

Fire from Heaven?



*Charismatic
doctrine and
practice
in the light
of the Bible*

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Preface

In the past decades, believers and established denominational churches alike have been confronted with miraculous claims made by the charismatic movement. Many people do not know what to make of this. They wonder whether these tendencies and teachings come from Satan's domain? Should we be wary of these developments?

Many other believers who want to believe the gospel are captivated by all these 'new' developments: healing of terrible diseases through prayer, miraculously speaking in foreign or strange languages, dreams and visions recorded in diaries or journals, powerful deliverance from demonic forces... After everything that they have experienced as being 'dead' in Christianity, here at last there is something alive which is supposed to demonstrate the omnipotence of God. At last, there is some proof that our God really is powerful. This is what is claimed.

What is the truth?

The Bible is the Word of God; this Book alone is our authority when it comes to questions of faith. This means that we do not now want to concern ourselves with what various people and leaders have stated or practice, but with the question: what does the Bible say? This is because this holy, unique Book is inspired by God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit Himself has given us this Word - in which the truth about Himself and the gifts of the Spirit are recorded for us.

With this, we do want to give a warning: in many Protestant Churches, including charismatic Churches, increasingly the use of modern Bible paraphrase-like translations is advocated. These are certainly easier for modern day people to understand than some of the more literal translations. But in paraphrases, the 'translators' often express their own thoughts at the expense of God's truth. Besides this, various statements are toned down, which can also result in wrong convictions on the part of some Bible readers. We cannot recommend such paraphrases. The power of blessing of God's Word is neutralised in this way. For this reason, we are using the New King James Version (1982 edition) which is a true translation, not a paraphrase.

We wish each reader the rich blessing of the Lord in reading this brochure.

The Holy Spirit

Who is the Holy Spirit?

In Hebrews 9:14, God's Spirit is referred to as the eternal Spirit. And only God is eternal. The Spirit of God has power and love (Rom. 15:13,30). He is a Person who thinks and judges, and intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26-27). He searches, knows, instructs and convicts (1 Cor. 2:10-11, Neh. 9:20, John 16:8 and 13). He has His own sovereign will (1 Cor. 12:10-11, Acts 13:2). He lives in the believing individual (1 Cor. 6:19) and in the Church as a whole (1 Cor. 3:16, Eph. 2:22). He can be grieved (Eph. 4:30, Isa. 63:10), insulted (Heb. 10:29), His effectiveness can be quenched (1 Thess. 5:19), and you can lie to Him (Acts 5:3).

The Lord Jesus speaks about Him as a Person (see e.g. John 14:16, 17, 26). The Bible confirms in Acts 5:3-4 that the Holy Spirit is God, and in various passages He is - as already mentioned - closely linked to God the Father and God the Son. So the conclusion is clear: the Holy Spirit is **God the Holy Spirit**, hence a divine Person who is equal in position to Father and the Son. He is certainly not a subordinate spirit or a vague influence or force - although, of course, He has all power, because He is God!

God's Word clearly states that there is only one God (1.Tim. 2:5) - but God is revealed as three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although the term 'Trinity' is not found in the Bible, we do find the truth that God is three-in-one. There is only one God, revealed in three Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19, 2 Cor. 13:14, 1 Cor. 12:4-6, Eph. 4:4-6, Gen. 1:26, Prov. 30:4, Isa. 9:6, Mic. 5:2 etc.). This is not a truth which we can understand with our intellect, but one which we accept in faith. Anyone who does not accept this is denying the basis of the Christian faith and, according to the Bible, adheres to false doctrine (2. John 8-11).

What does He do? What is His work?

His coming to the earth in Acts 2 had a very special, clearly defined goal. Actually, He wants to bring about two things: the worship of the Father (John 4:23-24) and the glorification of the Son (John 16:14). He does this primarily by leading unbelievers to Christ (see also John 16:8-11), and subsequently by enabling the individual believer and the Church as a whole to grow.

How does He bring about this growth? By presenting the Word of God to us by means of the gifts which He has given to the Church for this purpose.

It is a fundamental point that the Holy Spirit did not come to earth to glorify Himself or His gifts, and even less to (cause people to) honour individuals who claim to have a gift or whole Churches that take pride in their numerous gifts. But we will read more about this later.

What is the proof that someone has received God's Spirit?

The Bible states and confirms that anyone who has heard and believed the entire message of the Gospel of salvation and thus is saved (Acts 16:31) by faith in the Lord Jesus has also become a child of God (John 1:12), because such a person has been born again through the working of God's Spirit (John 3:5-7). The Holy Spirit lives in him or her.

He is a divine, holy Person, but by God's grace indwells true believers in our dispensation of grace (e.g. John 14,16-17; 1 Cor. 6,19); this is distinctive from what we see in any other dispensation, and we should be thankful for it. He should have all space to govern, lead and encourage us in our spiritual pathway, but never imposes His will. However, if we act against His guidance and will, He will be saddened and finally keep silent (Eph. 4,30; 1 Thess. 5,19).

In Galatians we read that God gives His Spirit and works among us on the basis of the preaching of the faith, and not on the basis of works (Gal. 3:5). The sealing with the Holy Spirit is the consequence of our faith in the gospel (Eph. 1:13). The Spirit brings unbelievers to spiritual life and comes to dwell in believers. This means that God does not give us the Holy Spirit because we are particularly faithful or because we are particularly spiritual Christians. No, only on the basis of faith - the same faith by which we are *all* saved and become children of God; the same faith that God's Spirit Himself brings about, when we are born again by water and the Spirit (John 3:1 ff).

