way he needs to observe every direction given by his inner man. We know also, however, that these senses of the spirit are delicate as well as keen. Unless the child of God waits quietly and attentively to receive and discern the revelation in his intuition, he never can secure the guidance of the spirit. Consequently, the *total silence* of emotion is an indispensable condition to walking by the spirit ... "

¹⁸ Watchman Nee: The Spiritual Man, Volume II, Virginia 1968, p243-244: "We know that the Lord at the commencement of our spiritual walk normally comforts us during those times we suffer on His behalf. He causes the unbeliever to sense His presence, see His smiling face, feel His love and experience His care in order to prevent him from fainting. When the believer apprehends the mind of the Lord and follows it He usually gives him great pleasure. Although he has paid some price for following the Lord yet the joy he obtains far surpasses what he has lost and hence he delights to obey His will. But the Lord perceives a danger here: upon having experienced comfort in suffering and happiness in heeding His mind, the child of God naturally looks for such comfort and joy the next time he suffers or obeys the Lord's will or else expects to be helped immediately by His comfort and joy. Hence he suffers or does the Lord's will not purely for His sake but for the sake of being rewarded with consolation and happiness as well. Without these crutches he is powerless to continue. The will of the Lord becomes inferior to the joy which He bestows at the moment of obedience.

God realizes His child is most eager to suffer if he is comforted, and is delighted to follow His will if he is accorded joy. But God now wishes to learn what motivates him: whether he suffers exclusively for the Lord's sake or for the sake of being consoled: whether he heeds God's mind because it should be heeded or because he derives some joy by so heeding. For this reason, after a Christian has made some progress spiritually God commences to withdraw the consolation and delight which He gave him in the hour of suffering and obedience. Now the Christian must suffer without any ministration of comfort from God: he suffers externally while feeling bitter inwardly. He is to do the will of God without the least thing to stimulate his interest; indeed everything is dry and uninteresting. By this process God will learn precisely why the believer suffers on His behalf and obeys His will. God is asking him: are you disposed to endure without being compensated by My comfort? Are you ready to endure just for Me? Are you amenable to perform labour which does not interest you a bit? Can you do it just because it is My purpose? Will you be able to undertake for Me when you feel depressed, insipid and parched? Can you do it simply because it is My work? Are you able to accept joyfully physical suffering without any compensation of refreshment? Can you accept it because it is given by Me?

This is a practical cross by which the Lord reveals to us whether we are living for Him by faith or living for ourselves by feeling ... "

MacNutt: The Nearly Perfect Crime. How the Church Almost Killed the Ministry of Healing, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2005, p63). I myself would not be able to pinpoint the time and date of the baptism with the Spirit but I do know the time-span when there was a definite increase in the Spirit's manifest presence.¹⁹

Everyone who asks will receive. I repeat the spiritual principles which make us ready to receive the Holy Spirit in the way that God has intended for us. One: Repent and completely turn away from everything that you know is wrong in your life. Two: Put your faith in Jesus and trust the promise that you will receive infillings and refillings of the Holy Spirit. Three: Pray for the Holy Spirit. Four: Ask another Christian to lay his or her hand on you and pray for you. Five: Wait for the Holy Spirit to come.

Repent, have faith, pray, receive prayer with the laying on of hands and then wait. God is good. Amen.

¹⁹ " ... Not being sure theologically how the baptism with the Spirit related to baptism and confirmation, I could still see that its effects on people's lives were impressive. I decided that I, too, wanted to experience it. Even if it meant my feeling like a fool, I was ready to take the plunge in the midst of all these Protestants ... I made an appointment to pray in a small group for the baptism with the Spirit.

This small group prayed with great fervour for five of us who were seeking, but I received no interior experience. When I voiced my disappointment, they asked if I had prayed in tongues. When I answered no, they asked me if I would like to. I said yes, and proceeded to pray fluently in something that sounded like Russian. Yet it seemed as if I was making up the language on my own, so I was still disappointed. I had not been looking for a particular gift but for a deeper experience of Christ, which I knew was at the center of it all. So while the group congratulated me for having received the Holy Spirit, I felt frustrated and confused.

One Lutheran minister threw his arms around me, weeping. 'I can see now that even a Catholic priest can receive the Spirit!' he exclaimed. In the midst of this confusion, I went to the dining hall and happened to stand next to Agnes Sanford, one of the three speakers. As an Episcopalian, sensitive to my religious background, she asked me how my prayer for the baptism with the Spirit had gone. I told her about my disappointment.

'Well, frankly,' she responded, 'I had the feeling that your group should not pray for you as they usually do, as if you didn't have the Holy Spirit and were receiving the Spirit for the first time. I think it would be better to pray for you for a release of the Spirit and the charismatic gifts that are already in you through baptism, confirmation and ordination.' That made a lot of sense to me.

So the next evening after supper, Mrs. Sanford and two other friends prayed over me that I might receive this unfolding of the Spirit and the release of all the gifts. As she prayed, she shared a prophecy that the Lord would work through me in bringing healing prayer back to the Catholic Church. When she finished the prayer, all four of us were overcome by a wave of laughter. It was as if a spring of joy had welled up from within me, the joy of the Holy Spirit. Wave upon wave of joy engulfed me. We all laughed together, not hysterically but because we were all filled with joy in the presence of God.

It was in his way - a way that seemed just right and suited for me - that I was baptized with the Holy Spirit. It happened in a way I had not planned but I believe God chose and arranged ... For many of us, the Spirit had been there all the time but was somehow quenched or bottled up. The baptism with the Spirit is a release of the Spirit. (After all, Peter and the other disciples had the Spirit in some measure before Pentecost.)

I have found since then, in praying for many Christian leaders, that ordinarily the baptism with the Spirit is a peaceful experience. For some it is overwhelming, and a manifest change takes place immediately. For most ministers and priests, perhaps, the change is gradual and takes place mainly in the area of their ministry. I have found, too, that Christians who do not receive any obvious experience of the Spirit are often those who are bound by inner sorrow or hurt (and can profit by prayer for healing). Others have grown used to such a restrained, disciplined style of life that they are not free to respond to all the ways the Spirit wants to express God's love and power in our lives.

The change in my own life has been tremendous. Healing and casting out evil spirits really do accompany the preaching of the Good News ... " (Francis MacNutt: The Nearly Perfect Crime. How the Church Almost Killed the Ministry of Healing, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2005, p224-226).

3. Will You Still Serve Him

Jesus was a person - Luke 4:1: "full of the Holy Spirit" and he declared to everyone - Luke 4:18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." Peter, one of the disciples who witnessed most of his work, later said about him - Acts 10:37-38: "You know ... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." There was absolutely nothing wrong with Jesus. On the contrary he showed us what it is to be anointed with the Spirit and power, what it is to have the Spirit of the Lord upon us and what it looks like - being full of the Spirit - to do great things.²⁰

Only one key detail of his life does not seem to fit the picture. He suffered and died. How can that be? In the presence of so much Spirit power how can there be weakness, bones broken, tears and blood, rejection and ridicule, even torture and death? It was bad enough that Jesus was a poor peasant from the country and never gained much respectability but it was too much for the disciples to cope with his death - when he died like a condemned criminal, a terrorist of the state, on a cross. How can a man - full of the Spirit - be such an apparent failure?

When Jesus rose from the dead he faced that question and took great pains to explain that even the Anointed, the Christ, had to suffer. He had explained it previously and therefore somewhat exasperated he charged his disciples saying - Luke 24:25-26: "How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe ... Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory" (cf. Luke 24:46)? Did he not have to suffer? Well - did he really have to? Chances are that we also - like the disciples - have a slow heart to believe and are surprised that there is indeed a connection between Spirit power on the one hand and suffering and death on the other.

That's the topic for this morning. We will examine the connection between Spirit power and suffering. However, first I will again make a few preliminary remarks. One: John the Baptist announced Jesus as the one who would come after him and baptize people with the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 3:16) which Jesus then did after he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. On the day of Pentecost Jesus - from heaven - poured out the Holy Spirit on the disciples and baptized them with the Holy Spirit - meaning drenched them with the Spirit's power - which made the disciples declare - Acts 2:32-33: "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear."

Now when do we receive that baptism with the Holy Spirit? There does not seem to be a ready-made formula. On the one hand - and we said that last time - there can be a waiting period - sometimes substantially longer than the disciples had to wait for their baptism with the Holy Spirit. Martyn Lloyd Jones writes: "... you will find this abundantly confirmed in the testimonies and the experiences of people who testify to having received this great blessing. Many of them have had to strive sometimes for years before they had this wonderful experience ..." (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Joy Unspeakable. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1984, p167).²¹ On the other hand, however, the baptism with the Holy Spirit seems to have frequently come at the beginning of the Christian life and is not a reward for growing

²⁰ Cf. Luke 9:1-9; 10:1-24; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; John 14:12.

²¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Joy Unspeakable. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1984, p169: "... There are advantages in withholding and in refusing under certain given conditions. That is familiar in ordinary human life. God is our Father and he does not give us the blessing we want immediately, always. Thank God he doesn't. We would never grow up if he did, and this is part of our whole process of sanctification. By withholding the blessing God searches us, examines us, makes us examine ourselves, and realize the terms and the conditions, and he deepens the whole of our spiritual life ... People would seek a blessing for years before they received it. But there was a purpose in it all; God was dealing with them and leading them along a given path. You will never know the heights of the Christian life without effort. You have to strive for these things - there is a seeking, knocking, and in importunity. And it is because so many have missed that element that they get into confusion at this point."

maturity. Whenever a person repents, believes and is baptized he is expected to receive also the infilling with the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 19:1-7).

Two: We said that after the initial baptism with the Holy Spirit we need refillings because we do not always stay on the same level of Spirit power. For instance, here I want to give an example from Jesus himself. The Bible reports - Luke 5:17-18: "One day as Jesus was teaching, [people] ... were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick." The power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick at that time - on that day - which was worth mentioning because at other times even for Jesus the Spirit power was not always present in the same way for the same purpose.²² We are not in control and learn from Jesus that the relationship with the Holy Spirit is dynamic whereby we need to stay tuned to his movements constantly seeking to be filled and refilled by him with his power.

Three: Last time we said that we can grow in the Spirit's power. It is not wrong to want more. God does not think of us as being greedy but encourages us - 1 Corinthians 12:31: [to] "eagerly desire the greater gifts." Then God has a purpose for our life where he wants us to grow and mature so that we can handle bigger assignments and the greater Spirit power which comes with these assignments.

The last preliminary remark relates to the others and points to a problem. If the baptism with the Holy Spirit can come at the beginning of our Christian life, if brand-new Christians - young and old - are immersed in the fullness of the Spirit, if the baptism in the Spirit is not necessarily tied to growing maturity, then how will we not go off the rails - handling great power but getting corrupted in the process?

The apostle Paul wrote to one of his congregations - 1 Corinthians 1:7: " . you do not lack any spiritual gift ... " Thus, these Christians had it all: administration, faith, welfare, healings, prophecies, knowledge, miracles, speaking in tongues and their interpretation, ... These Christians had it all but nevertheless failed. Paul also wrote to them - 1 Corinthians 3:1-3: " . I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly - mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly ... " Despite awesome manifestations of the Holy Spirit these Christians tolerated divisions and lawsuits among themselves, incest, spiritual pride, disregard for the poor even at worship, and the list goes on. The heart of their problem may well be contained in these words - Paul pleaded with them - 1 Corinthians 13:1-2: "If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

Tongues without love. Prophecy without love. Faith without love. All that power without love! What a job God has at his hand! How can brand-new immature Christians, who nevertheless have received the infilling with the Holy Spirit, how can they grow in maturity so that the power of the Spirit produces more than a clanging cymbal or resounding gong?

That question is finally launching us into this morning's topic: the connection between Spirit power and suffering. We don't have to look far. The connection between Spirit power and suffering marks the Christian life from the beginning and comes to the fore whenever a person comes to faith. Let's take this in slowly. Any preaching of the suffering Christ carries with it the power of salvation but at the same time causes suffering in those that receive that message. When the apostle Peter preached his first sermon, he said - Acts 2:22-36: "People, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him ... be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

²² Cf. Luke 10:21.

That was a confronting message: “ ... you ... put him to death by nailing him to the cross ... the one, whom you crucified, God raised him from the dead and made him both Lord and Christ. ” Confronting! However, the crowd came under conviction. The preacher was right! What had they done? Acts 2:37: “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart ... ” They were cut to the heart!

You and I - we undergo the very same experience. Once the truth of God hits us, once the awareness of sin, our unrighteousness, the shameful behaviour toward God, the way we cause God grief, once all of that penetrates our thick skulls, once we behold the suffering Saviour on the cross who also died for our sins, we are likewise cut to the heart, pierced to the core of our proud self. A pastor writes: “Conversion is not the smooth, easy-going process some people [original: men] seem to think ... It is wounding work, of course, this breaking of the hearts, but without wounding there is no saving ... ” (John Bunyan, quoted in John Piper: *Tested By Fire*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001, p65).

The people, who listened to the apostle Peter preaching, they were wounded and cut to the heart and then asked the apostles - Acts 2:37: “What shall we do?” Peter replied - Acts 2:38: “Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins ... ” Yes - the message of the suffering Christ makes us suffer in turn - wounding and cutting our heart - destroying the sinful self and the proud self - so that we do repent and turn away from sin. Thus, there is suffering whenever a person comes to faith and this wounding marks the Christian life from the beginning but at the same time what power is also present with us! God makes us repent in woundedness but then he grants forgiveness to eternal life and as the apostle Peter added in his sermon - Acts 2:38 - God further promises: “ ... you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit ” in the sense that Jesus will baptize and drench you in his power.

I say it again: This is a lesson from the beginning of our Christian life. God employs suffering to break us down - cutting and wounding us - thus causing the saving reaction of repentance which he then answers with forgiveness and the promise of the Spirit. There is something basic at work here. Suffering breaks us down so that God can build us up. As we further investigate the connection between suffering and Spirit power this basic dynamic will remain with us.

John Bunyan, who wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* - now centuries old but “next to the Bible, perhaps the world's best-selling book ... translated into over 200 languages”²³ - he wrote that spiritual book as the fruit of twelve years of suffering in jail. He said about his plight: “The parting with my wife and poor children has often been to me in this place as the pulling of the flesh from my bones ... ” and George Whitefield said of the book *The Pilgrim's Progress*: “It smells of the prison. It was written when the author was confined in Bedford jail. And ministers never write or preach so well as when under the cross: the Spirit of Christ and of Glory then rests upon them.”²⁴

There again suffering and Spirit power seem connected. Just before his release (it seems), at age forty-four, Bunyan updated his spiritual autobiography called *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. He looked back over the hardships of the last twelve years and wrote about how he was enabled by God to survive and even flourish in the Bedford jail.

He quotes from the New Testament where the apostle Paul says - 2 Corinthians 1:9: “We had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.” Then John Bunyan says: “By this scripture I was made to see that if ever I would suffer rightly, I must first pass a sentence of death upon everything that can be properly called a thing of this life, even to reckon myself, my wife, my children, my health, my enjoyment, and all, as dead to me, and myself as dead to them. The second was, to live upon God that is invisible, as Paul said in another place; the way not to faint, is to 'look not at the things which are

²³ Christopher Hill: *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628-1688*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989, p375.

²⁴ Quoted in Barry Horner: *The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan, Themes and Issues: An Evangelical Apologetic*, Lindenhurst, NY: Reformation Press Publishing, 1998, p141.

seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal' (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:18)."²⁵

From the New Testament we can all learn not to trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead but in prison John Bunyan learned the radical nature of this proposition. (I find this unsettling.) He said: "[According to this] I must first pass a sentence of death upon everything that can be properly called a thing of this life, even to reckon myself, my wife, my children, my health, my enjoyment, and all, as dead to me, and myself as dead to them." Who would want to pass a death sentence on everything that one treasures in this life - just so God alone can be everything in life and death? The apostle Paul found equally disturbing words and I quote him from the Bible - Galatians 6:14: "Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."²⁶

Who can say that? "I want to glory in nothing else but the cross of Christ. The world - everything that the world promises - has been crucified to me and I to the world. I only want God." John Bunyan did. He passed the sentence of death on everything he loved but then God passed the sentence of life on his pen and book. Even today - in great numbers - we read his book *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Paul Yonggi Cho is the pastor of the largest church in the world, the Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul, Korea. Today his church numbers about 750,000 people. His story is another story of Spirit power coming by the way of suffering.²⁷

In 1961 Yonggi Cho decided to build the largest church in Korea. He reasoned that if he could get 600 members in only three years, much more is possible. One day, without anyone else knowing, he took a measuring stick, went over to the Yong Nak Presbyterian church which was then the largest church in Seoul, determined the length and width of the building, counted the pews and said: "I will build a church larger than this, and the Lord will fill it."

By 1964 the church was behind schedule, compared with Yonggi Cho's request to God for 3,000 members. The congregation had grown to 2,400 but Yonggi Cho was already in big trouble. Rushing around from early morning until late in the evening, his nerves were beginning to wear out. He suffered from constant fatigue, yet continued to force himself to keep the church moving. He preached, counseled, visited the sick, knocked on doors - always on the move.

One Sunday following the second morning service they were scheduled to baptize 300 people. An American missionary was there to assist Yonggi Cho but believing that he had to do everything himself, Yonggi Cho told the missionary that he would baptize each new member personally: full immersion, helping people out of the water and so on. But the missionary saw that Yonggi Cho was tired and said: "Cho, you'd better let me give you a hand." "No, no, I'm all right," he protested.

That afternoon Cho was scheduled to meet a visiting evangelist and that evening he would be his interpreter. By the time they were about a half hour into the evangelist's message, Cho began to feel terrible cramps around his heart. He couldn't breathe. His knees were trembling. Then he simply began to sag, his knees collapsed, it seemed as though his eyes had suddenly been switched off. Everything went black. As he was going down, he said to God: "Lord, why are you punishing me publicly? You could have done this to me privately in my office."

In hospital Yonggi Cho refused treatment because he felt humiliated. He was the pastor who prayed for the sick and the sick became well. What was he doing here? He did not get better. His heart continued to feel cramped and he struggled to breathe. The following Sunday he asked his deacons to take him to the church so that he could preach. He was so weak he

²⁵ John Bunyan: *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1978, p122-123; quoted in John Piper: *Tested By Fire*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001, p42-43.

²⁶ Watchman Nee: *The Spiritual Man*, In Three Volumes, New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1977, Volume I, p96: "Firstly, Christ died on the cross for the sinner to remit his sin. A holy God could now righteously forgive him. But secondly, the sinner as well died on the cross with Christ so that he might not be controlled any longer by his flesh ... "

²⁷ Paul Yonggi Cho with Harold Hostetler: *Successful Home Cell Groups*, New Jersey: Logos International, 1981, p1-12.

couldn't leave the house for fear of fainting, and he needed a housekeeper to take care of him, but he still insisted on preaching.

After the deacons helped him to the podium, he stood in front of the anxious congregation. He lasted for eight minutes before he fainted. He tried again at the second service. This time lost consciousness after five minutes. He felt certain at last that he really was dying.

But then something happened to him. God seemed to be trying to reach him, telling him he couldn't go on claiming all those Bible promises of healing and do that blindly. He had never asked what God's will was in his situation. In fact, until then he had never considered the possibility that God might choose not to heal him.

He prayed: "Father, you gave all of these promises to us. But I claim them and you don't heal me. Aren't you going to heal me?" Then he was startled by the very distinct voice of God: "Son, I am going to heal you, but the healing is going to take ten years." It had not been an audible voice, but it was so clear that he knew he had not been mistaken. For the next ten years, from 1964 to 1974, he felt as though he was dying at every moment.

What happened here? God was indeed willing to grant Yonggi Cho the largest church in Korea and even the world. Today we can see that and Yonggi Cho had felt confirmation of that in his heart when he prayed. So - why this stumbling block of a ten-year-long sickness?

Yonggi Cho writes himself: "It has become clear to me that an arrogant man pays a very high price - a hardened heart is very hard to break. [If I had to be broken,] I had wanted to be broken in an instant; instead it took ten years to destroy 'the Great Cho', as I had come to consider myself." He writes further: "In 1961 I decided to build the largest church in Korea. At that time I thought I was doing it for God, but today I realize that really I was doing it out of my own personal ambition ... The Lord had to let me fail so that I would turn to him in my need and allow him to build his own church - in his own way."²⁸

What a difficult lesson for all of us but one which is confirmed in the Bible. The apostle Paul, like Yonggi Cho, had the same experience. He writes - 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (The Message paraphrase): "... so I wouldn't get a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap ... At first I ... begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then he told me, My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness. Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen ... It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size - abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become."²⁹

²⁸ Yonggi Cho writes: "I had been raised during the Japanese occupation of Korea and had been forced to live in a very poverty-stricken situation ... As a response to my background, I had tremendous ambition to become famous and successful, and to make a lot of money ... So when I entered the ministry, in my heart there was a hidden goal to become a famous and successful preacher. I loved God and wanted to work for him, but my hidden motive was always the drive to succeed. I was very egotistical, and I wanted to do everything my own way."

²⁹ More Bible passages: 2 Corinthians 6:3-10: "We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance, in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left, through glory and dishonour, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; ... having nothing, and yet possessing everything." 2 Corinthians 4:7-12: "But we have this treasure [of God's good news] in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you." 2 Corinthians 13:4: "For to be sure, Jesus Christ was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you." Romans 8:17-18: "... heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." Philippians 3:10-11: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." Colossians 1:24: "Now I rejoice in

You and I - why not submit to this? Let's also become weak, be cut down to size, accept the God-given handicap, a ten-year-long sickness or even more, suffering so that Spirit power also comes into your life and mine.³⁰ Two more examples to make this lodge deep into our hearts: Suffering and Spirit power are connected.

Claudio Freidzon is an Argentinean pastor, who travels the world, has preached in big stadiums full of people, imparted an anointing on key-leaders in the Christian world, but he did not start out that way. He was a proud Seminary student - only relenting to clean the bathrooms when the principal proceeded to do his job for him - and then he was a proud graduate who used to say: " ... I'm going to preach, and Argentina is going to know who Pastor Freidzon is."³¹ Upon viewing his first field of ministry he said: "In two or three months we can shake the whole district."

However, his proud dreams soon fell to the ground. After three months his congregation was made up of his mother-in-law, father-in-law, his wife and three grannies. His house lacked hot water in the bathrooms, and for years they had to bathe by heating water in pots. Only one room was usable and that's where the congregation met. He and his wife arranged chairs and the pulpit, and held the worship services, sometimes with Claudio preaching to his wife as sole member of the audience. At night they took the chairs away and put their bed in their place, as well as a cot for the kids and all they had in the way of possessions.

After seven years his congregation stayed at seven people. There were worship services when he was completely alone. He was ready to give up. Then - finally - God made him organize an evangelistic campaign in a public square which had a rather bad reputation. The police and city authorities said: "You're going to preach there? Then you're even crazier than the drug addicts themselves." However, then healings took place and conversions. A rather dangerous drug dealer reports: "I watched everything with critical eyes. I did not believe the testimonies of healing ... but after two hours something changed within me. I noticed that those people felt really happy ... When the pastor asked people to receive Jesus, I went up to the platform. 'I'm going to try,' I said to myself; 'I've been to so many places ... and here they're not asking me for anything.' Once I repeated that prayer I was not the same man. I experienced indescribable peace ..."³² And so did many many more. Finally the suffering had an end and Spirit power came in God's mighty strength.

In hindsight everything made sense and Claudio Freidzon explains it well. He writes: "Those years of defeat helped me realize that everything I had attempted on my own was in vain. God showed me that my capacities, my theological training, were insufficient. The world does not need theology. The world needs life. From that moment I began to experience thirst and hunger

what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church." Galatians 6:17: " ... I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: " ... we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." 2 Corinthians 12:7-10: "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness ... "

³⁰ Martin Luther, perhaps the greatest reformer in Western Christendom, said: "This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the Apostle calls 'enemies of the cross' [Phil 3:18], for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works. Thus they call the good of the cross evil and the evil of a deed good. God can be found only in suffering and the cross, as has already been said. Therefore the friends of the cross say the cross is good and works are evil, for through the cross works are dethroned and the [old sinful self], who is especially edified by works, is crucified. It is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his good works unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God's" (quoted in Gerhard Forde: On Being A Theologian Of The Cross, Grand Rapids 1997, 82).

³¹ Claudio Freidzon: Holy Spirit I Am Hungry For You, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1996, P27.

³² Claudio Freidzon: Holy Spirit I Am Hungry For You, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1996, P66-67.

for power, a longing to know the Holy Spirit. I need an anointing to break hardened hearts, an anointing that shatters the devil's chains and make the light of Christ shine ... God will make you mature as a disciple before he assigns you greater responsibilities in the ministry ... "³³

The Bible passage which became very dear to Claudio was Deuteronomy 8:1-5. I read (you can follow the Bible reading on the data-projector): "... Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord ... Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you."

Yes - "when we are in the desert, what is in our hearts comes out ... The heart is deceitful and God unmask it by means of trials. We think we have love ... until someone offends us. We think we are humble ... until we are told to do something humbling."³⁴ The people of God needed forty years in the desert - forty years of humbling and testing - to become mature and ready to receive the fullness of Spirit power. Then they conquered the promised land.

Interestingly, Jesus himself underwent the same discipline. At the age of thirty he was baptized by John the Baptist and at that time was also baptized with the Spirit. However, before he was able to use all of the Spirit's power the following happened - Luke 4:1-13: "Jesus - full of the Spirit - ... was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil ... " Like the people of God in the desert for forty years - and maybe like Claudio Freidzon in his seven member church for seven years - Jesus faced discipline and temptation for forty days in order to bring forth the character which was to handle the power of the Spirit without becoming corrupted.³⁵

Loren Cunningham, the founder of the biggest mission organization in the world - Youth With A Mission - he had just resigned as a minister in his denomination to start an interdenominational mission. A short time before he had turned down his aunt's offer to join her in a multi-million dollar business. He had burned all the bridges behind him and now he and his wife were traveling along this road in a van when with a sickening crunch of metal and glass, the van was rolling down the embankment, from its side to its top, to its other side down the highway while Loren's head and body slammed painfully against the inside walls.

He blacked out. When he came to he scrambled to his knees. Where was Darlene, his wife? Then he saw her - unmoving. She lay face down under a heavy suitcase a few yards away. "Darlene!" he screamed her name, crawling towards her. There was a brick in his stomach. Lifting the suitcase off of her, he saw that a gash had opened her head in the back. Gently, he turned her over. She was not breathing. Her eyes were wide open. Unseeing. Fixed.

Cradling her bruised, bloody head in his lap, he rocked her. *She's gone!* Tears ran down his cheeks. He thought he had lost so much when he gave up his aunt's business offer and his ministerial credentials. But now, in a moment's time everything was lost - the van was totaled, their belongings were scattered in the dust of the desert, and the one person who mattered most to him was dead.

All was gone. What happened next on that desolate stretch of desert road defies all reason. Loren Cunningham writes: "There, with not a living thing around me for miles, a voice spoke my name aloud. 'Loren!' I looked around. Then I knew. Even though I had never heard His voice with my ears before, I recognized it as the voice of God. 'Yes, Lord?' I responded, my voice choked with emotion. 'Loren, will you still serve me?' Why did he have to ask me? There was nothing else left in my life but Him. Through tears I looked into the clear desert sky and answered.

³³ Claudio Freidzon: Holy Spirit I Am Hungry For You, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1996, P32.

³⁴ Claudio Freidzon: Holy Spirit I Am Hungry For You, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1996, P35.

³⁵ Cf. Hebrews 5:7-10: "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ... "

'Yes, Lord, I'll serve you. I have nothing left except my life ... and you can have that, too.' In a moment, the Lord spoke a second time. 'Pray for Darlene.' ... I began to pray with all my might. To my astonishment, she drew a rattly-sounding breath ... "³⁶

This is not for the fainthearted. God wanted to know the answer to his question: "With everything gone including your wife, Loren, will you still serve me? In the midst of this desert experience - humbled and tested - will you pass a sentence of death upon everything that can properly called a thing of this life and only live for me - your Lord and God?" Loren Cunningham - like John Bunyan, Yonggi Cho, Claudio Freidzon and Jesus - he said: "Yes - Lord, I'll serve you. I have nothing left except my life ... and you can have that, too." That's the kind of character - forged out of suffering - which then can be trusted with Spirit power.³⁷

The question is: After having listened to all of these stories and the Bible teaching do you and I still want that kind of power? Are we at this point of time still passionate about being drenched in the Spirit or do we lose interest because there is a cost attached? Maybe a more middle-of-the-road religion seems safer now and suits us better than the full-on faith which embraces the discipline of suffering to handle the Spirit's power. How much do we seek God? What sort of church are we?

Maybe we need some time to think about the answers to these questions. We might have to make adjustments. Can I simply conclude with the encouragement that wanting everything from God is worth it?³⁸ There are lots of people in heaven because they read John

³⁶ Loren Cunningham: Making Jesus Lord, Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 1988, p12-14.

³⁷ Cf. John 15:2: "... every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." James 1:2-4: "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Watchman Nee: The Spiritual Man, In Three Volumes, New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1977, Volume II, p242: "When we forsake physical happiness and mundane pleasures we are apt to conclude that the cross has finished its perfect work in us. We do not perceive that in God's work of annulling the old creation in us there remains a deeper cross awaiting us. God wishes us to die to His joy and live to His will."

One might add here that the meaning of suffering is not simply reduced to the forging of character for service. There is also the suffering which demonstrates the depth of Christian life or the suffering which comes from engaging the powers and principalities of Satan. There is no one simplistic answer to the question of suffering.

³⁸ 1 Peter 4:12-14: "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."

Consider also the following testimonies: John Bunyan: Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1978, p121; quoted in John Piper: Tested By Fire, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001, p75-76: "I never had in all my life so great an inlet into the Word of God as now [in prison] ... Jesus Christ also was never more real and apparent than now. Here I have seen him and felt him indeed ... I have had sweet sights of the forgiveness of my sins in this place, and of my being with Jesus in another world ... "

Martin Luther quoted in John Piper: Tested By Fire, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001, p75: "As soon as God's Word becomes known through you, the devil will afflict you, will make a real doctor [theologian or teacher] of you, and will teach you by his temptations to seek and to love God's Word. For I myself ... owe my papists many thanks for so beating, pressing, and frightening me through the devil's raging that they have turned me into a fairly good theologian, driving me to a goal I should never have reached."

There was a time when Brother Yun remained in an isolation cell for three months and used his time to memorize 55 chapters of the Bible. He writes: "God helped me understand his Word and to love him more dearly. This was a precious time of communion with Jesus. He showed me glimpses of the future of the Chinese church, and how we shall take the gospel throughout the unreached world ... " (Brother Yun: The Heavenly Man, Monarch 2002, p180).

John Paton, the Scottish missionary to the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) 100 years ago, described one of his most harrowing escapes from danger as he hid in a tree with cannibals raging around him: "Never, in all my sorrows, did my Lord draw nearer to me, and speak more soothingly in my soul, than when the moonlight flickered among these chestnut leaves, and the night air played on my throbbing brow, as I told all my heart to Jesus. Alone, yet not alone! If it be to glorify my God, I will not grudge to spend many nights alone in such a tree, to feel again my Savior's spiritual presence, to enjoy his consoling fellowship. If thus thrown back upon your own soul, alone, all alone, in the midnight, in the bush, in the very embrace of death itself, have you a Friend that will not fail you then" (quoted in John Piper: Tested By Fire, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001, p75).

Madame Guyon at the end of her autobiography writes: "While I was prisoner at Vincennes, and Monsieur De La Reine examined me, I passed my time in great peace, content to pass the rest of my life there, if such were the will of

Bunyan's book *A Pilgrim's Progress*. There are lots of people in heaven because Yonggi Cho activated hundreds of thousands of people in the largest church of the world. There are lots of people in heaven because Loren Cunningham launched the largest mission organization in the world. There are lots of people in heaven because Claudio Freidzon traveled the world.

When these people started out, they were not different from us and they are still not different us. I repeat from the Bible 2 Corinthians 1:9 and this is about some anointed apostles: "We had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead." These people - like us - still cannot trust in themselves but only in God. Can we be encouraged? God give that there will be lots of people in heaven because we, the congregation of Living Grace, likewise sought the power to do God's work. Amen.

God. I sang songs of joy, which the maid who served me learned by heart, as fast as I made them. We together sang thy praises, O my God! The stones of my prison looked in my eyes like rubies; I esteemed them more than all the gaudy brilliancies of a vain world. My heart was full of that joy which Thou givest to them who love Thee, in the midst of their greatest crosses. When things were carried to the greatest extremities, being then in the Bastille, I said, "O, my God, if thou art pleased to render me a new spectacle to men and angels, Thy holy will be done!"

4. The Foolishness Continues

Would God ever do anything that would offend us? Would God ever upset us - on purpose? I guess that's not foremost on our minds. We want and imagine God to be nice and gentle and accommodating. We want to be coaxed into a relationship with him - attracted by sensitive love. Thus, this morning it may come as a surprise: There is another side to God. By design - on purpose - God plans to offend - scandalize - us.

Our problem is that as good church people we do not always recognize that because we have become comfortable with some of God's offensiveness and then don't expect any further outrage. People were continually offended at Jesus. They questioned where he came from - John 1:46: "Nazareth? Can anything good come from there?" They attacked how he shared meals with people - Luke 7:34: " ... Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners'." They objected to his healings and driving out demons - Matthew 12:24: "It is only by the prince of demons that this fellow drives out demons." They objected to his teaching. Even the disciples struggled - John 6:61: "Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, 'Does this offend you?' ... ""³⁹

Yes - Jesus offended: A wining and dining healer and preacher from Nazareth and then the worst offense of them all came with his death - a crucified saviour. The apostle Paul nailed it with these words - 1 Corinthians 1:18-25: " ... the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing ... we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block for some [original: to Jews] and foolishness to others [original: to Gentiles] ... ""⁴⁰

Of course our problem is that as good church people we are no longer offended by any of that. Jesus is now considered to be cool taking on the religious establishment and the cross has become golden hanging on our church walls. Yet, God does not give up so quickly in offending us. I read more verses from the Bible - 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 - and this is about the people whom God uses: " ... Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."

First Jesus, then his followers offend because God once again chooses the foolish, the weak, the lowly, the despised to offend, scandalize, nullify what is left of human wisdom and strength. God offends to humble us. God offends to nullify all pride and boasting.⁴¹

First God did this through Jesus, then through his followers whom he has called by the Holy Spirit.⁴² Now the Holy Spirit is another great source of offense even among churches. Not

³⁹ Cf. Matthew 13:57; Isaiah 8:14; Galatians 6:12.

⁴⁰ Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: Growing In The Prophetic, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p210: "God often offends the mind to test and reveal the heart. In the account of the Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2:12-13, some people were amazed, some were perplexed, and some mocked. We continue to see these three responses to the work of the Spirit and some consequent events today ... " Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: Growing In The Prophetic, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p69: "Jesus knew their hearts - that most of them loved their tradition more than God. He also knew that those who followed Him as told in John 6 did so with mixed motives. He revealed their hearts by intentionally offending their minds. By offending people with His methods, God reveals the pride, self-sufficiency and feigned obedience that lies hidden in people's hearts." Cf. 2 Kings 5.

⁴¹ Cf. Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: Growing In The Prophetic, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p210ff: "Following are some of the reasons why God might choose to utilize strange and/or bizarre events to further His kingdom among men: 1. To demonstrate His power through signs and wonders ... (1 Corinthians 2:4-5) ... 2. To deepen experiential intimacy with God - knowing God and being known by him. 3. To impart grace and power to overcome inner bondages - fear, lust, pride, envy, greed, deceit, bitterness and so on ... 4. To impart love, peace, joy, fear of God and the like ... 5. To effect healings - physical and emotional ... 6. To bond with other believers - relational barriers fall when people experience the Spirit's presence together. 7. To impart anointing for service ... 8. To release God's word - prophetic sensitizing, powerful preaching ... 9. To inspire intercession - apprehended for effective, Spirit-led prayer. 10. To enlarge and liberate spiritual capacities ... "

⁴² Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: Growing In The Prophetic, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p75: "People are offended in several ways by the Lord. Some are offended by the message of the cross itself. Some are offended by the

only does he move in unlikely people - like us - he also often comes causing strange manifestations and that shall be the main focus for the remainder of this sermon.