Naturally, God Himself does not need any proof of this. He knows exactly what anyone's internal state is. But the proof of all these things for our eyes as people (who after all do not know the heart) is that such a person confesses with his mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord (1 John 1:6-10; Rom. 10:9).

But this is not yet enough, because we know that it is easy to talk, and many religious people claim that Jesus is their Lord. Often they learned this at catechism or Sunday school. But many have never done anything about it. So God's Word gives us a second criterion: the fruit of the Spirit must be visible in our lives (Gal. 5:22 ff.; Matt. 12:33 ff.).

After all, you can recognise the tree by the fruit. The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16). And this must be evident from our whole life.

As long as we are living on earth, we remain weak, we fall short and often do not pay proper attention to the Word of our heavenly Father. But still - if our life after our conversion has not actually changed, if we remain unchanged, if we act like people of this world, there is something basically wrong. Consider the facts of how the believers in Thessalonica radically changed; they turned away from idols to God in order to serve the living God and to wait for His Son from heaven (1 Thess. 1:8-10).

Please note: it is not the fact that I have a gift (or *claim* to have one) that will

convince people around me that I am born again. No single 'gift' proves that I have the Spirit of God. Do not assume that the devil is not able to imitate the gifts of a shepherd, teacher or evangelist, or of speaking in tongues, prophecy etc. After all, since the day of the Fall, he has been pretending to be an angel of light (2 Cor. 11,14). He imitates the work of God. He was already doing this in Acts (just read 8:9 ff and 19:13).

But even later, here and now in modern day Europe, there are blasphemers who expound wonderful passages in the Gospels from the pulpit. I remember how a thoroughly liberal clergyman preached at the funeral of a neighbour. She had come to faith on her deathbed - a wonderful testimony! And the clergyman had to proclaim the gospel, because it was her last wish... Great thinkers have crept into Christendom and have swept many along with them, but after a time they have revealed themselves to be false teachers. In the Epistle of Jude, they are referred to as 'wandering stars' (verse 13): they go astray themselves and put others on the wrong track. False prophets have existed since, and even many sincere believers cannot distinguish them from real servants of God. After all, these 'prophets' quote from the Bible; they call on God or the Holy Spirit; they say they are working with power from Above (where 'above?'). In Africa, witch doctors speak in all sorts of languages when they go into ecstasy with their incantations. And would you think that the devil can only do this in Africa?

When someone is converted, through grace he receives forgiveness of his sins. God offers forgiveness in and through His Son. Such a person is born again, not through the will of man but through God's Spirit (John 3:5 ff.), and can now freely turn to God as his Father (Rom. 8:15). The Holy Spirit comes to live in his body; his body becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit. And the Lord Jesus says that the Holy Spirit remains in such a person eternally (John 14:16, 1 John 2:27). God does not give the Spirit to people who without faith in the Lord do very good deeds, and He does not reveal His power for this reason either, but He does this on the basis of saving faith in the Lord Jesus. Galatians 3:5 confirms this quite clearly.

The seal of the Holy Spirit

When someone is converted, he receives the Holy Spirit as a seal. A seal is like a stamp, an imprint which reveals that the person is the property of God. But a seal goes further than a simple stamp. A stamp can perhaps be rubbed out, but with a seal no one is allowed to break it. In this way, the tax authorities or the police can seal an office or a house and there is no one who then has the right to enter it. In the same way, the Holy Spirit is a seal on the believer: His indwelling guarantees the fact that the believer is saved for eternity, and that he is the property of the Lord Jesus for eternity. Only someone who is stronger than God would be able to change this - and no such person exists (read Eph. 1:13, 4:30; John 10:28)!

The anointing with the Holy Spirit

Every person who is converted and believes the gospel of salvation, putting his trust in the Lord Jesus, receives the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit comes to live in him. But God's Word also speaks of us being *anointed* with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21, 1 John 2:20,27). This is another aspect of the one same fact. The anointing

emphasises that God's Spirit is given to us because we are chosen by God, and that His Spirit is now leading us into the full truth. It goes so far that those who are born of God, according to 1 John 2:20, now know all things. This is a consequence of our position in Christ; it is our ability, in principle, to know everything through the help of the Holy Spirit and without the need for the 'new light' offered by the false teachers the apostle John was warning about; it is our ability, even though at the same time we still have to learn many things in practice.

Baptism with the Holy Spirit

On the day on which he is sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13), the believer is added to the Church, the Body of Christ, which has existed for twenty centuries now. This Church was formed on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, when the believers at the time were baptised with one Spirit to form one new Body, an entity and unity which was hitherto unknown, and to which subsequently all believers have been added. This is the only event in the Bible which is mentioned in connection with baptism with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11, Acts 1:5 and 8; 11:16; 1 Cor. 12:13).

Some people would like to be baptised 'with the Holy Spirit *and with fire*'. But they do not understand that they are asking for something impossible. In Matthew 3:11-12, which speaks about this, it is also explained that baptism with the Holy Spirit is for believers. Likewise, Acts 1 only mentions that within a few days the disciples would be baptised with the Holy Spirit, but not with fire!

Why? Because baptism with fire indicates something terrible: submersion in the fire of God's judgement. Every tree which does not bear fruit (every person who does not live to the glory of God) will be cut down and thrown into the eternal flame; even the axe is ready, very close to the root! Equally close is the judgement of God for those who reject God and shall be thrown into the inextinguishable fire! So 'Baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire' can never happen to the same person; you cannot receive the Spirit of God and at the same time go into the eternal fire. This is why the expression 'baptise with fire' is never used in reference to believers.