Right in the beginning when the Holy Spirit first came with power on the disciples the outcome was offensive. The disciples came under the strong influence of the Holy Spirit which some mistook for alcohol saying - Acts 2:13: "They have had too much wine." I wonder what caused this impression. Did the disciples stagger around or fall to the ground or slur their words?⁴³ The Bible reports in other places that the apostles Peter and Paul both fell into trances (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:12-13). Then the Bible knows of people falling in the presence of God (Daniel 8:17; 10:7-10,15-19; 1 Kings 8:10-11; Revelations 1:17), faces shining supernaturally (Exodus 34:30f; Acts 6:15), temporary blindness (Acts 9:4) or numbness (Luke 1:22), and lots more.⁴⁴

We know from church history and our own experience that these phenomena were not always received well. And yet, they are there in all of their awkwardness and offensiveness.⁴⁵ One pastor reports: "... there were some instances of persons lying in a sort of trance ... It was a very frequent thing to see outcries, faintings, convulsions, and such like, both with distress, and also admiration and joy ..."⁴⁶

Then this testimony was written up in an Alpha magazine: " ... I was meeting with eight or nine pastors ... God touched them and they fell on the floor shaking ... [One pastor] began to roar

type of people God uses. Others are offended by the way the Holy Spirit moves. I was not prepared for unusual manifestations of the Spirit, but I was even less prepared for the unusual people that God joined to our team."

⁴³ Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: *Growing In The Prophetic*, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p67: "Two facts are clear. First, *the Holy Spirit does not appear to be overly concerned about our reputations*. The outpouring of the Spirit didn't do much for the respectability of those in the upper room. 'These men are not drunk as you suppose,' said Peter ... A second fact about the Spirit's dealing with us is this: In contrast to the polite, shy, gentlemanly image we have of Him, *He intentionally offends people*. It pleased God that the Gentiles were offended by the foolishness of the gospel message and that the Jews were tripped up by the stumbling block of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:21-23). Paul warned the Galatians that if they required circumcision as demanded by the Jews, then 'the offense of the cross has ceased' (Galatians 5:11). The implication is that the gospel is sometimes offensive by God's design." Cf. John 6.

⁴⁴ Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: *Growing In The Prophetic*, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p201: "Following are a few more scriptural examples of the manifest presence of God in operation. * Daniel fell, had no strength, terrified by God's presence (Daniel 8:17; 10:7-10,15-19). * Fire from heaven consumes sacrifice (Leviticus 9:24; 1 Kings 18:38; 1 Chronicles 21:26). * The priests couldn't stand because of God's glory (1 Kings 8:10-11). * Solomon and the priests couldn't stand because of God's glory (2 Chronicles 7:1-3). * King Saul and his antagonistic men are overcome by the Holy Spirit and prophesy as they near the camp of the prophets (1 Samuel 19:18-24). * Bush is burning but not consumed (Exodus 3:2). * Thunder, smoke, shaking of the grounds, sounds of trumpets and voices upon Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:16f). * Moses sees the 'glory of God' pass by him; Moses' face supernaturally shines (Exodus 34:30f). * The Holy Spirit descends in bodily form as a dove (John 1:32). * Unbelieving guards thrown to the ground (John 18:6). * Peter and Paul fall into trances and see and hear into the spirit world (Acts 10:10; 22:1). * Saul of Tarsus saw brilliant light, thrown from his horse, heard Jesus audibly, was temporarily struck blind (Acts 9:4). * John fell as dead, had no bodily strength, and saw and heard into the spirit world (Revelations 1:17). * A virgin conceives the Son of God (Luke 2:35)."

⁴⁵ Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: *Growing In The Prophetic*, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p209: "Following are phenomena and/or manifestations that have been observed in contemporary experience: Shaking, jerking, loss of bodily strength, heavy breathing, eyes fluttering, lips trembling, oil on the body, changes in skin colour, weeping, laughing, 'drunkenness', staggering, travailing, dancing, falling, visions, hearing audibly into the spirit realm, inspired utterances (that is, prophecy), tongues, interpretation; angelic visitations and manifestations; jumping, violent rolling, screaming, wind, heat, electricity, coldness, nausea as discernment of evil, smelling or tasting good or evil presences, tingling, pain in the body as discernment of illnesses, feeling heavy weight or lightness, trances (altered physical state while seeing and hearing into the spirit world), inability to speak normally and disruption of the natural realm (for example, electrical circuits blown)." Cf. Dave Roberts: *The 'Toronto' Blessing*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publishing 1994, p127-136.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Edwards quoted in Dave Roberts: *The 'Toronto' Blessing*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publishing 1994, p131-132. Jonathan Edwards quoted in Winkie Pratney: *Revival*, Texas: Agape Force 1983, p105: " ... The person was deprived of all ability to speak. Sometimes the hands were clenched and the flesh cold but the senses remaining ... the soul so overcome with admiration and a kind of omnipotent joy as to cause the person unavoidably to leap with all his might in joy and mighty exaltation." Jonathan Edwards quoted in Winkie Pratney: *Revival*, Texas: Agape Force 1983, p105: " ... The person was deprived of all ability to speak. Sometimes the hands were clenched and the flesh cold but the senses remaining ... the soul so overcome with admiration and a kind of omnipotent joy as to cause the person unavoidably to leap with all his might in joy and mighty exaltation."

like a lion. The normal rule of thumb would be that he needed deliverance [from demons]. [However,] I felt God tell me that this was symbolic. [The pastor was Chinese] and the dragon is highly symbolic in Chinese culture. [Roaring like a lion] was a symbolic prophetic act to signify that the Lion of Judah [Jesus] will triumph [even in his culture] ... "⁴⁷

That's out there! Tears of repentance are okay. A few "hallelujahs" here and there: that's okay but someone roaring loudly - indecently - drowning out everything else: in our church my guess is that this would not be okay. And yet, we better be careful. Is this God trying to offend us - blowing away our notions of religion and respectability?

The Holy Spirit is not shy in causing strange manifestations and then - to go off on a slightly different tangent - he is also not shy in manifesting further strangeness through the way he operates in us and through us - further humbling us.

When Moses and the people of Israel were fleeing from Pharaoh's army and needed to cross the Red Sea, God told Moses - Exodus 14:16: "Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water ... " Yeah - sure. Can you imagine how foolish Moses must have felt? He was asked to do the impossible - move the waters of an ocean - and that by absurdly standing there in the sight of all the people raising a walking stick over the water and stretching out his hand - as if that would do it. What if nothing happened?

Jesus on earth, likewise, had the Spirit operating strangely through him. Not all of the time but certainly the time when he healed a blind man with bizarre medicine - John 9:6: "Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes." Yuk, strange, offensive healing but in that instance that is how the Spirit worked.

One evangelist felt that the Holy Spirit would descend in power if the congregation waited on him in silence. He writes: "... it got quiet all over the room. It was really quiet. I didn't know what to do next, so I waited and stayed quiet. Pretty soon forty minutes had passed. I waited with my eyes shut because I had no idea what was going to happen - if anything. And after all that time, I didn't want to look."⁴⁸

Can you imagine how foolish he must have felt - leading the congregation into forty minutes of prolonged silence with no guarantee of anything happening? How can this not offend our need for control? But then bang and another bang and another one. All over the auditorium people were falling to the ground. The evangelist writes: "Then *whoosh!* Something filled the hall. I felt a strong electrical charge, like what I think a bolt of lightning would be. I felt a numbness sweep across most of my body. And right before my eyes, almost everyone there crumbled to the floor. Virtually no one was standing but me. I was stunned ... "⁴⁹

The Holy Spirit is not shy in causing strange manifestations and then he is also not shy in manifesting further strangeness through the way he operates in us and through us - further humbling us. Maybe at this point of time - taking on board the message - we feel that we can handle that. Yes, the Holy Spirit does indeed offend with strangeness. We can agree to that. However, now that we have learned the lesson we feel ready for whatever comes and we won't be offended. Not us.

A pastor felt the same way. He knew that the Holy Spirit comes with freshness in every new season. He wrote: "One of the more important lessons for us is to see that God does not

⁴⁷ Dave Roberts: The 'Toronto' Blessing, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publishing 1994, p135.

⁴⁸ Benny Hinn: The Anointing, Thomas Nelson: USA 1992, p65.

⁴⁹ Benny Hinn: The Anointing, Thomas Nelson: USA 1992, p99-100: "As the service proceeded, I laid my hands on a person needing help, and nothing happened. A second person came up and nothing happened - no falling under the power, nothing. After the third person, I was a nervous wreck. Then something in me kept whispering, 'Say: The Power of the Spirit goes through you.' 'Why should I say that?' The fourth person, nothing. Then the fifth one, nothing. And the suggestion was still there. 'Say: The power of the Spirit goes through you.' Finally, I began to get the idea. 'Lord, are you teaching me something new?' 'Start doing what I'm telling you,' He replied. Finally the next person came up, and I said, 'The power of the Spirit goes through you.' *Bang!* Down he went. The next one the same; the next one; the next one. 'What is happening?' I asked myself. Finally I realised that the anointing is dependent upon my words. God will not move unless I say it. Why? Because He has made us co-workers with him. He set things up that way."

always repeat Himself when manifesting His glory."⁵⁰ He was right. "God was powerfully at work in men like Luther and Calvin in the sixteenth century. He was powerfully at work in men like Wesley and Whitefield in the eighteenth century. But the manifestations of His glory were quite different, when you compare the two eras. To oversimplify, what God did in the sixteenth century was largely intellectual: that is, glorious doctrines were rediscovered - justification by faith alone, assurance of salvation by looking to Christ alone. Not that people didn't experience these truths - they did, and the world was turned upside down. But the preaching of Wesley and Whitefield was largely experiential. The immediate witness of the Spirit accompanied conversions. Some manifestations included falling to the ground. 'Swooning' or 'losing one's strength' was Jonathan Edwards's way of putting it. The Welsh Revival (1904-1905) was quite different. There was a lot of singing, many people giving testimonies, and great joy. There was not a lot of preaching, however. But the power present was undeniable."⁵¹

⁵⁰ R. T. Kendall: *The Anointing: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, Lake Mary: Charisma House 2003, p176: "Openness to the Holy Spirit is what will stand us in good stead not to miss what God is in today. There is no great stigma (speaking generally) in defending what Athanasius stood for. He stood alone - and won. But nobody will be ridiculed (that is, in the church) for saying that Jesus Christ is truly God - coeternal, consubstantial and coequal with the Father. There is no great stigma in defending justification by faith alone today - even with many Roman Catholics. Martin Luther stood alone. But he won the day; today Christians generally grant that we are saved by faith alone in Christ's work on the cross. The stigma *may* repeat itself, however, and we must always be prepared to uphold the historic faith.

So one must rule out that a challenge to an ancient truth once vindicated could reemerge as a new battle that must be won. Remember, however, that the rule of thumb will be that the new stigma will be a *stigma*, and it won't be easy to accept and stand for. The Holy Spirit will not deceive us. If we are on good terms with Him, we will know what He is in and behind and what He is doing and saying. He is not likely to let those in whom He dwells ungrieved in large measure miss what is on the cutting edge, in heaven's eyes."

R. T. Kendall: *The Anointing: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, Lake Mary: Charisma House 2003, p48: "Dr Paul Cain uses and expression, 'No camping allowed.' By this he means to warn people not to stop and 'camp' at the phenomenon of manifestations. For example, he reckons that Pentecostal churches and many Charismatic churches focused on speaking in tongues and never really wanted to move beyond this. He fears equally that those who were touched by the Toronto Blessing of laughing and falling on the floor are quite happy to live in this kind of atmosphere indefinitely. It is a danger every movement faces. They get stuck in a particular manifestation of God's glory and want to perpetuate that manifestation rather than be open to the many ways God may yet manifest his glory. A particular manifestation can become yesterday's anointing very quickly, but there will be those who want to 'camp' at one kind of phenomenon.

Dr. Cain goes even further. He says while some see an emergence of a new denomination as what began in revival, the truth is that the new denomination being formed is more likely the end of the revival. Once people try to organize themselves around a new movement of the Spirit, they unwittingly render that movement yesterday's anointing.

Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: *Growing In The Prophetic*, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p219: "Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones said concerning the danger of being presumptuous about the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit, 'Never say *never* and never say *always* concerning what the Holy Spirit might do or not do.' The Lord, on purpose, doesn't submit to the boxes in which we try to confine him!"

⁵¹ R. T. Kendall, http://www.lutheranrenewal.org/archives/feb2004/newsletter_1.html: "It is not always easy to know why the Spirit subsides after a while. One cannot blame Dr. Breesee for wanting to "keep the glory down," for when it lifts things are not the same. I only know that the manifestation of God's glory in this life will tend to be temporary. Revivals end. Why? I go back to the aforementioned reasons. First, me. Us. We grieve the Spirit. The chief way we grieve the Spirit seems to be bitterness. Because right after Paul said, 'And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption' (Eph. 4:30), he added, 'Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you' (Eph. 4:31-32). I do know that in my own case bitterness and an unforgiving spirit crept in, and the powerful sense of God's presence subsided.

But the second reason is the sovereignty of the Spirit. He chooses to stay for a while, but not indefinitely in the sense He has been manifesting himself. Why? You tell me. I only know that the Holy Spirit is sovereign and, whether He is grieved or if it belongs to His inscrutability, He doesn't stay around indefinitely. Sometimes it is for years, and sometimes it is for days. One hopes the immediate sense of His power will last, but eventually the Holy Spirit seems to withdraw the feeling of awe.

My point is this. We need to come to terms with what may suddenly become yesterday's anointing. It will do us no good to pretend that what happened yesterday is happening today if it isn't ... I have had to come to terms with yesterday's anointing at more than one level. Church history, speaking generally, is like a graph on a chart going up and down! There are high-water marks and times when the situation was bleak. One of the more important lessons for us is

So the pastor knew that God does not always repeat himself when manifesting his glory and therefore he led his congregation in the following prayer: "We pray for the manifestation of the glory of God in our midst *along with an ever-increasing openness in us* to the manner in which You [God] choose to manifest that glory."

And yet, listen to his story: "My friends Lyndon Bowring and Charlie Colchester joined me for an evening in London's West End .. While waiting for our food, Charlie spoke up: 'Have you guys heard about this new [original: Toronto] thing?' Neither of us had a clue what he was talking about. He began to describe how at his church, Holy Trinity Brompton [in due course the place of origin of the Alpha course], people were being prayed for after the service and then falling to the floor in laughter. Lyndon and I looked at each other, rolled our eyes heavenward and listened as Charlie was clearly gripped by what had been happening. He asked, 'Do you think this could be from God?' I replied that if you put me under a lie detector I would say it was *not* of God."⁵²

They finished their meal and went to the cinema, but the pastor found himself thinking of that conversation. In the Sunday service he referred to the new phenomenon. He stated that he did not believe it was of God, *but* that one must always be open to unusual things like this, since church history has taught us that God *can* surprise us with the unusual and unprecedented. In any case, he had gone on public record that this particular phenomenon was not of God.

A few days later a ministers' meeting was being held on their premises. Lyndon Bowring introduced him to Bob Cheesman, who had recently returned from the place where this new phenomenon came from. Bob's face was beaming. He said: "My life has been dramatically changed." The pastor invited him to come to the vestry and pray for him. He remained unconvinced, but still felt he had to be open. In the end four ministers were praying together. As best as he can recall, not ten seconds had elapsed when his friend fell forward - right on the floor of his vestry, face down. He gulped and swallowed hard. He said nervously: "I am impressed, I must admit." Ten minutes later the *three* of them commenced praying for him. Nothing happened. But that was the moment he was forced to reassess his opinion.

By the time lunch was over, he knew in his heart he had been on the wrong side of something God was in. He could see himself in the succession of those who opposed Edwards, Whitefield, Wesley and the Welsh Revival. He said to his wife, Louise, after that lunch: "I am going to have to climb down." The following Sunday he declared in church: "How many times have you heard me say over the years: *What if revival broke out at All Souls, Langham Place or Kensington Temple? Would we be willing to affirm it even though it wasn't here at Westminster*

to see that God does not always repeat Himself when manifesting His glory. God was powerfully at work in men like Luther and Calvin in the sixteenth century. He was powerfully at work in men like Wesley and Whitefield in the eighteenth century. But the manifestations of His glory were quite different, when you compare the two eras.

To oversimplify, what God did in the sixteenth century was largely cerebral: that is, glorious doctrines were rediscovered-justification by faith alone, assurance of salvation by looking to Christ alone. Not that people didn't experience these truths - they did, and the world was turned upside down. But the preaching of Wesley and Whitefield was largely experiential. The immediate witness of the Spirit accompanied conversions. Some manifestations included falling to the ground. 'Swooning' or 'losing one's strength' was Jonathan Edwards's way of putting it.

The Welsh Revival (1904-1905) was quite different. There was a lot of singing, many people giving testimonies, and great joy. There was not a lot of preaching, however. But the power present was undeniable. Dr. Lloyd-Jones also told me this story. A coal miner came home from work only to find that his wife had gone to church without cooking his meal. He was angry. He said to himself, 'I will go to that church and break up that meeting.' When he arrived he couldn't get in because the place was packed and people were crowded at the door. He was sufficiently livid and not to be put off. He managed to push through the crowded doorway and get inside. The next thing he remembered was finding himself on his knees in front of the pulpit with his hands in the air, crying to God for mercy! The people who witnessed the scene said that once he got inside he walked on the tops of each pew making his way to the front where he was gloriously converted.

I call that power. Anointing. What memories came out of the Welsh Revival! But when it was over, it was over. It became yesterday's anointing. Sadly, some people can only conceive of revival in terms of the anointing that was in Wales in those days. One London pastor wrote me a firm letter rebuking me for my openness to a particular man's ministry. He said, 'When revival comes to London, I'll know it.' Really?"