But it goes even further: nowhere in the Bible do you find that believers nowadays must pray to receive the Holy Spirit or to be baptised with the Holy Spirit. Only in Luke 11:13 does the Lord Jesus tell His twelve disciples (the apostles) that the Father will give them the Holy Spirit when they ask Him. This is a promise which we see fulfilled in Acts 1 and 2. When the Lord Jesus had gone up into heaven, the disciples met together in a room and persevered in prayer, while they were waiting for the coming of the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit. The promise was fulfilled and their prayers were answered when a short time later - in Acts 2 - the Holy Spirit came upon them. The Lord Jesus came to the earth once, not time and again; and in the same way the Holy Spirit came to the earth once and will continue to live here in the Church until the Church is taken up into glory. This one time, the 'outpouring of the Holy Spirit' on this group of individual believers, in the Bible is called 'baptism with the Holy Spirit'.

Nowhere else in the Bible do you read about baptism with the Holy Spirit. Nowhere do we find a believer in the Bible times who prayed to be baptised with God's Spirit. And neither do we read about a church that was praying for this.

If your experience and emotions show you something else, you must simply mistrust your experience, because the Bible is the ultimate authority for a child of God. Otherwise you are in danger of being misled by your emotions through which Satan is working, and of believing in something which is plainly contradictory to God's Word.

Negative: to grieve or even quench the Holy Spirit

When a believer sins, the Holy Spirit is not taken away from him [1] . But God's Spirit is grieved (Eph. 4:30). When a believer continues to ignore warnings and admonitions by the Spirit through his conscience and the Word of God, the working, the activity of the Holy Spirit in this believer (or collectively, in the assembly life) is quenched (1 Thess. 5:19). This continues until he confesses his sin and can again enjoy complete fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:9).

Positive: being filled with the Holy Spirit

But when the Holy Spirit has every opportunity to guide us, He will lead us into complete truth (John 16:13). We will be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18), and this will become evident. But this is not revealed through ecstasy, as it customary in Hinduism or paganism when someone is possessed by higher (occult) powers. No, it is revealed through a life in fellowship with the Lord, a life of prayer, worship and thanksgiving, a life in which as believers we encourage one another to follow the Lord faithfully (Eph. 5:18-21, Col. 3:16-17).

No. Footnotes of last chapter

[1] Bible passages such as John 14:16 and 1 John 2:27 show clearly that the Holy Spirit remains in the believer eternally. The case of David in Psalm 51:11 was very different. Firstly, David was an Israelite under the law; he lived long before the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, and hence long before the Holy Spirit came to the earth to live in believers. At the time of the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit worked on earth but did not live here in any person or company. Then He was not known as a divine Person (the truth of God's trinity is only clearly taught in the New Testament). This means that the translation, 'Do not take Your spirit of holiness from me' is more accurate than, 'Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me'. The apostle John tells us that the Holy Spirit could be with Old Testament believers, but in the future would be in them (from Acts 2 on, as explained)

For what purpose does the Holy Spirit dwell in the believer and in the Church?

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a special and unique blessing for the believers of our time only; it was not known in the dispensations before. Though the Holy Spirit from the very beginning was working in souls and came upon some of them for special purposes and tasks, He only came to live in the believer and in the Church as a whole from the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 on (see e.g. John 7,39; Acts 1,5; 1 Cor. 3, 16 and 6,19; 2 Cor. 1,21-22).

As we have already seen, He came to cause us to worship the Father and to glorify the Son. The Spirit does not glorify Himself, and He definitely does not bring about the glorification of any person, however spiritual he or she may seem to be or however great his gifts may seem to be in the eyes of people (John 4:23-24, John 16:13-14)!

This is why the singing of Christians and the Spirit led thanksgiving and worship of believers should never be an endless repetition of superficial phrases without substance, accompanied by rhythmic or even ecstatic music, as has been customary among pagans since the days of Cain's descendants (Genesis 4). Words which are (or seem to be) Christian but which are accompanied in this way are a mixture of Christianity and paganism - characteristic of Babylon, the great harlot in Revelation 17:1 ff.

Many contemporary Christian songs have hardly any depth and do not reflect the abundance of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hidden in Christ. They tend to be like the mantras of Hinduism or like other forms of paganism, which seem to have found their way into certain forms of gospel music as well.

No, Christian worship is something spiritual, something which is brought about in our spirit by the Spirit of God through reflection on the glory of the Person and the work of Christ. This is expressed in a spiritual way, not with overt pomp and circumstance or features which appeal to the flesh. We do not come to adoration or true worship through drumming or rhythmic clapping and dance which is meant to lead us into ecstasy and is meant to cause us to lose selfcontrol, as is sometimes the case in what is supposed to be worship.

No, it is the Holy Spirit who leads us to live soberly, righteously and godly (Titus 2:12) - and this applies to our worship too. Outwardly, this is sober, but it rises up from the depths of our hearts to God and is brought about through His Spirit.

This worship is the believer speaking openly to his Saviour, Jesus Christ, and to his Father in heaven, to glorify Him because of His great love and because of the majesty of His Person.

Let us not use idle repetitions, of little substance, as pagans still do. God's Word warns us expressly about this in Matthew 6:7 and Ecclesiastes 5:2. Some believers have the habit in their prayers and songs of endlessly repeating the same question or remark. They sing twenty-five times, *Jesus has saved us*. They pray endlessly, *Will*

You please do this?... This endless repetition is far from adoration or worship!

Let us be realistic: would we speak in this way to our father or mother? They would consider this to show a lack of respect or trust. How much less should it be that a child of God addresses God with such an ill-considered, repetitive sentence?!

Please note: when people are glorified for their gifts, whether it is a vicar, pastor, priest or church denomination, when authority is wielded by people and everything is centred around a person, when nothing can be done without the agreement of a person, whatever his title may be (3 John 9-10) - then it is abundantly clear that this is a work that is not brought about by God's Spirit, because He did not come to the earth to glorify people!

Speaking in tongues - what is it?

In Acts, in *certain, specifically defined* situations, some believers spoke in existing languages, when there were Jews present (Acts 2, 10:19). This happened in cases where for the first time people from a *new* target group repented and believed in the Lord Jesus: from among the Jews, the Gentiles and the special group of disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus. This was the initial fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy (Isa. 28:11).

First we read in Acts 2 of believers among the Jews who were baptised with one Spirit into one Body, to form the Church of God (1 Cor. 12:13). Then believers from the mixed race of the Samaritans were added (Acts 8), followed by believers from among the Gentiles (Cornelius and his household, Acts 10) and the disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19). The Holy Spirit ensured that the latter three groups did not form their own fellowship or Church, independent from the one Church which had now already come into being in Jerusalem. No, it was to remain one universal Church of God. So it was something unique and collective, quite exceptional at the time.

There is no proof at all and no reason whatsoever to think that the believers in Acts always spoke in other languages (or tongues) as a proof of their conversion and the fact that they had received the Holy Spirit. On the contrary: do we read about it in relation to the 3,000 souls who were added in Acts 2? Or in relation to Barnabas, Philip, Stephen, the eunuch from Ethiopia, the Church or the believers in Samaria, Antioch, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Thessalonica, Athens ...? Most definitely not! Not once in any of these places.

Only in the First Epistle to the Corinthians does Paul speak about this again. But in all other cases (some thirty churches in the New Testament) no word is uttered about this (consider the other epistles from the apostles Paul, Jude, Peter, James, John and the seven letters in Revelation 2 and 3). This ought to be enough to realise that it is wrong to say that anyone who has received the Holy Spirit must of necessity speak in other languages (for: 'Do all speak in tongues...?'; 1 Cor. 12,30). Or that we should wait in prayer for a type of second conversion: a supernatural experience in which we suddenly - we ourselves do not know how - come to speak in tongues. Even in New Testament times, this was definitely not the case.

Is speaking in tongues proof that God's Spirit is in me?

The proof that someone has received the Holy Spirit has never been that he spoke in other languages or tongues, because even in New Testament times, only a few people had this gift (1 Cor. 12:29-30, 1 Cor. 13:8, 1 Cor. 14:27 etc.) So we stand by what we have already seen in the Bible: the proof of the fact that someone is saved and that God's Spirit lives in him (1 Cor. 6:19) is the confession of his mouth (Rom. 10:9, cf. also 1 John 1:6-10 etc.), which is inevitably accompanied by the revelation of the fruit of the Spirit in his life (Gal. 5:22 vv; Matt. 12:33 vv).

So beware of sidelining the Word of God in favour of your experience!

Speaking in tongues in Bible times

The fact that someone has a gift, or pretends he has, is never proof that he has the Spirit of God. For example, see Acts 8:9 and Acts 19:13. Almost all the gifts which God has given as a sign to certain believers, such as speaking in tongues and performing miracles, have also been performed by pagan sorcerers in the past and are even now. Consider some of the miracles which Pharaoh's sorcerers performed in Exodus 7 and 8. Only, the devil can never give *life*.

So in the Bible, no single gift is stated as being the distinctive characteristic by which you can recognise a believer, or as something by which you can see that he has received God's Spirit. Not even speaking in tongues!

But of course many people ask lots of questions about this subject. This is normal and indeed a good thing. These questions should always cause us to open God's Word to consider what is actually the case according to God's thinking (Acts 17:11).

How was speaking in tongues done in Bible times?

The Bible is the Word of God. So this Book is our Guide, our authoritative norm, our 'Handbook' which alone - under the leadership of God's Spirit - can make His thoughts clear. There is no other book, no other writer who could take this place. The Bible also teaches us very clearly about speaking in tongues. The divine Word says the following:

- Speaking in tongues is a gift of grace, which - like every other gift - is accorded to believers by God the Holy Spirit in accordance with His own will. He gave it to whom He wanted, and as He wanted (1 Cor. 12:11.18). So it is never something which we can demand or which we can gain through human effort (1 Cor. 12:4-5). We must earnestly desire the best gifts (1 Cor. 12:31). But firstly speaking in tongues is definitely not among these, as this passage demonstrates; and secondly, this task means that we must make an effort to serve and edify the Church as well as possible through the Word (the service of prophecy, 1 Cor. 14:3) - and speaking in tongues was not given for this purpose.
- Not every believer had the gift of speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 12:28 vv), although all had received the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:19).
- In assembly meetings, it was only practiced when there was someone there to interpret (1 Cor. 14:27), as there might be someone present who did not know the local language.
- In assembly meetings, it was only practiced by two or at most three brothers (1 Cor. 14:27).
- These brothers spoke one after another, so not all at the same time (1 Cor. 14:27). This is actually a general rule for any form of service or prayer in the Church! The modern habit of all praying aloud at the same time (that is, all talking at once) in the church is a disorder which goes against the plain instructions of Scripture.
- Speaking in tongues is indicated by God Himself to be one among the lesser gifts, figuring amongst the smallest, the least, the most insignificant. See 1 Corinthians 12:28-31 and 14:1 and 39. If need, the apostle Paul used the gift during his missionary travels to many lands. But the believers were encouraged

much more to speak in accordance with the greater gifts of grace, in particular the gift of prophecy. Prophecy means speaking the Word of God in order to edify and encourage others, the church (1 Cor. 14:3).