⁵² R. T. Kendall: *The Anointing: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, Lake Mary: Charisma House 2003, p82-84.

Chapel?" (Yet he never thought that one day he would actually have to do that.) On that morning he affirmed that God was at work at Holy Trinity Brompton, and they prayed publicly for Sandy Millar, their vicar and his friend.

This is absolutely crucial. You and I - we don't underestimate how hard it is to recognize the genuineness of the Holy Spirit amidst the offense of manifestations. With all of his knowledge of church history and with all of his hunger for revival the pastor of this story was still rolling his eyes at a move of God which saw Holy Trinity Brompton church become the source of blessing for the whole world through the Alpha course.⁵³

This is hard to come to terms with. Why does God seem to jeopardize his own work? If he wants people to be saved, why does he offend them? If he wants the church to support his mission, why make us struggle with discernment?

Just one more example to illustrate the point: Charles Finney came to a place where he worked with the Presbyterian minister for the revival of the village which almost immediately commenced. Now a few years earlier there had already been a revival in that village under the labours of the Methodists. It had been attended with a good deal of excitement, and many cases had occurred of what the Methodists call "falling under the power of God". This the Presbyterians had resisted, and in consequence a bad state of feeling had existed between the Methodists and the Presbyterians; the Methodists accusing the Presbyterians of having opposed the revival among them because of these cases of falling under the power of God.

One day when Finney was preaching he also observed a man fall from his seat near the door. He was satisfied that it was a case of "falling under the power of God," but he feared that it might again divide and alienate the faithful and thus stop the revival. However the person that fell was one of the principal members of the Presbyterian church. And during the entire revival whenever anyone fell under the power of God it was always a Presbyterian and not a single Methodist.⁵⁴

Maybe this was God's sense of humour. The two Christian communities repented of their divisions and the revival continued. Only - can you see what risk God seemed to take in making another person fall under his power? Why not let him decently be converted sitting in the pew? Why cause a commotion and offend good church people?

I quote the Bible - Luke 10:21: "At that time Jesus full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.'" " ... you have hidden these things from the wise and learned ... " Once again God seems to like nullifying our wisdom and our learning. All honour, all praise and all glory are his and he is jealous about that. May we like Jesus full of joy through the Holy Spirit praise him. His good pleasure is our good pleasure.

Another observation! We may question why God risks offending people and then we may question why God risks offending people over manifestations which are not the main deal of salvation. The person from before fell under the power of God but so what? Falling, jerking,

⁵³ Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: *Growing In The Prophetic*, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p198: "Visitations of God's manifest presence upon individuals, movements and geographic regions have often occurred in the history of Christianity. They have often been disdained for various reasons. Sadly, they have most often been opposed by religious leaders who are not humble enough to admit that there might be some legitimate spiritual experience and knowledge beyond their own. This opposition can arise when leaders have been lifted up as having all the answers about God, His Word and His ways. We must continually seek to take the posture of being learners before the Lord ... "

R. T. Kendall: *The Anointing: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, Lake Mary: Charisma House 2003, p98: "The stigma. Why is it that so many sovereign vessels put people off? Arthur Blessitt by his unconventional style. Paul Cain by his prophetic ministry. Rodney by his laying hands on people. It seems that every generation has its stigma by which the believer's faith is tested. But why must some of the best, most knowledgeable and most refined of God's people be put off? Can't they see genuine men of God? I have had to come to terms with the fact that the best of Christians sincerely get put off by the anointing. I only wish that the anointing could come in a neat and tidy package that plays into our comfort zone. But it rarely comes."

⁵⁴ Charles Finney, *Original Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2002, p108.

eyes fluttering, visions, tingling, and whatever else may happen - all of that is not essential, the Bible does not promise us these manifestations and they do not happen in this way for all Christians. Sure - we all want an experience of God's power but that can occur without spectacular manifestations which can be so distracting.⁵⁵ Unless the person from before also repented of his sins and put his faith in Jesus Christ the supernatural slide from his seat under the power of God would ultimately gain him nothing - neither friendship with God nor heaven.⁵⁶

A quote from another pastor raises some more challenges: "If we attach great significance to the manifestations, people will equate the manifestations with the work of the Spirit and even view them as a badge of spirituality. When that happens, insecure people will often imitate these manifestations to draw attention to themselves and appear spiritual. An equally significant mistake would be to try to suppress the manifestations. Imagine a person who is under such intense conviction by the Holy Spirit for his sins that he has an acute sense of the torments of

⁵⁵ Watchman Nee: *The Spiritual Man, In Three Volumes*, New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1977, Volume I, p168: " ... Emotion is what believers mistake most for spirituality. Carnal Christians whose tendency is emotional in character habitually crave sensation in their lives. They desire to sense the presence of God in their hearts or their sensory organs; they yearn to feel a love-fire burning ... True, spiritual believers sometimes do have such sensations, yet their progress and joy are not contingent upon these ... " Watchman Nee: *The Spiritual Man, In Three Volumes*, New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1977, Volume II, p133: " ... However true it may be that the Holy Spirit does sometimes allow people to so feel Him, it is very damaging for men to seek Him by means of emotion. For this not only can excite their soul life but also may evoke the enemy's counterfeit. What is really valuable before God is not how we emotionally feel the presence of the Lord or how we even feel love towards Him; rather is it how we follow the Holy Spirit and live according to what he has revealed to our spirit ... Not emotion but communion with the Lord in the spirit is what is valuable before God." Watchman Nee: *The Spiritual Man, In Three Volumes*, New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1977, Volume II, p191: " ... Emotion may be denominated the most formidable enemy to the life of a spiritual Christian. We know a child of God ought to walk by the Spirit. To walk this way he needs to observe every direction given by his inner man. We know also, however, that these senses of the spirit are delicate as well as keen. Unless the child of God waits quietly and attentively to receive and discern the revelation in his intuition, he never can secure the guidance of the spirit. Consequently, the *total silence* of emotion is an indispensable condition to walking by the spirit ... "

Charles Finney also frequently instructed people to suppress feelings so that they can engage the mind and will in the matters of repentance and faith. For instance, Charles Finney, *Original Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2002, p131: "... The agitation deepened every moment; and as I could hear their sobs, and breathing, and sighs, I closed my prayer and rose suddenly from my knees. They all arose, and I said: 'Now please go home without speaking a word to each other. Say nothing - try to keep silent, and do not break out into any boisterous manifestation of feeling; and as you cannot talk or speak to each other and still control your feelings, please to go without saying a word, to your rooms.'"

⁵⁶ Jack Deere: *Surprised By The Power Of The Spirit*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publishing 1993, p96: "After all, it is not the manifestation that is of ultimate significance but rather the work of the Spirit. The manifestation is merely a reaction to the Spirit's work. We want to honor the work of the Spirit in convicting, forgiving, saving, healing and delivering - not the physical reaction to his work."

Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: *Growing In The Prophetic*, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p209: "The Hebrew and biblical model of the unity of personality implies that the spirit affects the body. At times the human spirit can be so affected by the glory of God that the human body is not capable of containing the intensity of these spiritual encounters - and strange physical behavior may result. Sometimes, though certainly not always, physical responses are simply human responses to the Spirit's activity and are not directly caused by the Holy Spirit."

At other times physical reactions may be caused by demonic powers being stirred up by the manifest presence of God. It seems to be common in NT narratives that demons would be forced to 'blow their cover' when Jesus or the apostles came around (for example, the Gadarene demoniac; the fortune teller at Philippi). Some of these strange experiences might be best considered as 'revival phenomena' rather than 'manifestations of the Spirit'. However, this does not imply that they are therefore carnal and should be forbidden."

Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: *Growing In The Prophetic*, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p210ff: "Following are some of the reasons why God might choose to utilize strange and/or bizarre events to further His kingdom among men: 1. To demonstrate His power through signs and wonders ... (1 Corinthians 2:4-5) ... 2. To deepen experiential intimacy with God - knowing God and being known by him. 3. To impart grace and power to overcome inner bondages - fear, lust, pride, envy, greed, deceit, bitterness and so on ... 4. To impart love, peace, joy, fear of God and the like ... 5. To effect healings - physical and emotional ... 6. To bond with other believers - relational barriers fall when people experience the Spirit's presence together. 7. To impart anointing for service ... 8. To release God's word - prophetic sensitizing, powerful preaching ... 9. To inspire intercession - apprehended for effective, Spirit-led prayer. 10. To enlarge and liberate spiritual capacities ... "

hell and is trembling as a result of that conviction. Now imagine the immense folly of approaching a person like that and telling him to snap out of it! If we attempt to suppress a real physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit's work, we are in danger of putting out the fire of the Spirit."⁵⁷

All right - do not suppress the manifestations because that might also suppress or put out the fire of the Spirit. We may need to hear that kind of advice again and again because our constant temptation will be to put a stop to all of the spiritual hoopla. You cannot run an orderly church with that and the quote from before points to another stumbling block: " ... insecure people will often imitate these manifestations to draw attention to themselves and appear spiritual ... " How will we ever see our way through this? It almost makes you think that a season of great spiritual power would be too difficult to handle for us. Offensive manifestations, faking and then - to go even further still - demonic counterfeits - 2 Corinthians 11:14: " ... Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. "

In an earlier example story we heard that one pastor was roaring like a lion which made another pastor suspect at first that a demon was manifesting. And that's a real possibility because the power of the Holy Spirit does challenge and stir up the demonic - but more about that in the next talk. Maybe this is all too hard.

And - let the truth be known - in my observation there are a lot of charismatic and pentecostal Christians who have been in the forefront of renewal but now feel rather jaded with the Holy Spirit manifestations. In the past they may have seen people fly through the air and enjoyed rapturous rallies but then even their most anointed ministers fell into sin and people were not cured of their dysfunctions. Manifestations seem to have obscured the deeper work of the Spirit of dealing with sin, restoring relationships, healing communities and so on.

However, we cannot give up. God does what he wants to do and we simply depend on his wisdom day by day crying out to him in prayer. Another thought: Just in case we think that we can weed out the genuine manifestations from the counterfeits, know that this is not so easy.⁵⁸ John Wesley criticized Whitefield because of the unusual manifestations that characterized Whitefield's preaching - people falling down on the ground, laughing, shaking ... Wesley rebuked Whitefield for allowing this and urged that at least Whitefield deal with what was patently of the flesh if not the devil. Whitefield replied that if you try to stamp out the wildfire and remove what is false, you will equally and simultaneously remove what is real. One has to let things be, said Whitefield. Wesley eventually acquiesced and subsequently witnessed the same mixture of manifestations in his own ministry too, and he agreed to let things be.⁵⁹

How hard is that? We may feel the need to step in and sort out people but the advice is to keep our hands off. Jesus himself warned in the parable of the weeds that in trying to pull out the weeds - those people that do not belong to him - we may also uproot the wheat - his people - with them (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43).

However - on the other hand - we are not completely passive. There are a few tests which we can run to determine whether certain manifestations are from God or not and despite everything God also admonished us in the Bible - 1 Corinthians 14:40: to "let all things be done decently and in order." There is a call on us to oversee spiritual order and discipline.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Jack Deere: *Surprised By The Power Of The Spirit*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publishing 1993, p96-97. Cf. Dave Roberts: *The 'Toronto' Blessing*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publishing 1994, p127-128

⁵⁸ Dave Roberts: *The 'Toronto' Blessing*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publishing 1994, p151; Charles Haddon Spurgeon: "Revival is a season of glorious disorder." Anonymous: "Am I missing the burning bush for trying to keep the lawn cut?" Dave Roberts: *The 'Toronto' Blessing*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publishing 1994, p158: "For those with a perfectionist mindset it will all be a little too messy. Allowances must be made for congregation members to respond appropriately to the Spirit, and for leaders learning to discern between the Spirit, the flesh and the devil."

⁵⁹ R. T. Kendall: *The Anointing: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, Lake Mary: Charisma House 2003, p91-92.

⁶⁰ Dave Roberts: *The 'Toronto' Blessing*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publishing 1994, p158-159: "Wimber also reflected on the 'decently and in order' passage in 1 Corinthians 14:40: 'It's dependent on how you read the text as to what meaning you derive. In my earlier conservative evangelical background, I would have read it in this way. Everything should be done in a *fitting* and *orderly* way. Fitting and orderly meant according to our traditions and our development.'

Jonathan Edwards probably drafted the most widely respected tests for spiritual manifestations. Based on Jesus' words - Matthew 7:20: "By their fruit you will recognize them" - he devised five diagnostic questions: "1. Does it bring honour to the person of Jesus Christ? 2. Does it produce a greater hatred of sin and a greater love for righteousness? 3. Does it produce a greater regard for Scripture? 4. Does it lead people into truth? 5. Does it produce a greater love for God and people?"⁶¹ As we ask each other these diagnostic questions we help each other to cut through the distractions and focus on what the Holy Spirit first and foremost wants to do: bring glory to Jesus Christ.

In closing I pick up again the first line of a previous quote: "If we attach great significance to the manifestations, people will equate the manifestations with the work of the Spirit and even view them as a badge of spirituality." Are we humans not hopeless? First spiritual manifestations offend us and then - in a sinful twist - they become a badge of honour and then - to twist this even further - those with the badge look down upon those that don't seem to have the badge.⁶² And what is the badge? Falling down a chair, shaking, numbness, eyelids fluttering, and so on. What has that to do with faith, righteousness and holiness?

In one publication pastors are reminded to "keep assuring people that it's OK if they do not manifest anything unusual when they receive prayer. God works differently in different people. Remember to encourage people that it's not manifestations we are after but changed hearts. The manifestations are simply a by-product."⁶³

There is a need to expose false ideas about the manifestations of the Spirit.⁶⁴ For instance, it is frequently false to say: "If I was more devoted, then I would experience these manifestations of the Spirit." The experience of these things is not just related to our spiritual passion and diligence, but are the operation of the grace and providence of God. It is also frequently false to say: "Just be open and sensitive to the Holy Spirit and you will get visibly touched, too." It would be much less perplexing if this were the way it works, but it isn't. Although people may have emotional barriers that hinder the work of the Spirit, many who are skeptical and cynical have been powerfully and visibly touched by God. Others who are very open and hungry for a touch are not powerfully affected, at least outwardly. We must refrain from judging who is "open" and who is "closed" and assuming quick-smart this is what is aiding or hindering a person from receiving more from God.⁶⁵

He suggests that the Lord challenged him that perhaps the passage should be read: '*Let everything be done, in a fitting and orderly way. What's fitting and orderly to us may to be fitting and orderly to God.*' He continued, 'I studied the Old Testament and discovered God is disorderly and unfitting (by our terms). I'd been taught that God is a gentleman, he'll never embarrass you. But what about a prophet called to be in the nude before his neighbours (Is 20) ... and all the others?' ... "

⁶¹ Quoted in Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: *Growing In The Prophetic*, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p206-207.

⁶² Watchman Nee: *The Spiritual Man*, In Three Volumes, New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1977, Volume I, p155: " ... He accords them special gifts and supernatural experiences ... Unfortunately believers do not follow God's intent. Rather than glorifying God and drawing closer to him, they grasp God's grace for their own boasting. They now regard themselves stronger than others; for, they privately imagine, who can be more spiritual than those who have had such encounters? ... "

⁶³ Dave Roberts: *The 'Toronto' Blessing*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publishing 1994, p140.

⁶⁴ Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: *Growing In The Prophetic*, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p215-216: "Exposing dangers regarding manifestations ... 1. Fanaticism ... 2. Neglect of the less intoxicating and less noticeable aspects of our faith ... 3. Casting off all restraints and disciplines in the name of 'the liberty of the Spirit.' ... 4. Becoming distracted from focusing on God and other present purposes ... 5. Falling into the pride of grace ... 6. Spreading of rumors and misinformation ... 7. Exalting outward manifestations above the inward and hidden work of the Spirit within people's hearts ... 8. Exalting the weak human instruments that God is especially using as catalysts in the work of the Spirit ... "

R. T. Kendall: *The Anointing: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, Lake Mary: Charisma House 2003, p86: "Dr. Lloyd-Jones used to say to me, 'The Bible was not given to replace direct and immediate revelation from God; it was given to correct abuses.'"

⁶⁵ Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: *Growing In The Prophetic*, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p213ff: "Exposing false equations about the manifestations: *If I was more devoted, then I would experience these manifestations of the Spirit.* The experience of these things is not related to our spiritual passion and diligence, but are the operation of the grace and providence of God. *Many people were visibly touched by the Holy Spirit. Revival is here! ... Those people*

At all times we need love. If any one of us has had a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit that came with visible manifestations, praise God but let's not use it as a badge of honour against others. There are people who experience this more inwardly and then those that are still waiting and those that are held back by fear, pride, unconfessed sin, unforgiveness, unbelief, false guilt and other sins, they will just be put off by our attitude.⁶⁶ The Bible makes this very clear - 1 Corinthians 13:1-14:1: "If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging symbol. If I have the gift of prophecy ... and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor ... but have not love, I gain nothing ... Follow the way of love ..." At all times we need love to overcome the offense of spiritual manifestations and draw each other deeper into the work of the Holy Spirit among us.

Back to the beginning. Would God ever do anything that would offend us? Yes, he would. The Holy Spirit has a habit of offending us and in turn under the influence of the Spirit we offend others. Yet, we allow God to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him. Amen.

God is using to impart His power are really mature and sensitive to God. God must really love them a lot more than He does me. But if I'm diligent enough, maybe I'll become qualified to do those same things ... Just be open and sensitive to the Holy Spirit and you will get visibly touched, too. It would be much less perplexing if this were the way it works, but it isn't. Although people may have emotional barriers that hinder the work of the Spirit, many who are skeptical and cynical have been powerfully and visibly touched by God. Others who are very open and hungry for a touch are not powerfully affected, at least outwardly. We must refrain from judging who is 'open' and who is 'closed' and assuming this may be aiding or hindering a person from receiving from God.

Certainly people often have barriers that hinder them from freely receiving from God's Spirit. They can be things like fear, pride, unconfessed sin, unforgiveness, unbelief, false guilt and the list goes on. If you believe you have such a barrier, ask God to reveal the nature of it to you. He will be faithful, in His time, to answer such a request. In the meantime, do not assume that it must be a barrier that is keeping you from receiving from God. *If it is truly the Holy Spirit touching and moving upon these people, then there will be instant and/or lasting 'fruit' in their lives ... If it is really the power of the Holy Spirit on these people, then they should not have any control over their responses and behaviour ...*

⁶⁶ Dave Roberts: *The 'Toronto' Blessing*, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publishing 1994, p140-141: "He identifies control, fear and analysis as stumbling blocks for those willing to receive from God ... *Control*. For many pastors, the pastoral mindset is difficult to set aside. They are over-alert, watching the meeting, anticipating what is going to happen next. They are reluctant to be vulnerable, regarding themselves as an example to the congregation, and loath to be in a situation where weakness might be exposed ... *Fear*. We fear deception, we fear emotion, we fear Satan. Trust, born from 'hanging on to our common sense' and evaluating the spiritual stance of those whose meetings we attend, can take us past the fear-of-deception hurdle ... *Analysis* ... encourages people not to clinically analyze their experience with God ... John Wimber ... : 'Let's not lift up phenomena. This isn't about phenomena, this is about God visiting the church. Let's talk about God, let's teach the main things of scripture, and let's focus this experience on the works of God. Therefore, let's go feed the hungry and care for the broken and the bruised in the community, let's look after widows and divorcees and the fatherless, and let's preach the gospel to the lost.'"

5. The Battle Is On

Our nation is in crisis. Only last month the heads of churches distributed a joint letter to the Christian communities of Queensland (October 2006). I quote the letter: "We are writing to you as a matter of urgency in the face of continuing drought conditions ... circumstances have reached a new crisis point. So low are water reserves in most of the State that the Premier of Queensland, the Hon Peter Beattie, recently asked us as a body to urge our Churches to pray for rain. We are only too willing to do this ..." Then the heads of churches continue: " ... and we have suggested to the Premier that he also invite our brothers and sisters of other faiths to pray as appropriate to their own traditions."

What does that last sentence mean? Who are our brothers and sisters of other faiths? Who else do we want to pray for rain and whom would these people of other faiths worship? I got on the phone and rang the Anglican, Lutheran, Uniting and Assemblies of God head-offices asking these questions. The moderator of the Uniting Church gave very clear answers: "Yes, the brothers and sisters of other faiths refer to other religions such as Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, ..." I asked how wide-ranging and all-inclusive we wanted to be. Would we want Peter Beattie also to invite witches covens and tribal religions to summon their gods? He didn't want to go that far but then again if a Hindu can be a religious brother offering a goat to Shiva why couldn't a witch be our religious sister sacrificing to mother earth?

On the phone I was not as confronting as that but I queried him: "I know that there are differences of opinion but do some other religions not worship powers and principalities which belong to the kingdom of darkness - ultimately Satan?" The moderator of the Uniting Church did not hold to that view and his was not the only signature on the letter. Together the heads of the Anglican church, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Churches of Christ, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army and Uniting Church - in a manner [and there may have been a mix-up between various draft versions of the letter but the way it was published in a manner the heads of churches] - called upon the premier of Queensland to invite the worship of other gods, other spiritual rulers and authorities besides God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Our nation is in crisis and maybe it is not just the drought conditions. This sermon is sermon number five in a series on the Holy Spirit and so far the series has been challenging to many. Why? Because even in the church we no longer seem to know much about the supernatural. In fact we have come from an era where some of our brightest theological minds argued against the world-view of the Bible saying - I quote the eminent New Testament scholar Rudolph Bultmann and this is from the early 1940s: "It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles ... [This is] unintelligible and unacceptable to the modern world" (Rudolph Bultmann in Bartsch, H.-W. & Fuller, R. H.: Kerygma and Myth, London 1972, p5). And another quote: "Human knowledge and mastery of the world have advanced to such an extent through science and technology that it is no longer possible for anyone seriously to hold the New Testament view of the world - in fact, there is no one who does ... Now that the forces and the laws of nature have been discovered, we can no longer believe in spirits, whether good or bad" (Rudolph Bultmann in Bartsch, H.-W. & Fuller, R. H.: Kerygma and Myth, London 1972, p5).

This is how it seemed even to many church people. Now that the forces and laws of nature have been discovered, now that we send people to the moon and master the atomic bomb, there is no longer a need to believe in a God who participates in life on earth. Our reason, our mind, our rational powers have finally understood that the world is no more than molecules and matter functioning without the supernatural - God the Holy Spirit, angels or demons.

Yet - even if it sounds Bible-believing primitive and behind the times - we cannot tone down the supernatural elements of the Christian faith because a church without the supernatural is a church without God and without the power of the Holy Spirit operating in it.

In such a church you cannot survive because you become defenseless against the powers of darkness - ignorant of what you do when you want the government of the day to pray to other entities than the one and true God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Looking back over the sermon series so far it has been challenging to reacquaint ourselves with the active side of the Holy Spirit - words of prophecy, bold preaching, speaking in tongues, manifestations such as people falling to the ground, laughing, shaking, being filled with the love of God, joy, peace, ... Sometimes we may have thought that this all sounded rather spooky but today the challenge goes even further than that. The Holy Spirit comes with power and then - without fail - he leads us into battle and makes us confront unholy spirits - the domain of Satan.

When Jesus was about thirty years old - as he was praying - I quote from the Bible - Luke 3:21-22: " ... heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove ... " Immediately after the Spirit descended the battle was on. I continue to read from the Bible - Luke 4:1-2: " Jesus, full of the Spirit, returned ... and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil ... " Tempted but not overcome Jesus announced his new mission with these words - Luke 4:18-19: " The Spirit of the Lord is [now] upon me ... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners ... to release the oppressed ... " which he then proceeded to do by preaching the kingdom of God and confronting the dominion of Satan - thus releasing the prisoners, thus releasing the oppressed from his power. I quote from the same Bible chapter - Luke 4:31-44: " ... he began to teach the people. They were amazed because his message had authority ... an evil spirit cried out at the top of his voice, 'Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us ...' 'Be quiet!' Jesus said sternly. 'Come out of him!' ... All the people were amazed and said to each other, 'What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!' ... When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, 'You are the Son of God!' ... "

His disciples later summarized this period of Jesus' ministry by saying - Acts 10:38: " . God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and . he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil ... " Thus, when the anointing with Spirit power came upon Jesus, he began to confront the dominion of Satan - healing those under the power of Satan.

This continued until the climax of the cross where Satan struck back with force. Towards the end the Bible says - Luke 22:3: " . Satan entered Judas, one of the [disciples] ... " who was consequently to betray Jesus and begin an evil chain of events whereby Jesus was arrested, spat upon, disowned, mocked, insulted, sneered at, tortured and finally killed by having his body pinned to a cross with nails. At that time Satan seemed to have his way and finally triumph. Even Jesus conceded - Luke 22:53: " ... this is your hour - when darkness reigns."

Yet, the confrontation took a decisive turn when Jesus' death was not Satan's final victory but his ultimate defeat. Jesus' death defeated Satan in a battle of cosmic proportions because it turned out to be the redeeming sacrifice for all sinners who could rightly be accused by Satan. This is worth repeating. Jesus' death surprised Satan with sudden defeat by removing all grounds for accusations and guilt. Sinners - you and I - would go free from his clutches because the innocent blood of Jesus - this amazing sacrifice - paid the price for our iniquity and thus contains the power to wash away all of our sins.

In the words of the Bible - Colossians 2:15: " . having disarmed the powers and authorities [of Satan], he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." Also 1 John 3:8: " He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God [Jesus] appeared was to destroy the devil's work." We should add that Jesus made this victory complete and beyond any doubt when he rose from the grave after three days - 1 Corinthians 15:54: " Death has been swallowed up in victory."

How does hearing all of that make us feel? The message of victory is welcome but what about these battle scenarios, confrontations between Spirit power and Satan's dominion, with

authority and power giving orders to evil spirits, Satan orchestrating an evil chain of events, ... Is that not all far-fetched and a little extreme? Where are we going with this? We may think that it is bad enough to spend so much time on the Holy Spirit but now to populate the world with even more spirits that are said to be unclean and demonic - that's no longer nice Christianity. At least it sounds new.

If it does, I'm sorry. I'm one of many preachers who have neglected the teaching of that kind of spiritual reality. However, the Bible is a clear witness. The risen Jesus taught his disciples and commissioned them - Luke 24:45-48: "... This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." Then Jesus made it clear that even a perfect understanding of this truth and commissioning is not enough to gain ground in mission work. More is needed and therefore he added - Luke 24:49: "... stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."; Acts 1:8: "... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and [then] you will be my witnesses ..." In addition to the message of Jesus Christ power is needed. Why? Because every Christian reaching out is engaged in a power struggle - with the kingdom of darkness - which necessitates that every Christian needs to wait on the Holy Spirit for fillings and refillings with his power.

How prevalent is this power struggle with Satan? We consider a few more Bible passages: Ephesians 6:12: "... our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." 2 Corinthians 4:4: "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ ..." Acts 26:17-18: "... I am sending you ... to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins ..." Ephesians 2:1-10: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient ... But because of his great love for us, God ... made us alive in Christ ..." Ephesians 4:27: "Do not give the devil a foothold. [Do not sin.]"

Martin Luther, like many of our fathers and mothers in the faith, concurred with the Scriptures. He saw our conflict with Satan as central to our faith and wrote: "This is why Christians have to be armed and expect every day to face constant attacks ... He is the kind of enemy who never gives up or gets tired. When one temptation stops, new ones take its place ... The petition [“deliver us from evil” from the Lord’s Prayer actually means - rightly translated from the Greek of the New Testament - “deliver us from the evil one” and] seems to refer to the devil, as if to compress everything into the one idea that the sum total of all our prayer should be aimed at this main enemy of ours ... this petition also includes all the evil that can happen to us under the devil’s rule: poverty, disgrace, death ... all the ... heartache which never ends here in the world. Because the devil is not only a liar but also a murderer, he never stops trying to kill us, and takes his anger out on us by doing what he can to get us hurt in accidents, and to do us physical harm. This is how he manages to break many a person’s neck and to drive others insane. Some he drowns, and many he pushes into suicide and many other terrible evils ..." (Luther's Large Catechism, translated by Friedemann Hebart, Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House 1983, p159-160).

If so far we are not aware of a spiritual enemy which seeks to accomplish our spiritual death - making it permanent by physical death - then try this: Seek to become real in your relationship with God. Seek to become holy as our God is holy. Seek to overcome the sin that has a hook in your life and holds you back. Seek the presence of God and worship him. Seek to be filled more with the Holy Spirit. Do this and you will discover that the powers of darkness do not cede ground without attempting to fight back. As long as you and I are reasonably passive and inactive in our faith we are no threat to the devil whatsoever but move spiritually and there will be a counter-attack. Don't be surprised when it comes and don't let the devil do to you what he does best - John 10:10: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."

When the Spirit descended on Jesus with power, he began to preach and teach with authority which in turn forced unclean spirits to manifest - come to the surface - making a last

ditch effort to resist departing from humans. A pastor writes: "It seems to be common in New Testament narratives that demons would be forced to 'blow their cover' when Jesus or the apostles came around ... "⁶⁷ Just one example from the Bible - Mark 1:21-28: " ... Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed ... because he taught them as one who had authority ... Just then a man in their synagogue who was bothered [original: demonized] by an evil spirit cried out ... " Again - the evil spirit manifested and cried out because the holy and powerful presence of Jesus forced a confrontation, forced him to "blow his cover" and attempt some sort of fight-back.

In our own congregation I know of at least two such cases. One was a woman that went to church all of her life. At one stage she came close to handing the reins of her life over to Jesus, only to discover that in her case this could not happen without a serious struggle. All of a sudden - to her great surprise - after so many years of going to church - the mere mention of the name of Jesus in worship became intolerable. At the name of Jesus - whenever the name of Jesus was sung or preached or prayed to - something within her stirred, made her fly into a rage, made her want to run out of church, ... - classic symptoms of an unclean spirit coming to the surface, making a last ditch effort to resist the power of Jesus.

Once again the Bible precedents and these cases may sound a little extreme and it is true that not many seem to be bothered by unclean spirits to that same extent. However, they serve to illustrate the principle. Seek to become real in your relationship with God - allow his holiness to come in, seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit - and you will discover that the powers of darkness do not cede ground without attempting to fight back.

A preacher shared this observation: "People have been in meetings where the glory of God has fallen, where the fingerprints of God have been upon everything, and where fortifications have been made in the body. The next morning the power of Satan attacked them."⁶⁸ Why? When the glory of God falls, a fight-back occurs. I am saying this so that we are prepared for it.

The question is: How do we win the power encounter? If the initial thesis holds true: The Holy Spirit comes with power and then - without fail - he leads us into battle and makes us confront unholy spirits - the domain of Satan, how do we win the battle? Earlier we said that Jesus defeated the devil and triumphed over powers and principalities by the cross but how do we apply that victory in practical ways now?

That's another big topic. I may simply give a few quotes which touch on various aspects and then concentrate on one feature of fighting only. First a few snippets from one scholar covering a range of issues: "The central, foundational activity for spiritual warfare is prayer. In one sense prayer is a weapon of warfare, and in another sense it is the medium through which all of the other weapons are utilized."⁶⁹ "Holiness means being so full of God that there is no room for anything else."⁷⁰ "The name of Jesus is a powerful weapon of spiritual warfare and it wields tremendous authority ... "⁷¹ "Satan hates nothing more than to be reminded of the blood of Jesus."⁷² " ... how powerful praise can be as a weapon of spiritual warfare."⁷³ Prayer, holiness, the name of Jesus, the blood of Jesus, praise - key topics for further study of spiritual warfare.

However, at present all we can do this morning is to concentrate on the meaning of Ephesians 6:17 - I read: "Take the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God." The longer Bible passage of Ephesians 6:10-18 describes the full armor of God and lists the defensive

⁶⁷ Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: Growing In The Prophetic, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p209.

⁶⁸ Smith Wigglesworth: Greater Works: Experiencing God's Power, New Kensington: Whitaker House 1999, p78.

⁶⁹ C. Peter Wagner: "Spiritual Warfare" in: C. Peter Wagner, ed.: Territorial Spirits. Insights Into Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare & Intercession, Chichester: Sovereign World Limited 1991, p3-27, p7-8.

⁷⁰ C. Peter Wagner: "Spiritual Warfare" in: C. Peter Wagner, ed.: Territorial Spirits. Insights Into Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare & Intercession, Chichester: Sovereign World Limited 1991, p3-27, p8.

⁷¹ C. Peter Wagner: "Spiritual Warfare" in: C. Peter Wagner, ed.: Territorial Spirits. Insights Into Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare & Intercession, Chichester: Sovereign World Limited 1991, p3-27, p10.

⁷² C. Peter Wagner: "Spiritual Warfare" in: C. Peter Wagner, ed.: Territorial Spirits. Insights Into Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare & Intercession, Chichester: Sovereign World Limited 1991, p3-27, p10.

⁷³ C. Peter Wagner: "Spiritual Warfare" in: C. Peter Wagner, ed.: Territorial Spirits. Insights Into Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare & Intercession, Chichester: Sovereign World Limited 1991, p3-27, p12.

weapons of the belt of truth, the breast-plate of righteousness, feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation but then concludes with the sword - a weapon of attack capable of driving back the enemy: "Take the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God."

We need the sword. This cannot be overemphasized. The word of God - the truth of God - the accuracy of teaching determines whether we win or lose against the powers of darkness. Before we sin, we have to believe a lie. Rick Warren hammers the point: "The battle for sin always begins in the mind. Always. If you lose the battle in your mind - your thoughts - you've lost the battle ... sow a [sinful] thought and you reap a [sinful] action." Neil Anderson in his spiritual warfare manual emphasizes: "Satan is a liar and a deceiver and the only way he can have power over you is if you believe his lies."⁷⁴

The very first human sin was caused by a lie - Genesis 3:4-5 [reworded]: "Eat the forbidden fruit. It's safe and will make you like God." Jesus explains about some people that they - Luke 8:12: "... are the ones who hear the Word of God, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved." Take away the Word - the truth of God - and you cannot believe because you no longer know what is right to believe.

God says in the Bible that the devil - 2 Corinthians 4:4: "blinds the minds of unbelievers" and therefore the Bible continues - 2 Corinthians 10:4-5: "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." Whatever blinds the mind gets demolished by weapons of divine warfare. Nothing must prevail against the knowledge of God. Every thought is taken captive to be made obedient to Christ.

How does this work? It is rather practical. In this last segment of today's sermon I want to apply the sword of the Spirit to a common misconception of what it means to have the Spirit fill and refill us with his power. Contrary to initial experiences and therefore common expectations we do not always feel the power of the Spirit! We do not always sense heightened emotions when empowerment comes!

Martyn Lloyd-Jones is right when he writes: "It is that the baptism with the Holy Spirit [the initial filling with the Holy Spirit] is always something clear and unmistakable, something which can be recognized by the person to whom it happens and by others who look on at this person ... The very essence of this is that it is conscious, that it is experimental, obvious, plain, and clear; not only to the recipient but also to those who are familiar with him ... I am not concerned to emphasize anything spectacular, although we have got to say this: in the New Testament it was highly spectacular ... to them ... it was the most spectacular thing that had ever happened to them. So that any impression that is given that this is something quiet, and restrained and almost unobserved seems to me to be coming very near to what the apostle calls, 'quenching the Spirit' ..."⁷⁵

Right! When the Christians in the Bible were first baptized with the Holy Spirit - received that first drenching with the power of the Spirit - that was highly experiential. The evidence proves that - Acts 2:1-4: There was the experience of a sound like the blowing of a violent wind, tongues of fire, speaking in other tongues - Acts 10:44-46: Sudden praise of God and speaking in tongues - Acts 19:6: Speaking in tongues and words of prophesy. In the letter to the Galatians the apostle Paul even appealed to the experience of the Spirit to make his point - Galatians 3:1-5 [paraphrased]: "How did you receive the Spirit? How did that experience come to you? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? What does your experience tell you?" Then the Bible says that God - Romans 5:5 "... has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit ..." and that

⁷⁴ Neil Anderson: The Steps To Freedom In Christ, Gospel Light 2001, p1.