- Without an explanation, speaking in tongues was only edifying for the person speaking in this way (1 Cor. 14:2.4). However, in the church the edification and encouragement of *all* those present must be intended and achieved. This was why it was better to speak five words in the Church with understanding than ten thousand in tongues. This is what the apostle says in 1 Corinthians 14:18-19, inspired by God's Spirit.
- It was strictly forbidden for women to exercise this gift or to perform any other public service during the meeting of the Church, including praying aloud, testifying or announcing songs. See 1 Corinthians 14:34-37; compare also 1 Tim. 2:11-12.
- It always related to actual, existing languages (Acts 2:11). Pronouncing some incomprehensible stream of sounds and calling this 'speaking in tongues' is unbiblical, nonsensical and a completely unhealthy fallacy.
- Neither did it relate to languages of angels, as some would like us to believe by making a misplaced appeal to 1 Corinthians 13:1. This text is a hypothetical reference by the apostle to the pride of some Corinthians who considered their own speaking in tongues to be a notch above that of others, and who made themselves out to be more spiritual by pretending that their 'tongue' was no ordinary human language.

Why was the gift of speaking in tongues given?

As a sign to 'this people' - that is not to any random people, to the nations or to various tribes, but to a very specifically designated people, namely to *Israel*. After all, this people did not want to listen to God, despite all the prophets He sent. So even after the death of His Son, He made a last attempt to break through their pride by addressing Himself to the Gentiles in gentile languages while the Jews were present. In this way, He made it clear that His grace and favour were no longer limited to one single earthly people. Just read 1 Corinthians 14:21-22, Isaiah 28:11-12 and Romans 10:19.

This is why we read that divided tongues, like fire, appeared over the disciples and settled on each of them. The term *tongues* implies speaking. The fact that the tongues were *divided* reminds us that during the construction of the tower of Babel, God's judgement came on people. Indeed, the very existence of all these languages is not a blessing, but actually a judgement - a fact that seems to be forgotten in the charismatic movement. The more languages are spoken, the more cause there is to recall God's judgement on the pride of man. Is this what we want when we are together as assembly? Is this the goal of this gift?

In the heaven, there will not be many tongues or languages and no divided tongues at all. This qualifies the value of this gift quite considerably, if we come to think about it. Moreover, the tongues were even divided *like fire*, and in Scripture, fire always indicates God's judgement.

So what did this gift testify? It was a sign, namely the public proof that God had turned to the nations to save them too. This was a cause of falling and very upsetting to the Jews. In general, they were proud of their religion, and because of this were smug, satisfied with the fact that for centuries God had restricted Himself to them alone. See for example Luke 20:16, Acts 13:46-50, Acts 17:5.13, Acts 18:12.

Why was this gift necessary just then? This is a good question. Why did the apostles not simply learn the gentile languages at a type of 'language school'? Well, simply because God wanted to show His approval of the Word which was preached; because He wanted the gospel to be spread quickly, even until the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:19); and because He knew that within a relatively short time the believers would be driven out of Jerusalem (Acts 8:1).

In Acts 2, we read what they said in those other languages: the wonderful words of God! Do you not think that the people who heard them in their own languages were the benefactors of the gospel being preached by those from that upper room? So that is one reason more why He gave them the opportunity to be able to speak these languages immediately in a miraculous way.

God can now, for example, help missionaries who are learning the language at a language school or in a pagan village, but without the special pressure of time unique to the apostles' era, there is no need of any supernatural gift.

In Acts 2, Jews from many different countries had come together to celebrate the Pentecost in their holy city of Jerusalem. They were extremely surprised when they

heard the apostles speaking in the gentile languages of the countries where they (the visitors) had been living, sometimes for many generations (for example, in Corinth in present day Greece, in Turkey, Egypt and Libya, there were large Jewish settlements; see verse 11.)

So because this gift was a sign for the unbelieving Jewish people, it was completely pointless to employ the speaking in tongues in places where there were no Jews to be found anywhere around to hear about it and for whom it might be a sign - this applies today even more.

Even in a city like Corinth, there was a large Jewish settlement with synagogues. This is why we find strict instructions about the use of this gift in the First Epistle to the Corinthians. The believers in this city were practicing this gift in the wrong way. They were not respecting at all what God says about it in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Actually, this is the only place where it is stated that people were speaking in tongues at the church meetings - and at the same time, there were terrible immoral and unspiritual practices in their midst. This already shows that being spiritual and speaking in tongues have nothing to do with one another.

A striking detail: you do not read anything more about speaking in tongues in the second epistle that the apostle addresses to them, after the believers in Corinth had repented, had turned back to the Lord and were again displaying spiritual convictions ...

Are all gifts intended for all times?

Various gifts were given for a certain time, with the special goal of confirming the message which the apostles and their fellow workers were proclaiming (read and consider quietly passages such as 1 Cor. 13:8, Heb. 2:3-4, Mark 16:17-18, 2 Cor. 12:12). This is nothing new. For while God is always the living, almighty God who performs miracles, in the Old Testament He only granted such visible signs to a few men of God. Consider Moses and Elijah. But others, such as Abraham, David, Isaiah and Jonah, were never given a gift or instructions to perform signs. They had to convince the unbelievers not through miracles but by the Word of God.

To make it completely clear: nowhere in the Scriptures do we find a complete list of all conceivable gifts. This is understandable. After all, there are many ways of edifying and encouraging believers. The gifts that are intended for the building up of the saints, for the edification of the Assembly, are listed in Eph. 4. The gifts mentioned there include those of the apostles and prophets of the initial period, who are no longer with us (except through their writings). They laid the foundations for the Church and later they died. Actually, it was a requirement for an apostle that he had seen the Lord Jesus here on earth; see Acts 1:21-25.

The passages in Romans 12:1-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and 27-31 mention even more gifts, both temporary and continuing.

Why did precisely this gift of speaking in tongues have to confirm the gospel message? Very simple: the Word of God had then not yet been completed. But since the time of the apostles, no new truths have been revealed (Col. 1:25-26), so the Word of God has been complete for over 19 centuries now. When the Bible had not yet been fully completed, God confirmed the authority of those who were proclaiming the gospel (Heb. 2:3-4; 2 Cor. 12:12) by means of these signs and wonders (which were signs and proof of the apostleship).

But nowadays, when a Jew (or anyone) wants to know whether what Christians are proclaiming is true, it is not necessary for the sick to be healed, other languages to be spoken or the dead to be raised. No, for such a person, it is more than enough if he is convicted of sin, righteousness and judgement by reading God's Word, so that he then accepts God's grace through faith.

A Jew will understand even more if he sees that the Bible has now been translated into many languages and that God addresses all people without making a distinction between language, religion, race, culture or gender. God wants to save everyone through the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is worth making the point that the Church was entirely new, a work of God, not predicted by the prophets in the Old Testament times. Therefore, its authenticity and divine origin could not be proved from the Bible. Therefore, God gave miracles on its birthday to demonstrate that it was

His work. Obviously, the need to draw attention to the new beginning is just for the time of the beginning

Dreams, apparitions and visions

The question which occupies many Christians is this: does God nowadays still reveal His will to us by means of dreams?

Based on an article by Christian Briem, with a few additions, we would like to present the following considerations:

In the New Testament, only the evangelist Matthew speaks about dreams, and he mentions that God gave instructions 'in a dream' (Matt. 1:20; 2:12, 19, 22). He also says that Pilate's wife suffered much in a dream because of the Lord Jesus (27:19).

The lack of dreams after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is certainly significant: nowadays - in the time of grace - God does not want to guide us through dreams, but through His Spirit, who dwells in us (1 Cor. 6:19; 1 John 2:20; John 16:13-15). Besides this, we have the Bible, the complete, written Word of God, to which we must not add anything and from which we may not take away anything (Col. 1:25, 26, Rev. 22:18-19). And God wants to use this very Word to make His will known to us.

When it comes to recognising God's will, the role of the Bible is primary and determines everything. The Holy Spirit will *never* show us a way which is in conflict with the Bible, God's Word. For example, we can never say, 'The Holy Spirit is leading me to do this or that', when this is not in agreement with the Bible. God has revealed Himself and His thoughts to us completely in His Word. He wants to lead us in our spiritual and moral lives, and does this by bringing about in us an inner conviction; He wants our lives to be in agreement with His own being.

When you are led by dreams, this inner aspect is lacking: you are led by something which comes from outside, without any profound consideration of what God's Word says about the subject. This means that dreams were suitable in the time before God had revealed Himself in all His fullness in Christ.

In these earlier times, God spoke many times and in different ways to people by means of prophets (see Heb. 1:1). But in our time, He speaks to us in Christ (verse 2). He is the Word of God which became flesh (a Man). In the same way, the written Word of God is sufficient for us - sufficient to guide us and to point the way. Our God encourages us: 'I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go' (Ps. 32:8). He watches us with His eye and leads us - but for this we must live close to Him in His fellowship. 'Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle (verse 9). This means that

we must certainly not have the unhealthy attitude of looking out excitedly every day for dreams and visions as guidance for our course through life. But rather we must have a clear vision of the Lord Jesus, in a life of fellowship with Him. This is the way in which He wants to guide us!

Often the book of Job is mentioned: 'God may speak in one way, or in another, yet man does not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls

upon men, while slumbering on their beds, then He opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction. In order to turn man from his deed, and conceal pride from man, He keeps back his soul from the Pit, and his life from perishing by the sword' (Job 33:14-18). Indeed, God used to speak in different ways in the past (Heb. 1:1), in order to bring people back from their wicked ways. Even this often-quoted passage from Job 33 does not say that God spoke in dreams to *His children*, but to unbelievers!

This passage from Job was written long before Acts 2, and hence before the Holy Spirit came to the earth to live in believers and to guide them. This was the period before the Word of God was completed, that is before the Bible was complete.

In our time, no revelations of new truths are possible anymore. And woe to the person who makes such false revelations known, as Revelation 22:18-19 emphasises, even if it is a believer who claims to have received this revelation in a dream from God.

We certainly believe that God still works in a miraculous way in our time. In particular in areas where the Word of God is still completely unknown (for example among pagan tribes or in closed Islamic regions). In such places God can certainly also make Himself known through a vision to a seeking soul who does not have access to the Bible, or even to someone whose conscience is hardened.

But as born again Christians, we can be completely convinced that the Bible is more than sufficient for us to know the way that God wants us to take personally, as a family, as a servant or as a local church. It is certain that God wants to guide His children, step by step! It is certain that He speaks to us through His Word and His Spirit. This is a voice directed to us very personally, which convinces us of the way which we should go: '*Your Word* is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path' (Ps. 119:105).

Several (mainly older) believers have told me that at a certain moment they saw the Lord Jesus in a dream or that He clearly said something to them. In principle, I do not reject this possibility completely, that the Lord Jesus can nowadays give instructions or warnings in certain exceptional cases by means of dreams. But in general we must be very cautious in this. In the majority of cases, dreams are the natural consequence of impressions we have absorbed during the day in our soul and emotions; these impressions are often added to our subconscious in a strange way and reflected in a dream. This means absolutely nothing to us as believers. However, if we think a dream contains a message from the Lord, we must realize this point: it surely will never in any sense contradict the plain instructions from His divinely inspired Word.