⁷⁵ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Joy Unspeakable. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1984, p52-54.

- Galatians 5:22-23: " . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace ... " Love, joy, peace - you experience that. Romans 8:14-16 further adds: " . those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God ... The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." We do notice when we are led and we do discern when the Spirit testifies with our spirit. Any communication with God is also an experience.

However - agreeing with all of that and not downgrading anything - basing your entire Christian faith walk on experience is a mistake. Watchman Nee warns repeatedly: " ... The emotional part of the soul also can be aroused easily by the adversary. Since many believers crave joyful feelings and the sensations of having the Holy Spirit, of the loveliness of the Lord Jesus, and of the presence of God, evil spirits will supply their senses with many strange experiences. This is that their natural abilities might be stimulated and that the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, traceable only by a person's delicate intuitive faculty in his spirit, might be suppressed ..."⁷⁶ Words of wisdom! Feelings, sensations, emotions need to be tested. Do they come from God or do they come from the adversary of whom the Bible says - 2 Corinthians 11:14: "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."

Jesus himself had the greatest time when he was baptized with the Holy Spirit - Luke 3:21-22: " ... heaven was opened. The Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove and a voice came from heaven saying: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'" Jesus shared our humanity and therefore - like us - must have enjoyed hearing, seeing, experiencing the fullness of God but the emotional high was not to continue - Luke 4:1-2: "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned ... and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days and at the end of them he was hungry." Jesus returned and according to this account remained full of the Holy Spirit but he returned nevertheless to a forty-day battle experience with Satan where he would feel nothing but hunger and deprivation.

Devoid of the previous feelings of Spirit power and excitement he became vulnerable. The devil drew near and said - Luke 4:1-13 [and I paraphrase]: "Jesus, if you are the Son of God, then you shouldn't have to feel as bad as you do now. Why feel hungry as the Son of God? Tell this stone to become bread." A little later he was at it again: "Jesus, this is no way to be for the Son of God. Worship me and I make you powerful in the world." He didn't let up: "Jesus, why feel so low? If you are the Son of God, if Spirit power is with you and in you, experience it by throwing yourself down from a public building and enjoying the adulation."

Was the devil reasonable? Yes, he was if you base your faith on emotions. However, that's not how it works. We do not always feel the Spirit even when he is present with power. How then did Jesus fight back? Jesus took the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God and he quoted the Bible against the lies of Satan and he marshaled the truth against his feelings of hunger and hardship. For instance, he said - citing Deuteronomy 8:3 from the Old Testament: "A person does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

That's the sword of the Spirit. Live on every word that comes from the mouth of God - not on your feelings - and quote the word, state the truth, declare spiritual reality against the lies of Satan. The Bible also says about this weapon - Hebrews 4:12: " . the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Graham Cooke - a man with a strong prophetic gift - he received a word from God in the late 1970s saying: "Take a deep breath. For the next two years you will not feel my presence. Learn this discipline. For the next two years I will not let you sense any emotional or physical connection with me." In Graham's words: it took him six months to stop whining. He thought that if he whined long enough, God would change his mind but he didn't. He had to learn to trust that God was there simply because he said that he would be there. When he laid hands on people, they would often fall over but he would not feel a thing. In the midst of great

⁷⁶ Watchman Nee: The Spiritual Man, In Three Volumes, New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1977, Volume I, p177.

worship services nothing stirred him. One day on tour he took out a blank post-card from his briefcase, addressed it to God and wrote in the message section: "Dear God, Wish you were here. Love Graham." He stuck the card in his Bible. A few days later he knocked his Bible on the floor and the card was floating to the ground. He looked at it. The message side was up and it read: "Dear Graham, What makes you think I'm not? Love God." He wrote: "Dear God, Wish you were here. Love Graham." God messaged back: "Dear Graham, What makes you think I'm not? Love God." Graham looked at the card for about five minutes and then - according to his testimony - he saw it change back to his own hand-writing. He didn't feel a thing. One day he went to bed at 11pm, suddenly woke up and the presence of God filled the room like a blanket. He looked at the clock and it was 12pm - two years to the day - and God said: "Get up, son. We got things to talk about."

The story may be a little out there but the experience - or better lack of experience - is not. I close with a quote from Oswald Chambers: "God has frequently to knock the bottom board out of your experience if you are a saint in order to get you into contact with Himself. God wants you to understand that it is a life of *faith*, not a life of sentimental enjoyment of His blessings. Your earlier life of faith was narrow and intense, settled around a little sun-spot of experience that had as much of sense as of faith in it, full of light and sweetness; then God withdrew His conscious blessings in order to teach you to walk by faith. You are worth far more to Him now than you were in your days of conscious delight and thrilling testimony."⁷⁷

We have covered some ground today. The Holy Spirit comes with power and then - without fail - he leads us into battle and makes us confront unholy spirits - the domain of Satan. You and I - wrestle with the implications. Do not be taken by surprise but learn to use our weapons. Amen.

⁷⁷ So also Watchman Nee: "We know that the Lord at the commencement of our spiritual walk normally comforts us during those times we suffer on His behalf. He causes the unbeliever to sense His presence, see His smiling face, feel His love and experience His care in order to prevent him from fainting. When the believer apprehends the mind of the Lord and follows it He usually gives him great pleasure. Although he has paid some price for following the Lord yet the joy he obtains far surpasses what he has lost and hence he delights to obey His will. But the Lord perceives a danger here: upon having experienced comfort in suffering and happiness in heeding His mind, the child of God naturally looks for such comfort and joy the next time he suffers or obeys the Lord's will or else expects to be helped immediately by His comfort and joy. Hence he suffers or does the Lord's will not purely for His sake but for the sake of being rewarded with consolation and happiness as well. Without these crutches he is powerless to continue. The will of the Lord becomes inferior to the joy which He bestows at the moment of obedience.

God realizes His child is most eager to suffer if he is comforted, and is delighted to follow His will if he is accorded joy. But God now wishes to learn what motivates him: whether he suffers exclusively for the Lord's sake or for the sake of being consoled: whether he heeds God's mind because it should be heeded or because he derives some joy by so heeding. For this reason, after a Christian has made some progress spiritually God commences to withdraw the consolation and delight which He gave him in the hour of suffering and obedience. Now the Christian must suffer without any ministration of comfort from God: he suffers externally while feeling bitter inwardly. He is to do the will of God without the least thing to stimulate his interest; indeed everything is dry and uninteresting. By this process God will learn precisely why the believer suffers on His behalf and obeys His will. God is asking him: are you disposed to endure without being compensated by my comfort? Are you ready to endure just for Me? Are you amenable to perform labour which does not interest you a bit? Can you do it just because it is My purpose? Will you be able to undertake for Me when you feel depressed, insipid and parched? Can you do it simply because it is My work? Are you able to accept joyfully physical suffering without any compensation of refreshment? Can you accept it because it is given by Me?

This is a practical cross by which the Lord reveals to us whether we are living for Him by faith or living for ourselves by feeling ... " (Watchman Nee: *The Spiritual Man*, Volume II, Virginia 1968, p243-244).

6. It Is A Gift

Born in 1897 Agnes Sanford, the wife of an Anglican priest, later discovered - to her great surprise - that God was still healing people and that she herself had a strong healing gift. She also discovered that not everyone in the church was happy about it. At one time she prayed for a faithful member of the Baptist church who was very sick. Once healed the Baptist woman resumed teaching her Bible class only to be told that she must not share her healing with anyone. When she saw the minister she cried out to him: "But I was healed!" He looked pained and replied severely that such miracles did not happen today.⁷⁸

Again and again the wife of an Anglican priest had to prove from the Bible that God indeed performs such miracles even today. The problem is not with God but the church and her unbelief. I was reading all of this in Agnes Sanford's autobiography and I began to admire her pioneering work - her understanding of the Scriptures in the face of much opposition, her perseverance, her insight into healing prayer - but then 220 pages into her autobiography I was completely taken by surprise when Agnes Sanford turned out to be not so different from her detractors - from any one of us. She upheld the healing gift - yes - but then in the case of another spiritual gift she also - like many of us - struggled with what was outside of her own immediate experience.

One day she received a very disturbing letter from Marion, her friend. It was full of hallelujahs and praise-the-Lords and stated that she and her sons ... had attended some sort of church group and now spoke in tongues. Agnes was sure that her hair stood on end with horror. As far as she was concerned this was the end of their journey together into the kingdom of God, for she would never do a thing as weird and completely off base as this. She wrote Marion to this effect, with some vehemence, but Marion replied with equal vehemence and with disconcerting arguments out of the Bible.

Finally she wrote: "You are a Bible teacher. How then can you refuse even to contemplate something that is right out of the Bible?" Agnes wrote back: "Very well, next time I go west I will stop off at your place and let you two pray for God to give me whatever gifts of the Spirit he wants me to give. But I do *not* want the gift of tongues, so don't expect me to sound off, for I'm sure God would not give me any gift contrary to my will."

In due time she met with her friend and one of the boys. They sat in a circle and prayed together, and presently they began to speak in languages that Agnes did not know, although quietly, without hysteria or any upsetting demonstrations. Finally, they laid their hands on Agnes' head and prayed as she had asked them to pray. But immediately, Agnes desired the gift of tongues with a great longing. And in another moment she spoke as they had spoken, in words that the conscious mind did not understand. Within her there was a great melting, even unto tears of joy and of comfort.

She writes: "I felt as though the love of Christ, already in me, now moved down, down to a deeper level, and I am sure it did! For speaking in tongues is simply the Spirit reaching and touching something in the deep unconscious, or as the Bible would say, the heart, so that out of the heart the tongue speaks a language that the conscious mind does not understand but that the heart knows. Hence the feeling of the nearness of God ... "⁷⁹

What is the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues? What language comes out of the heart - through the Holy Spirit - that the conscious mind does not understand? Are we ready to explore this or do we - right now sitting in the pew - feel a reaction coming on which is not unlike what Agnes Sanford felt at first: hair standing on end, cancellation of friendship, anger, ... ?⁸⁰ This is the last message in our sermon series on the Holy Spirit. Are we ready to explore something that happened even at the first outpouring of the Spirit on the disciples?

⁷⁸ Agnes Sanford: Sealed Orders, New Jersey: Logos International 1972, p149.

⁷⁹ Agnes Sanford: Sealed Orders, New Jersey: Logos International 1972, p220-221.

⁸⁰ Ernest Gentile: The Glorious Disturbance. Understanding And Receiving The Baptism With The Spirit, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books 2004, p123-135. Gentile lists thirteen common objections to the gift of speaking in tongues.

Some time ago 40 Queensland Lutheran pastors met for a few in-service training days. At one stage we conducted an anonymous survey into our prayer habits and somehow the survey included the question: "Do you speak in tongues?" 30 pastors filled out the survey and to everyone's surprise 10 out of the 30 - 25% of all Lutheran pastors present, currently serving in our denomination - they replied that they did. That many spoke in tongues - and no one knew who they were. Why? Because for whatever reason we are uneasy about this spiritual gift and therefore we are uneasy about admitting to this spiritual gift as if speaking in tongues undermined sound doctrines.

A few months ago at our denomination's General Synod meeting another pastor came up to me saying: "I also speak in tongues but I keep it quiet." Again the question: Why would you want to keep quiet about a gift from God? Because it might harm your reputation. No one likes to be counted among the weird mob of mindless babblers - and even if we are a little more relaxed about this many of us - I certainly had that attitude - we simply don't want to pray words which we don't understand. What possible purpose can it serve?

Thus, a person who was confronted with the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues muttered to the Lord while standing in front of the bathroom mirror, brushing his teeth: "Now, God, the gift of tongues doesn't really interest me." According to his testimony the Lord's response was intimate and penetrating. He said: "Bob, I've talked to you all these years in your language. Won't you talk to me now in mine?" He forgot all about the toothpaste drooling out of his mouth and down the cheeks. He laughed, then cried, and a heavenly language poured out from his heart.⁸¹

A brief survey of the Bible reveals that the main sources of information about this gift come from the book of Acts and the first letter to the Corinthians.⁸² In the book of Acts speaking in tongues is closely associated with the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Thus, on the day of Pentecost the first disciples received what was promised to them by Jesus - Acts 2:4: "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and [- here is the reference - when the Holy Spirit first came on them, immediately] they began to speak in other tongues/other languages as the Spirit enabled them." Likewise in Acts 10 the gift of speaking in tongues came with the baptism in the Holy Spirit and functioned as a sign of that drenching of the Spirit - Acts 10:44-46: "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The . believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on these people [original: the Gentiles]. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God." In similar fashion Acts 19:6 says: "When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied."

In 1 Corinthians there are further references to speaking in tongues which are very affirmative - 1 Corinthians 12:28: "And in the church God has appointed ... those speaking in different kinds of tongues." 1 Corinthians 14:1-5: "... eagerly desire spiritual gifts ... For anyone who speaks in a tongue ... utters mysteries with his spirit ... He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself ... I would like every one of you to speak in tongues ..." 1 Corinthians 14:13-15: "For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind." 1

⁸¹ Father Robert DeGrandis with Mrs Linda Schubert: Come, Follow Me, Printed in the United States of America 1989, p46.

⁸² Larry Christenson: Answering Your Questions About Speaking In Tongues, Minneapolis: Bethany House 1968, p18-19: "The Bible tells us that speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor. 12:10). St. Paul warns that the tongue can have a false note - like a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal - if the speaker does not manifest the gift *in love* (1 Cor. 13:1); it may be used out of turn (1 Cor. 14:27), or at the wrong time (1 Cor. 14:28). But not even in Corinth, where tongues were greatly abused, does St. Paul suggest that it has degenerated into a purely human phenomenon, the product of excess emotionalism. His plea, rather, is that precisely because this *is* a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, it should be manifested 'decently and in order' (1 Cor. 14:40), for 'God is not a God of confusion but of peace' (1 Cor. 14:33). He does not tell them to *stop* manifesting this gift. On the contrary, he tells them to *continue manifesting the gift* (1 Cor. 14:5a), but in a proper way (1 Cor. 14:13, 28), and with a proper regard for the other manifestations of the Spirit as well (1 Cor. 14:5b)."

Corinthians 14:18: "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you." 1 Corinthians 14:39: "... do not forbid speaking in tongues."⁸³

From this brief survey we can conclude that against all possible protestations we must come to grips with the strange phenomenon of speaking in tongues.⁸⁴ In Acts more than once all that were filled with the Spirit spoke in tongues - everyone! Then 1 Corinthians entices us with the words: "Eagerly desire spiritual gifts. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues" and "do not forbid speaking in tongues." Thus, we may hear a definition of what may happen even in our own lives: "Speaking in tongues is a supernatural manifestation of the Holy Spirit, whereby the believer speaks forth in a language he has never learned and that he does not understand."⁸⁵

Now before we unpack some of the uses and purposes of speaking in tongues, let's tackle one of the most divisive questions associated with this spiritual gift. "Must everyone speak in tongues?" The answer is: "No!" Speaking in tongues is not necessary for one's salvation.⁸⁶ The Bible says - Mark 16:16: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." And Ephesians 2:8: "... by grace you have been saved through faith ..." The key to salvation is faith in Jesus Christ - not speaking in tongues.

Furthermore, when the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians it is quite clear that there were believers who had not yet received the gift of speaking in tongues. He wrote - 1 Corinthians 12:28-30: "... Are all apostles? Are all prophets? ... Do all work miracles? Do all speak in tongues?" The expected answer to these questions was always the same: "No, not all are

⁸³ One needs to acknowledge that the phenomenon of speaking in tongues may also be caused by demonic forces and thus the Bible warns us - 1 John 4:1: "... do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God ..."

⁸⁴ Ernest Gentile: *The Glorious Disturbance. Understanding And Receiving The Baptism With The Spirit*, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books 2004, p117: "Gordon Fee, one of the premier New Testament scholars of our day, says about Paul's intent in the words 'praying in/by the Spirit': *There is every good reason to think that Paul intends this phrase precisely as he has used it elsewhere - especially in 1 Corinthians 14:14-15 (cf. Rom 8:26-27) - to refer specifically to that form of prayer in which the Spirit assumes a special role in praying, especially, though probably not exclusively, praying in tongues. In that passage Paul distinguishes between two forms of prayer: one he will do 'with the mind' and in the public assembly; the other he will do 'in/by the Spirit' and in the privacy of his own life of devotion before God. If that catches some of us off guard because it is so little a part of the prayer life of most people in the church, we probably ought not to read our experience of church back into the life of Paul. What Paul says about this kind of praying 1 Cor 14:1-5 and 14-19 demonstrates that he engaged in it regularly, and that he urged the believers in Corinth to do so as well.*"

⁸⁵ Larry Christenson: *Answering Your Questions About Speaking In Tongues*, Minneapolis: Bethany House 1968, p22.

Ernest Gentile: *The Glorious Disturbance. Understanding And Receiving The Baptism With The Spirit*, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books 2004, p117: "Don Basham put it this way: "Speaking or praying in tongues is a form of prayer in which the Christian yields himself to the Holy Spirit and receives from the Spirit a supernatural language with which to praise God."

Ernest Gentile: *The Glorious Disturbance. Understanding And Receiving The Baptism With The Spirit*, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books 2004, p107: "The Greek word *glossa* means 'tongue' or 'a language spoken.' In the New Testament sense (as used by Jesus in Mark, by Luke in Acts and by Paul in Corinthians), it is 'the supernatural gift of speaking in another language without its having been learnt' (W.E. Vine). 'The technical term *glossolalia* derives from *glossais lalein*, a Greek phrase used in the NT meaning literally *to speak in* [or *with* or *by*] *tongues*' (Spittler). This phenomenon is variously called: glossolalia, glossolalic utterance, praying in the Spirit, spiritual language, heavenly language, tongues, devotional tongues, speaking in tongues, tongues-speech, ecstatic speech and automatic language. The New Testament refers to 'new tongues' (Mark 16:17), 'other tongues' (Acts 2:4), 'different kinds of tongues' (1 Corinthians 12:10) and 'a tongue' (1 Corinthians 14:12). There is no essential difference in any of these four expressions."