It is true that the New Testament speaks several times about the fact that 'we see Jesus' (Heb. 12:2-3, see also 2 Cor. 3:18 and Heb. 2:9, Heb. 3:1). However, this relates to the fact that we have Him in sight through faith. This is different from seeing Him bodily. We must remember that the glorified Lord does not show Himself physically to people, not even in a dream.

For a brief moment, Stephen and Paul saw the Lord Jesus in His glory, but this was

something completely different; and besides this, it had nothing to do with dreams.

We must not be concerned at all about our subconscious or about dreams, but about the clear things which God has revealed to us in His Word, in particular about the Lord Jesus Himself. It is always Satan's intention to draw us away from the Lord Jesus and His Word, so that we are involved with things which are in themselves doubtful and only bring unrest in our inner being. In this regard, I want to give an express warning about autogenic training and other similar practices (that is a certain mind and body technique involving relaxation and body awareness exercises with an occult background).

What are apparitions and visions? They are different from dreams, because they are experienced consciously. This is made quite clear in the examples of Cornelius and Peter in Acts 10 and 11. Peter had a vision when he fell into a 'trance' (Acts 10:10 and Acts 11:5). But he answered consciously when the voice spoke to him. And Cornelius immediately took the appropriate action after the angel who had spoken to him had departed, and he sent his men to Joppa. For this man of faith, the conversation with the angel was almost like a normal conversation with an earthly interrogator. The apostle Paul also experienced consciously how an angel of the Lord, and even the Lord Himself, stood next to him at night. In both cases, he was told important information about his future life (Acts 27:23 and Acts 23:11). Here the word 'vision' is not used, but it was definitely a vision.

For myself, I am convinced that such visions are in principle still possible today. But with this the previous warning also applies, that we must not be seeking such things, but must always be focussing our attention on the Lord Jesus Himself. In general, in the latter times with so much weakness, the Lord will not often speak through visions. After all, we have His Word and His Spirit, and this is enough! It is true that today there are so-called churches and movements in Christianity in which much value is placed on visions and appearances of the Lord (in the charismatic movement, as well as in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches). We need to test these things in the light of God's Word to see whether they are genuine and God-given. This way, we can be certain that these are extremely unhealthy things which are not from God. And the simple but honest proof of this is that in these movements, the Lord Jesus and the Word of God are to a certain extent pushed to the side and replaced by people and their imaginations and fantasies.

Still, on the basis of God's Word, in principle we do not want to exclude the possibility that even today the Lord can come to the aid of His special servants in specific situations in a supernatural way. But we must hold onto this fact: we do not need visions (and certainly not dreams) about things which God has clearly revealed in His Word. And all dreams and visions which are contradictory to this unique, holy Word of God come from human imagination and/or the mind of the arch liar (Satan, John 8:44).

Other phenomena

The gift of healing

With this gift, too, it is the case that it was practiced exclusively to the glory of God, and never to the glory of the 'gifted person' (who claimed to have a so-called 'healing ministry'). This gift certainly did not occur at all times in the Bible. Even at the time of the Lord Jesus and the apostles, not all the sick were healed. This was definitely not only or primarily because of a lack of faith on the part of the sick. Timothy was a valuable, faithful and dedicated fellow worker of Paul. He did not have very good health (1 Tim. 5:23), but Paul did not heal him, any more than he healed Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25 ff) or Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20). Nowhere in Scripture do we read of a campaign of healing. Neither the Lord Jesus nor the apostles ever stooped to this.

Much good literature has already been written about this, so I do not want to go into this further. I would like to refer you to the recommended books which are listed at the end of this brochure.

Saved but possessed?

According to some people, believers can still be possessed by demons. This is one of the reasons why in recent years the so-called ministry of deliverance has been flourishing. What does Scripture have to say? If the Son of God makes us free, we are free indeed (John 8:32.36). Being really free means being completely free from the power of sin, completely free from fear and enslavement by the devil, who once had the power over death (Heb. 2:15), completely free from the fear of death (1 Cor. 15:54-57). As believers, we can still become ill (physically and also mentally). This is shown clearly in texts such as 2 Timothy 4:20.

Unfortunately, often a direct link is made between illnesses and personal sin, as was also done at the time of the Lord Jesus (see John 9:2). As a general principle, this is a very serious mistake (except for the 'sin unto death' of 1 John 5 and a serious case like 1 Cor. 11, where many were weak and fallen asleep). It is a mistake which various 'deliverance pastors' also make, in order subsequently to be able to drive the 'evil spirit of the illness' or 'the demon of depression' out of a believer.

Do I mean by this that after our conversion we can no longer be plagued by previous sins? We most certainly can! And the consequences of these sins can also still cause us problems. After his conversion, an alcoholic must be very careful not to fall back again; and after his conversion, his liver can still be seriously damaged. Someone who was bound by the powers of evil before his conversion can still definitely be attacked after his conversion. This can be terrifying, and he may desperately need the prayers of fellow believers and counselling by experienced workers.

But still it is always true that in all these things, we are more than conquerors. By ourselves? Through our own strength? No, certainly not, but through Him who loved us, Jesus Christ. Because we can be sure that no angels, authorities or forces of

evil can separate us as children of God from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (read Rom. 8:37-39). For the One who is in us (the Holy Spirit) is greater and more powerful than he who reigns in this world, Satan (1 John 4:4).

No, if we believe in Christ and so are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13), our body has become a temple of the Holy Spirit, who now lives in us (1 Cor. 6:19). It is no longer possible for demons or evil spirits to live in this same body anymore. So they can no longer be driven out either. What agreement does God's temple have with idols? Or light with darkness? Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

It is the case, as stated, that those who previously had ties with the occult in particular can still be bothered by these spirits. Prayer for them is really necessary. But consider: if we go our way completely separated from evil, the devil may attack us, because he is going round like a roaring lion. But he cannot harm our spiritual well-being if we remain in fellowship with the Lord.

Read also the first part of Job 1, in particular verse 10. Here the devil himself is shown to be powerless to do anything to the believing Job except within the boundaries set by God, because God Himself is protecting him. Let us stay within the hedge of God's fellowship, and then no evil will overcome us outside the will of Him who also gives us the strength to bear it.

God's Word warns us against being too hasty in the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 5:22) - or conversely of being overhasty in allowing hands to be laid on us by so-called 'deliverance pastors'. The laying on of hands signifies that you become one with each other. This means even with the sins of the other person or the powers to which he lays himself open; keep yourself pure from such things (verse 22b)!

A similar warning is necessary about driving out demons from church buildings, from a sickbed or deathbed or other places. In the middle ages, these pagan practices were widespread - first practiced by German sorcerers, then by Roman Catholic priests, and now they are making an entrance in charismatic circles. Keep far away from every form of evil (1 Thess. 5:22)!

For where Christ is, the devil will not stay. He trembles when he thinks about the one, almighty God, and his evil spirits will avoid such a confrontation (James 2:19). This is why in James 4:7, there is a very encouraging exhortation for every believer who places his trust in God, namely that we must resist the devil and 'he will flee' from us. Not: he may perhaps flee. And not: in the end he will flee. No: *he will flee*. And he does not do this out of fear of you or me, but of Christ and of God's Spirit who lives in us. Our only job is to draw near to God and thus resist the devil.

Falling 'in the Spirit'

The fruit of the Spirit (see Gal. 5) consists among other things of love, joy, peace and patience. The wisdom which comes from God is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace (see James 3:17-18).

With certain so-called revival preachers (particularly in some English-speaking countries), in contrast, egotism, greed, discord, brutality and severity play a great role. Unfortunately, where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are to be found (see James 3:16). Because of this, we know immediately that such preaching does not come from the working of God's Spirit.

For as with all other forms of human religion, in the charismatic movement, too, we find such anomalies, which arise from man and his prince: the devil, the liar from the beginning. Recently, there was a report on the internet about how someone was beaten by such a 'pastor' during the so-called 'exorcism' of demons, with the result that the person fell to the ground like a log - supposedly because the evil spirits had been driven out, but in reality because the woman had been beaten into unconsciousness. A sad deception by the devil himself! What is of the flesh is flesh and remains carnal, even if such a person is called an 'apostle' or a 'revival preacher'.

Another aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is **self-control**. So any form of ecstasy is literally evil, that is to say, originates from the devil. God's Spirit never causes ecstasy and loose morality, but self-control in the fear of the Lord. The worship, praise and thanksgiving which believers bring, they bring through the Spirit but also with their minds (1 Cor. 14:15). The worship that God's Spirit brings about is always in agreement with the truth (John 4:23; John 16:13). When common sense and God-fearing sobriety are eliminated, the focus has already turned away from God (1 Cor. 16:13, 1 Pet. 5:8). Then, anomalies occur such as so-called falling in the Spirit, screaming, shrieking, hysterical 'laughing in the Spirit' and whatever else has been devised by the arch deceiver. Indeed people fall in the spirit - they relinquish their own spirit and lay it open to influences by evil spirits.

May the Lord keep us all from turning away from His Word, from drifting along on emotions which do not reflect His thinking, and from glorifying ourselves, our supposed gifts or other people whose god is their stomach, their own ego. They think earthly things. Turn away from them and cling to the eternal Rock, who never changes. He is the mighty God, who even today can perform miracles, if He considers it necessary. And He will also sustain us in the midst of so many false teachings which undermine His Word.

'The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.'

Recommended literature and resources, to be ordered from the publishers

H.L. Heijkoop: The Holy Spirit is a divine Person

H.L. Heijkoop: Faith healing, speaking in tongues, signs and miracles in the light of Scripture R.P. Daniel: From Truth to Fables

S. Ridout: The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit W. Kelly: The NT doctrine on the Holy Spirit

E. Dennett: God's way of peace; of rest, power & consecration; of holiness H.A. Ironside: Praying in the Holy Spirit

J.R. Rice: The charismatic movement

A. Seibel: The Church infiltrated (confronting the darkness)

A. Seibel: The Church subtly deceived

H.L. Heijkoop: Beginning with Christ

F. Legrand: All about speaking in tongues

G. F. Rendal: I speak in tongues more than you all

C. Briem: Dromen en openbaringen (vraag en antwoord)

J.A. Monard: Bidden tot de Heilige Geest?

A. Remmers: Gaven van Gods Geest?

J.P. Buddingh: Genezingen, spreken in talen en andere geestesgaven F. Wolf: Warum ich kein Charismatiker mehr bin

W. Buhne: La troisième vague

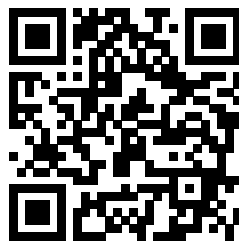
S. Fayard: Le Saint Esprit

C. Briem: Daar ben Ik in het midden van hen

A. Remmers: Verbinding verbroken?

Fire from Heaven?

Luimes, Erwin H. W.



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