Ernest Gentile: *The Glorious Disturbance. Understanding And Receiving The Baptism With The Spirit*, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books 2004, p108: "The 'tongues' miraculously spoken past and present in the Christian Church are not gibberish, irrational or garbled speech, nonsensical jabbering or gobbledygook. I believe, with many others, that spiritual language can be either one of the six thousand actual languages of the world or else angelic language, based on 1 Corinthians 13:1: 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels ...'"

⁸⁶ For instance, such godly men as Martin Luther, Charles Spurgeon, John Wesley, John Knox, George Whitefield, Charles Finney, D.L. Moody and others did not speak in tongues. Cf. John Rice: *The Charismatic Movement*, Murfreesboro: Sword Of The Lord Publishers 1976, p78-80.

apostles! No, not all are prophets! No, not all speak in tongues!" At least not yet. Paul encouraged them - 1 Corinthians 14:1: " ... eagerly desire spiritual gifts ... "

So - not everyone must speak in tongues because it is not a matter of salvation but how many could? If we all desired the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues, how many of us here would end up receiving the gift? My suspicion is that speaking in tongues would not be rare among us. Nicky Gumbel calls it a "beginner's gift" which is frequently given to brand-new believers - accompanying and confirming the infilling of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁷ There is really no maturity level required and in Acts on different occasions all believers - without exception - seemed to have received that gift all at once.

According to National Church Life Survey data from 1996 about 10% of attendees in the Catholic, Anglican, Uniting and other larger non-Pentecostal denominations speak in tongues which compares with a 17% approval level of that gift among Lutherans. Overall 14% of church attendees speak in tongues which compares with a 27% approval level across the denominations.⁸⁸

Now this data could be interpreted in the sense that whoever approves of the gift has a good chance of actually speaking in tongues themselves. There is not such a wide percentage margin between gift approval and actual speaking in tongues - 7 and 13 percentage points respectively - which once again points to the spiritual success rate - if you want to call it that - of the 1 Corinthians 14:1 instruction: "... eagerly desire spiritual gifts ..."⁸⁹ If you approve of the gift, desire it also - eagerly, persistently - and then receive the beginner's gift of speaking in tongues.

Nicky Gumbel writes: "Not every Christian speaks in tongues. Yet [the apostle] Paul says: 'I would like every one of you to speak in tongues,' suggesting that it is not only for a special class of Christians. It is open to all Christians. There is no reason why anyone who wants this gift should not receive it."⁹⁰

Maybe there are some of us here that are still not so sure whether they would enjoy speaking strange-sounding words that they don't understand. What's the use of speaking in tongues? There is more than one use but one of its key uses is simply providing a language or languages for prayer which then express all possible prayer forms such as praise, adoration, thanksgiving, confession, intercession, petition, and so on.⁹¹

The Bible says - 1 Corinthians 14:14: "... if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful." When I pray in an unknown God-given language - either human or angelic (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1) - then my mind is unfruitful which means my mind does not understand the words and that in itself can be good.

A Lutheran pastor writes: "It would seem that prayer in which the mind is unfruitful would have little value. What blessing can it be to pray when you have no idea what you are praying about? Actually, this is one of its greatest blessings - the fact that it is not subject to the limitations of your human intellect. The human mind, wonderful as it is from the hand of the Creator, has limited knowledge, limited linguistic ability, limited understanding, and furthermore is inhibited with all manner of prejudice, little and large. Speaking in tongues is a God-appointed manner of praying that can bypass the limitations of the intellect. One may picture the difference something like this: A prayer with the mind comes upward from the heart and must then pass through a maze of linguistic, theological, rational, emotional and personal checkpoints before it is released upward. By the time 'it gets out,' it may be little more than a slender trickle. An utterance in tongues comes upward from the depths, but instead of being channeled through the

⁸⁷ One may also notice how the apostle Paul rated this spiritual gift last in two enumerations of spiritual gifts which may also point to its nature as a beginner's gift: 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and 1 Corinthians 12:28.

⁸⁸ About half (52%) are neutral or do not have a view on the matter. 21% oppose the speaking in tongues.

⁸⁹ One may also consider that not everyone who approves of speaking in tongues may actually seek that gift for himself.

⁹⁰ Nicky Gumbel: Questions Of Life. A Practical Introduction To The Christian Faith, Colorado Springs: Cook Communication Ministries 1993, p159.

⁹¹ Larry Christenson: Answering Your Questions About Speaking In Tongues, Minneapolis: Bethany House 1968, p80.

mind, it bypasses the mind and flows directly to God in a stream of Spirit-prompted prayer, praise and thanksgiving."⁹²

The Bible also says - 1 Corinthians 14:14: "He who speaks in tongues edifies himself ..." which means - taking in what we've just heard - that as we exercise this gift in our private devotions, some other part of us, besides the intellect, is being built up.⁹³ A woman wrote the following letter to her pastor: "... During the past year my husband and I have felt a deepening in our spiritual lives ... with it came this strange gift of spiritual speaking. Believe me, it was a very humbling experience ... I became discouraged. This strange language was doing nothing for me. But gradually I became aware that my thoughts were shifting from myself and my daily activities to God and his greatness and his love for man. My everyday activities were truly being done to his service, and the presence of Christ was closer to me every day. I have always tried to live my life as a service to God and to be close to Christ, but it was an effort. Now it comes naturally, almost without effort. Now it seems that God is doing these things for me. I can take no credit whatever for this change. All the glory must be to God."⁹⁴ At first it was discouraging and the strange language was doing nothing for this woman but then the words of the Bible proved to be true - 1 Corinthians 14:14: "He who speaks in tongues edifies himself ..."

There is more - 1 Corinthians 14:2: "For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his Spirit." What is this about? Of course if we do not know what we are speaking out to God in tongues the words will always remain a mystery to our human minds. However, that is not quite what is meant. The "mysteries" of God - mentioned here - are a more technical term for the truth, knowledge and will of God. The apostle Paul called himself a "minister of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4:1).⁹⁵ Thus, when we speak out in tongues the mysteries of God with the Spirit of God, then somehow we connect with the deep wisdom of God - divine truth, knowledge and will - which has an effect.

One pastor said about the apostle Paul: "He prayed in the spirit until the 'mysteries' of God began to come alive in his spirit, then as revelation came he passed them on [original: wrote

⁹² Larry Christenson: Answering Your Questions About Speaking In Tongues, Minneapolis: Bethany House 1968, p73-74. Father Robert DeGrandis contends: "The first gift to focus on after baptism in the Spirit would be the gift of tongues. This gift seems to be the 'cork in the bottle'. Once tongues is released, other gifts begin to flow" (Father Robert DeGrandis with Mrs Linda Schubert: Come, Follow Me, Printed in the United States of America 1989, p50). This observation may have some merit because especially this gift seems to humble our intellectual pride and thus makes room for the operation of the Spirit according to His will rather than ours. Ernest Gentile writes: "Speaking in tongues is quite a remarkable idea when you consider the physical process. God gives evidence of the inner presence of the Spirit by using the body member most dependent on volitional, human intelligence: the tongue! 'No man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison' (James 3:8). God controls the most rebellious member of the human body (and by implication, all the others). Bypassing the mind, the Spirit uses the tongue to glorify God in words unknown to the person's brain, and thus, not corrupted by any self-serving motivation. Speaking in tongues allows an individual to pray words undefiled, because it is the Spirit Himself who directs the utterance" (Ernest Gentile: The Glorious Disturbance. Understanding And Receiving The Baptism With The Spirit, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books 2004, p111-112).

Cf. Don Basham: A Handbook On Holy Spirit Baptism, Pittsburgh: Whitaker House 1969, p91: "The willingness to surrender our tongues to God may also indicate a more profound surrender than almost any other act. The tongue is the primary instrument of expression of the human personality, and until God has dominion over the tongue, His control over us is relatively slight."

⁹³ Larry Christenson: Answering Your Questions About Speaking In Tongues, Minneapolis: Bethany House 1968, p76.

⁹⁴ In Larry Christenson: Answering Your Questions About Speaking In Tongues, Minneapolis: Bethany House 1968, p75-76.

⁹⁵ Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:7-16: ". we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery ... which none of the rulers of this age knew ... But God has revealed *them* to us through his Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God ... no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God ... the things of the Spirit of God ... are spiritually discerned ..." Ephesians 3:9; 6:9; Colossians 1:26.

them down].”⁹⁶ According to the same pastor the speaking of tongues can be a key to opening the realm of the Spirit, the key to having the Holy Spirit lead us and guide us into all truth.⁹⁷

Another scholar points out that speaking in tongues “ ... appears to answer the need of the [human] spirit to express the inexpressible, to carry the dialogue with God beyond the narrow limits of clearly intelligible language.”⁹⁸ The Bible says in similar fashion - Romans 8:26: “ ... the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”

One of my colleagues - Dirk Willner, a conservative evangelical mainline Lutheran pastor - he had a near-death or after-death experience where he received a glimpse of heaven. It was awesome - the light, the welcome, ... A few days later he was recovering at home, sitting up in bed, asking God what this experience was all about. Then five angels appeared at his bed-side and he had an audible conversation with them. I won't convey everything that transpired but - apart from communicating with him in English - these five angels spoke five different angelic tongues which Dirk did not understand but he learned that these five languages had five distinct purposes: one was for healing, one for rebuking Satan, one for undoing the works of Satan, one for praising God, one for just having a chat with God.

One angel said to him: “Put out your hand” and then the angel held out his hand which Dirk grasped with his. That happened with all five angels and - now this is even more extraordinary - whenever an angel would take hold of Dirk's hand my Lutheran pastor friend would then also speak in that angel's heavenly tongue. In the end Dirk received five angelic languages from these five angels - languages which he still speaks today. Dirk doesn't know the meaning of the words but can you imagine the potential impact on the world around him when he prays in angelic languages which are for healing,⁹⁹ for rebuking Satan, for undoing the works of Satan?

⁹⁶ Col Stringer: *Praying In The Spirit. Tongues For Personal Edification*, Australia: Col Stringer Ministries 1995, p20.

⁹⁷ Col Stringer: *Praying In The Spirit. Tongues For Personal Edification*, Australia: Col Stringer Ministries 1995, p24. Cf. David Pytches: *Come, Holy Spirit*, London: Hodder And Stoughton 1985, p66-67: “‘Tongues brings inspiration. ‘It seemed to me more and more certain as time went on that this tongue was for the edification of the spirit, not of the conscious mind, for after I had ceased speaking inspiration would come to me. Indeed much of the latter part of ‘Behold Your God’ was given to me in this way, for I would ask a question concerning the mysteries of Jesus Christ and apparently while I was speaking in tongues, my spirit would receive inspiration, and I would write it down.’ (Agnes Sanford *Sealed Orders* Logos 1972 p 223.) ‘I recall the initial glow in my life, walking along the road praising the Lord in a language I knew and in a language I didn't, knowing he was nearer than the near and dearer than the dearest. With a new openness to God I found all my creative faculties awakened. There was a freshness in my soul and in my daily work. I found myself praising God more and doing my work better.’ (Edward England *Renewal* Oct/Nov, 1984) ... ‘I also use this kind of prayer when brief petitions to God for help and guidance are required ... ’ (John Gunstone *Renewal* Oct/Nov, 1984).”

⁹⁸ Paul Tournier quoted in Larry Christenson: *Answering Your Questions About Speaking In Tongues*, Minneapolis: Bethany House 1968, p26.

⁹⁹ This is the reluctant testimony of an Anglican priest who at the end of his academic and respectable book on prayer counseling writes: “ .. I hope you [the reader] won't bail out on me - or on the Lord.

When the Lord directed me to write about ‘singing the Lord's song,’ I complained. I mentioned credibility. He said, ‘What credibility is worth anything unless it's from me?’ I complained of embarrassment. He reminded me that he made Isaiah walk naked for three years as a demonstrated sermon to the Egyptians. *That* was embarrassment. I rejoined that I'm no Isaiah. He responded that, apart from him, Isaiah was no Isaiah. I went back to credibility. He spoke of obedience. I recalled a time I took some flak for this from leaders I respect. He nodded and glanced at his hands, and I was ashamed to complain about flak.

So I proceed. Read the following with whatever lenses God has given you. In the mid-eighties, I attended a conference at which Francis MacNutt sang a song to fifteen hundred people. The song was in a language given by the Spirit. While it went on - about five minutes - I was analyzing it so much that I received no benefit from it. But I was scheduled to join Francis right after the meeting to pray for anyone who would come up.

Just as we were looking over the site assigned for prayer, a woman ran up to Francis in complete unselfconscious joy, declaring an egg-sized tumor on the side of her neck had totally disappeared while he was singing. *That* got my attention. But I wrote it off as a peculiar gift of Francis's, certainly never suspecting that I would ever do such a thing.

I don't know what everyone will make of this but it could throw light on another pastor's testimony. He described the transformation in his ministry when he began using the gift of tongues. He writes: "By the clock I prayed 15 minutes a day in the language of the Spirit and still felt nothing as I asked the Spirit to help me intercede for those he wanted to reach. After about six weeks of this I began to lead people to Jesus without trying. Gangsters fell to their knees sobbing in the streets, women were healed, heroin addicts were miraculously set free. And I knew it all had nothing to do with me."¹⁰⁰

Another altogether different use of speaking in tongues is for God to convey messages to others. This is what happened on the day of Pentecost - Acts 2:4: "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." A bunch of peasant Christians suddenly spoke or were heard speaking in foreign languages which caused a reaction - Acts 2:7-11: "Utterly amazed those listening asked: '... how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ... we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues.' ... "

This still happens today. A preacher (Dave Roberson) noticed that every time he made a statement a man about three rows from the front would bend over and whisper to the man next to him. His righteous indignation began to be stirred up. He was getting irritated and thought: "If they're going to interrupt the service, the least they could do is sit in the back." Somewhere in the middle of his message, the two men stopped whispering to each other, which helped the preacher to concentrate. After the service the preacher was in the back room recovering when someone else came in asking: "Did you notice those two men who were whispering to each other during the service?" He replied: "Yes. They talked about a third of the way through the message and then stopped." "Well, one of them only speaks French. He brought his own translator so he could enjoy the service." The preacher started to feel bad about his irritation. Then the person added: "This Frenchman said that one third of the way through the service, you stopped preaching in English and started to preach in French." He protested: "But I didn't preach in French." "Well, he says you did." It turned out that the message this person heard in French was the same that was delivered in English. God repeated the miracle of making people hear his Word in their own tongues.

Far more examples could be added with lots of different variations. Another common experience is where a person may speak in a tongue unknown to them but communicating to a native speaker of that language in the auditorium. Nicky Gumbel tells the story where an English girl prayed in tongues over a friend which made her friend smile. The words spoken in tongues turned out to be Russian and the friend receiving prayer was Russian and thus she was

A year later I was leading a small midweek worship service when the Lord reminded me of what Francis had done. Then, at considerable impact to my adrenaline gland, he said, 'You do it!' 'Aw, Lord, there you go asking me to do something foolish again.' Silence. 'But Lord, I've never done that before.' Silence.

I know that if I pondered it very much, I'd chicken out. And the twenty or so people were just looking at me, wondering why I wasn't doing or saying anything. So I told them to relax, close their eyes - I didn't want them staring at me - and expect that God was going to bless them in some way while I, uh, sang to them in the name of the Father.

I then sang for about six minutes. As I sang each line, I would hear the next one in my mind. I sang words and tunes I had never heard before. When I thought it should end, I looked at the people. Each one was 'deep in the Spirit.' What do I mean by that? Well, each looked as though he or she might be asleep. None moved. All looked exceedingly peaceful. Some had tears in their eyes. The atmosphere was pregnant with quietude.

I didn't have the courage to ask them what had happened. I felt lucky that I had survived another weirdness, and I fervently hoped I wouldn't be required to do that again. Fat chance! Since then, I suppose I've sung songs like that forty or fifty times. Each time the song is different. Each time people go into deep peace. Each time a few people come to me afterward and tell me what happened to them. For most it was an inner healing. But the Spirit is not limited to inner healing: once a man's scoliosis was straightened during the song; another time a pastor declared that he was delivered of a spirit of homosexuality; many proclaimed that they simply felt the loving presence of God" (Mike Flynn & Doug Gregg: Inner Healing. A Handbook For Helping Yourself & Others, InterVarsity Press 1993, p200-201).

¹⁰⁰ Jack Pullinger in Nicky Gumbel: Questions Of Life. A Practical Introduction To The Christian Faith, Colorado Springs: Cook Communication Ministries 1993, p158.

hearing from God in a supernatural way: "My dear child. My dear child" - over and over again.¹⁰¹

Then the Bible spends more time giving instructions of how a message spoken in tongues may be interpreted by the same person or another person - 1 Corinthians 14:13: "... anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says." In worship services the speaking in tongues with subsequent interpretations used to be a regular occurrence in an ordered way - 1 Corinthians 14:27: "If anyone speaks in a tongue, two - or at the most three - should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret."

At this point the whole matter may become a little confusing. With so many uses for the one gift how can I know what happens when? Well - maybe as we start using this gift God will guide us along the way and maybe we don't have to be in control. However, I may repeat that one of the key uses of speaking in tongues is simply the provision of a language or languages for prayer which seem to operate more in the privacy of our own prayer times rather than in public - 1 Corinthians 14:14: "He who speaks in tongues edifies himself ..."¹⁰²

How do we receive the gift? Do you want to receive the gift? It is a gift! Once again there does not seem to be a fixed method which God employs to bestow that gift upon us. Some receive it literally in their sleep waking up one day with a foreign tongue on their lips. Others seek and desire for years before they receive.

A Lutheran pastor writes: "Many people expect to be seized upon, overwhelmed, and virtually compelled to speak in tongues. But this is not the way the Spirit treats us. He leads, He encourages, He prompts, He gives - but He does not force."

The prompting may be a syllable, a word, or a phrase in the mind; to the understanding it is a meaningless sound, but when spoken out it leads into a new tongue. Or, it may be a certain 'moving of the Spirit' upon the tongue or lips, which will form into syllables and words as one lends the voice. Or, it may be a spontaneous speaking forth, difficult to describe because it is so

¹⁰¹ Nicky Gumbel: Questions Of Life. A Practical Introduction To The Christian Faith, Colorado Springs: Cook Communication Ministries 1993, p155.

¹⁰² Larry Christenson: Answering Your Questions About Speaking In Tongues, Minneapolis: Bethany House 1968, p27: "Those who have experienced this manifestation of the Spirit find that it has great blessing and value. It is no 'frill' or 'extra' in their Christian life - something which they could now take or leave depending upon their mood. It has had a deep, often a transforming effect on their spiritual life. One man expressed it this way: 'Speaking in tongues was a spiritual breakthrough for me.' There is an awareness of having entered a vast new spiritual realm. And this leads to deeper study of the Scriptures, for one wants to know more about this realm that has suddenly taken on new reality. One suddenly finds himself able to understand the Bible far better. One young worker who received this experience said, 'For years I have tried to force myself to read the Bible, but I never got anything out of it - I couldn't seem to understand it. Now I read the Bible every day, and I always get some new thought or insight.'"

Col Stringer: Praying In The Spirit. Tongues For Personal Edification, Australia: Col Stringer Ministries 1995, p30-34: "Let me share again with you the phases that I go through personally as I begin to spend time praying in tongues. Remember this won't happen in just 10 minutes it will take some time and consistency is the key.

Phase 1 - Creativity. Firstly, I find this is my most creative time, the more I pray in tongues the more I experience a moving from the things of the flesh to assessing the mind of the spirit. Usually I start getting ideas flashing through my mind that are obviously not coming from my conscious mind ... Obviously the more I pray in the spirit the more I am building myself up above a walk in the flesh and into a walk in the Spirit, I am actually starting to alter my brain patterns and access the Holy Spirit within me.

Phase 2 - Boredom. Secondly, the longer I pray the more I find my mind gets bored, it doesn't understand what is happening as it is being bypassed. As we have been so dominated by our minds all of our lives it does not like being bypassed and so it now tends to try to get me to quit. I get thoughts like, read a book, listen to tapes, get up and get a cup of coffee - do anything but this, I'm bored! But the more I stay with it the easier it becomes, eventually my mind raises up a little white flag and surrenders.

Paul understood the problem, he says in Ephesians 6:18: 'praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end WITH ALL PERSEVERANCE ...' It takes perseverance to pray in the Spirit!

Phase 3 - Edification, charging up the Spirit man. The third phase, I notice is an edifying, a charging up or my spirit man. Particularly if I have been a little run down or dry, I begin to notice this freshness, a stirring of the anointing within me ... Now I can't say I get this every time I pray in tongues, nor is it always the same but usually if I persevere it will come ...

Phase 4 - Peace, the rest, the refreshing. The fourth phase I experience is peace, the peace that surpasses understanding. Usually my mind cannot grasp why I am at such peace ... "

personal. People's experience of just how it begins seem to vary greatly. Once begun, however, the phenomenon is fairly consistent: A spontaneous and usually fluent language, in which the words are prompted not by the mind but by the Spirit."¹⁰³ "Once a person has spoken in tongues, he may do so at will thereafter."¹⁰⁴

Virtually everyone agrees that the gift of speaking in tongues has to be received by faith – like anything else from God. We receive by faith and thus step out in faith cooperating with the Spirit as we receive the gift of speaking in tongues. This means we cannot expect to receive the gift by keeping our mouths firmly shut. Nicky Gumbel shares how he was instructed by his friends. He writes: "They explained to me that if I wanted to receive the gift of tongues I had to cooperate with the Spirit of God; I needed to open my mouth and start to speak to God in any language but English or another known to me. As I did, I received the gift of tongues also."¹⁰⁵

Ultimately it is simple.¹⁰⁶ Trust that God delights to give good gifts to his children and that speaking in tongues is one of these gifts (Matthew 7:11). Take courage in the fact that many a time all believers received the gift of tongues together (Acts 2:4; 10:44-46; 19:6). Then pray with faith and expectation. Maybe seek out someone that has already received the gift and that can pray with you and for you. Focus your thoughts on Christ. Then – in the words of another pastor – "*simply lift up your voice and speak out confidently*, in the faith that the Lord will take the sound that you give Him and shape it into a language."¹⁰⁷

See what happens. Our faith can be an adventure. If you don't receive, then you may check whether this is God's sovereign choice or maybe there is something in you blocking the release of that gift. Maybe you hold on to unbelief and doubt or fear or feelings of inadequacy or unforgiveness. In any case don't beat yourself up but trust that the Spirit keeps working in you and that God's timing is always perfect.

In closing I want to draw attention to two almost universal temptations which are going to trouble us after we have received the gift of speaking in tongues. The first temptation comes almost at once. We think: "I am just making this up." A pastor writes: "This is a natural thought, for the interaction between the believer and the Holy Spirit is so subtle that it is hard to draw a clear line between my speaking and His prompting. The temptation, when this thought comes, is to draw back and deny the gift, or to quit using it. Our ultimate confidence cannot be the experience itself, but God's Word ... He has promised not to give me a stone when I ask for bread (Matthew 7:9) ... As you continue to use the gift, you will pass through this test ..."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Larry Christenson: Answering Your Questions About Speaking In Tongues, Minneapolis: Bethany House 1968, p125-126. According to Christenson speaking in tongues has the same emotional potential as speech or prayer in one's native tongue (p24).

¹⁰⁴ Larry Christenson: Answering Your Questions About Speaking In Tongues, Minneapolis: Bethany House 1968, p130.

¹⁰⁵ Nicky Gumbel: Questions Of Life. A Practical Introduction To The Christian Faith, Colorado Springs: Cook Communication Ministries 1993, p160.

¹⁰⁶ Nicky Gumbel: Questions Of Life. A Practical Introduction To The Christian Faith, Colorado Springs: Cook Communication Ministries 1993, p162-163: "If you would like to be filled with the Spirit, you might like to find someone who would pray for you. If you don't have anyone who would be able to pray for you, nothing stops you from praying on your own. Some are filled with the Spirit without receiving the gift of tongues. The two do not necessarily go together. Yet in the New Testament and in experience they often do go together. There is no reason why we should not pray for both. If you are praying on your own:

Ask God to forgive you for anything that could be a barrier to receiving. 2. Turn from any area of your life that you know is wrong. 3. Ask God to fill you with His Spirit. Go on seeking Him until you find. Go on knocking until the door opens. Seek God with all your heart. 4. If you would like to receive the gift of tongues, ask. Then open your mouth and start to praise God in any language but English or any other language known to you. 5. Believe that what you receive is from God. Don't let anyone tell you that you made it up. (It is most unlikely that you have.) 6. Persevere. Languages take time to develop. Most of us start with a very limited vocabulary. Gradually it develops. Tongues is like that. It takes time to develop the gift. But don't give up. 7. If you have prayed for any other gift, seek opportunities to use it. Remember that all gifts have to be developed by use.

Being filled with the Spirit is not a one-time experience. Peter was filled with the Spirit three times in the space of chapters 2-4 in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31). When Paul says, 'Be filled with the Spirit' (Ephesians 5:18), he uses the present continuous tense, urging them and us to go on and on being filled with the Spirit."

¹⁰⁷ Larry Christenson: Answering Your Questions About Speaking In Tongues, Minneapolis: Bethany House 1968, p130.

¹⁰⁸ Larry Christenson: Answering Your Questions About Speaking In Tongues, Minneapolis: Bethany House 1968, p131.

The second temptation usually comes after we have exercised the gift for a time - perhaps a few weeks or months. The initial enthusiasm wanes or you may from the beginning not feel very much.¹⁰⁹ and because your mind is not engaged you may actually become bored speaking in tongues. Pay no attention to how you feel.¹¹⁰ We do not pray in tongues because of any emotional thrill. We pray in tongues because the Bible promises positive results as we exercise the gift - such as our own edification, praising God, and so on. Every gift of God involves a stewardship of that gift. A pastor writes: "The great blessing of speaking in tongues is found in

¹⁰⁹ The experience of the Catholic priest Francis MacNutt is interesting. He writes: " ... Not being sure theologically how the baptism with the Spirit related to baptism and confirmation, I could still see that its effects on people's lives were impressive. I decided that I, too, wanted to experience it. Even if it meant my feeling like a fool, I was ready to take the plunge in the midst of all these Protestants ... I made an appointment to pray in a small group for the baptism with the Spirit.

This small group prayed with great fervour for five of us who were seeking, but I received no interior experience. When I voiced my disappointment, they asked if I had prayed in tongues. When I answered no, they asked me if I would like to. I said yes, and proceeded to pray fluently in something that sounded like Russian. Yet it seemed as if I was making up the language on my own, so I was still disappointed. I had not been looking for a particular gift but for a deeper experience of Christ, which I knew was at the centre of it all. So while the group congratulated me for having received the Holy Spirit, I felt frustrated and confused.

One Lutheran minister threw his arms around me, weeping. 'I can see now that even a Catholic priest can receive the Spirit!' he exclaimed. In the midst of this confusion, I went to the dining hall and happened to stand next to Agnes Sanford, one of the three speakers. As an Episcopalian, sensitive to my religious background, she asked me how my prayer for the baptism with the Spirit had gone. I told her about my disappointment.

'Well, frankly,' she responded, 'I had the feeling that your group should not pray for you as they usually do, as if you didn't have the Holy Spirit and were receiving the Spirit for the first time. I think it would be better to pray for you for a release of the Spirit and the charismatic gifts that are already in you through baptism, confirmation and ordination.' That made a lot of sense to me.

So the next evening after supper, Mrs. Sanford and two other friends prayed over me that I might receive this unfolding of the Spirit and the release of all the gifts. As she prayed, she shared a prophecy that the Lord would work through me in bringing healing prayer back to the Catholic Church. When she finished the prayer, all four of us were overcome by a wave of laughter. It was as if a spring of joy had welled up from within me, the joy of the Holy Spirit. Wave upon wave of joy engulfed me. We all laughed together, not hysterically but because we were all filled with joy in the presence of God.

It was in his way - a way that seemed just right and suited for me - that I was baptized with the Holy Spirit. It happened in a way I had not planned but I believe God chose and arranged ... For many of us, the Spirit had been there all the time but was somehow quenched or bottled up. The baptism with the Spirit is a release of the Spirit. (After all, Peter and the other disciples had the Spirit in some measure before Pentecost.)

I have found since then, in praying for many Christian leaders, that ordinarily the baptism with the Spirit is a peaceful experience. For some it is overwhelming, and a manifest change takes place immediately. For most ministers and priests, perhaps, the change is gradual and takes place mainly in the area of their ministry. I have found, too, that Christians who do not receive any obvious experience of the Spirit are often those who are bound by inner sorrow or hurt (and can profit by prayer for healing). Others have grown used to such a restrained, disciplined style of life that they are not free to respond to all the ways the Spirit wants to express God's love and power in our lives.

The change in my own life has been tremendous. Healing and casting out evil spirits really do accompany the preaching of the Good News ... " (Francis MacNutt: *The Nearly Perfect Crime. How the Church Almost Killed the Ministry of Healing*, Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2005, p224-226).

Agnes Sanford reflects on the same circumstances: "The next day he came to me in great disappointment. 'It didn't happen,' he said. 'Oh, I spoke with tongues; that was no trouble. But nothing really happened inside.' 'Well, then, I had better pray for you,' said I. We went with two others into my room, and there, with the laying on of hands, I prayed for the real entering in of the Spirit of God - into the heart, into the soul, into the unconscious. And it did happen! He was so overwhelmed with holy joy that he laughed aloud, not in any hysterical fashion, but in a deep outpouring from the heart. 'Oh, this is the way I thought it would be!' he cried again and again. 'Oh, this is the way I thought it would be!' He has since led countless others into this experience.

This man's first experience in the group, wherein he spoke with tongues, was by no means useless, I am sure. It was authentic, but it was not deep enough. It did not really penetrate the psyche. But very likely it opened the door for the deeper experience, and I am not by any means criticizing it.

The danger of not going deep enough is the old danger of Christianity: pride, inflation, the feeling that one has now attained and is now made perfect; and there is nowhere to go from here. There is no greater danger than this in the whole of the Christian life.

Nevertheless, the Lord uses different people in different ways, according to our circumstances and according to our gifts ... " (Agnes Sanford: *Sealed Orders*, New Jersey: Logos International 1972, p225-226).

¹¹⁰ Dennis Bennett: *How To Pray For The Release Of The Holy Spirit*, New Jersey: Bridge-Logos Publishers 1985, p65.

its regular and disciplined use over a long period of time - months and years - and not in the passing emotion of a few prayer sessions. It is a tool of prayer that is self-sharpening and improves with use."¹¹¹

That's the end of the sermon. We have covered quite some ground today and maybe the final question is: "Where to from here?" The gift of speaking in tongues exists and the Bible says - 1 Corinthians 14:39: " ... do not forbid speaking in tongues." Are we ready to engage and seek this for ourselves? Amen.

¹¹¹. Larry Christenson: Answering Your Questions About Speaking In Tongues, Minneapolis: Bethany House 1968, p132.

Appendix: How To Get Ready For The Infilling With The Holy Spirit

If you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit, then you desire something that Jesus promised to give - Acts 2:38-39: " ... Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you ... and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call."

According to the Bible every Christian has the Holy Spirit in some measure because " ... no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). However, Jesus promised his disciples more. He promised his believing followers that they would be "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5) which means that they would be completely submerged in the Spirit and drenched by the Spirit. Thus, every Christian can seek to be filled and refilled with the Holy Spirit as happened again to the believers in Acts 4:31: "After they prayed ... they were all filled with the Holy Spirit ... "

There is no set method which we can follow and thus control the infilling with the Holy Spirit. We do not control God but there are God-given ways which make us ready to receive the precious gift of the Holy Spirit in the manner God has intended for us. You may get together with someone that can pray for you and with you - perhaps lay hands on you. However, if you do not have anyone that can do that for you, there is nothing holding you back from praying on your own.

Some are filled with the Spirit without receiving the gift of tongues. The two do not necessarily go together. Yet in the New Testament and in experience they often do go together. There is no reason why you should not pray for both.¹¹²

You may follow these steps:

1. Invite God to be present and assert his lordship over you and this time. Pray something like this:

My worship is in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Lord Jesus, as you disarmed the powers and authorities of this dark world and triumphed over them by the cross, be with me now. Cover me with your blood and complete forgiveness so that the devil has no foothold in my life. In your name I bind whatever wants to exalt itself against you and declare that nothing must interfere with your purposes for me now. Amen.

2. Repent and turn away from everything that you know is wrong in your life. Pray something like this:

**Lord God, our heavenly Father,
I am a sinner and I have sinned against you,
not only in my words and actions,
but also in my secret thoughts and desires
which I cannot fully know or understand,
but which you know completely.
I am sorry that I have displeased you,
and repent of the evil I have done.**

Add what comes to your mind about concrete sins which you have committed and sinful practices which have a hold on you.

**For the sake of your dear Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
have mercy on me, forgive my sins,
and graciously help me in my weakness. Amen.**

3. Put your faith in the promises of God. Jesus said - Matthew 17:20: " ... if you have faith as small as a mustard seed ... Nothing will be impossible for you." Then Jesus gave us great encouragement when he said - Luke 11:9-13: " ... Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened ... If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." Trust that everyone who asks will receive the Holy Spirit. Exercise faith.

¹¹² Nicky Gumbel: Questions Of Life. A Practical Introduction To The Christian Faith, Colorado Springs: Cook Communication Ministries 1993, p162-163.

4. Have someone lay hands on you and pray for you or simply pray yourself something like this:

Lord Jesus, I invite you to fill me with your Holy Spirit. Drench me completely with his power and holiness. I want to receive and be open to your gift and presence.

5. Wait for more of the Holy Spirit to be poured out on you. While you wait, keep on "asking", "seeking" and "knocking" until your prayer is answered according to the promises of Jesus - Luke 11:9-13: " ... Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened ... If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

While you wait bring before God any potential blockages to the full release of the Holy Spirit in you, e.g.: sins such as unforgiveness, bitterness, doubt, anger, jealousy, sexual immorality, greed, ...

6. If you would like to receive the gift of speaking in tongues, ask. Then open your mouth and attempt to praise God in any language but English or any other language known to you. "*Simply lift up your voice and speak out confidently*, in the faith that the Lord will take the sound that you give Him and shape it into a language."¹¹³ Pray something like this:

Lord Jesus, please drive away all fear, doubt and confusion about the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. Please help me to surrender the control of my tongue to you. Please help me when I hesitate to give voice to strange sounding words which I do not understand. I thank you that you are giving good gifts to your children and I accept the gift of speaking in tongues from you in expectant faith ...

Now speak out the first sounds that come to your lips and do not be discouraged. Do not worry about how you feel or how you sound.

7. Believe that what you receive is from God. Do not be quick to doubt the experience. Do not be quick to judge that you are not meant to have this gift.

8. Persevere. Languages take time to develop. Most of us start with a very limited vocabulary. Gradually it develops. Speaking in tongues is like that. It takes time to develop the gift. But don't give up.

9. If you have prayed for any other gift, seek opportunities to use it. Remember that all gifts have to be developed by use.¹¹⁴

In closing remember that after the initial baptism with the Holy Spirit we need refillings because we do not always stay on the same level of Spirit power. Nicky Gumbel writes: "Being filled with the Spirit is not a one-time experience. Peter was filled with the Spirit three times in the space of chapters 2-4 in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31). When Paul says, 'Be filled with the Spirit' (Ephesians 5:18), he uses the present continuous tense, urging them and us to go on and on being filled with the Spirit."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Larry Christenson: Answering Your Questions About Speaking In Tongues, Minneapolis: Bethany House 1968, p130.

¹¹⁴ Nicky Gumbel: Questions Of Life. A Practical Introduction To The Christian Faith, Colorado Springs: Cook Communication Ministries 1993, p162-163.

¹¹⁵ Nicky Gumbel: Questions Of Life. A Practical Introduction To The Christian Faith, Colorado Springs: Cook Communication Ministries 1993, p162-163.