

Appendix N

REPORT OF THE AD INTERIM COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE QUESTION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Your committee, composed of Teaching Elders Peter Doyle, Adrian De Young, Palmer Robertson, and Jack B. Scott and of Ruling Elders William B. Robinson, Kenneth L. Ryskamp and Joseph Walker (Minutes of General Assembly 1-71) has understood its task to be to recommend to the 1974 General Assembly a wording for the Book of Church Order 7-1; to study the matter of spiritual gifts, using as resources the Bible, Reformed documents and writings, and the views of members of the National Presbyterian Church; and to recommend to the 1974 General Assembly guidelines for agreement and for liberty in the question of spiritual gifts within the National Presbyterian Church (Minutes of General Assembly 1-50).

Your committee has met three times since the appointment: briefly at the 1973 General Assembly and twice at length in Birmingham, Alabama.

We have sought to carry out our assignment by studying individually and together God's Word, Reformed writings, and the views of members of the National Presbyterian Church regarding spiritual gifts. It might be noted that the committee has received very few communications from members of the National Presbyterian Church.

In the following report we shall first make a proposal for the wording of the Book of Church Order 7-1, followed by guidelines for agreement and for liberty on this matter within the National Presbyterian Church.

Proposal for 7-1

“Under the New Testament, our Lord at first collected His people out of different nations, and united them to the household of faith by the ministry of extraordinary officers who received extraordinary gifts of the Spirit and who were agents by whom God completed His revelation to His church. Such officers and gifts related to new revelation have no successors since God completed His revelation at the conclusion of the Apostolic Age.”

Dear Brethren,

Inasmuch as the task of your committee has been to seek for a statement on the matter of spiritual gifts faithful to God's Word and our Reformed Standards which would also provide guidelines for reconciliation among brethren who hold differing views on the question of spiritual gifts, our report is in the form of a pastoral letter to the churches and members of the National Presbyterian Church.

The letter is presented in four major points with some concluding words of caution and recommendation. We have sought to document our letter by Scripture passages in footnote form in order to encourage the diligent study of the whole subject through God's Word by all the members of the church.

Your committee was by your intention “representative of the spectrum of convictions on this matter in the National Presbyterian Church” (Minutes of General Assembly 1-50). We have been able to come to agreement in the following areas and are much encouraged to hope that the National Presbyterian Church can therefore do the same.

A Pastoral Letter Concerning the Experience of the Holy Spirit in the Church Today

The General Assembly of the National Presbyterian Church, being fully aware of the widespread notice being given to the question of the work of the Holy Spirit today, offers the following pastoral letter addressed to its churches:

The General Assembly rejoices in all evidences of new life in Christ's body. It prays earnestly that the Spirit which Christ has poured out on his church may continue to affect radically the lives of men throughout the world.

At the same time, the General Assembly would express concern over an increasing emphasis on experience-centered criteria as they are applied to the life of God's people. The General Assembly would encourage the church as a whole to take most seriously its commitment to the Scriptures as the "only infallible rule of faith and practice" (B.C.O. 22-5), particularly as Scripture relates to current questions within the church.

In seeking to provide guidelines from Scripture to questions relating to the church's experience of the Holy Spirit, the General Assembly would offer the following observations:

I. Concerning the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised by Joel and other prophets in the Old Testament¹ as well as by John the Baptist and our Lord in the New Testament.² It found its fulfillment at Pentecost.³ While public and external manifestations of the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred on occasion in the Apostolic Age,⁴ Scripture teaches that the normal experience of the Spirit's baptism coincides with regeneration.⁵ It is therefore not to be viewed as a second blessing or a special work of grace enjoyed by some but not by all Christians.⁶ The initial reception of Christ by faith is not to be separated from the total impartation of the Person of the Holy Spirit.⁷

All references are from the American Standard Version, 1901

¹"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit. "Joel 2:28,29. See also Isa. 32:15; 59:21; Ezk. 36:26,27; 37:14.

²"Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified." John 7:37-39. See also Matt. 3:11; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8; John 14:16,17,26; 15:26; 16:7-16.

³Acts 2:16-21

⁴Acts 2:1-4; 8:14-17; 10:44-48; 19:6,7.

⁵"Not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour." Tit. 3:5. See also Acts 2:38; Rom. 5:5; 8:9; I Cor. 12-13.

⁶"Wherefore I make known unto you, that no man speaking in the Spirit of God saith, Jesus is anathema; and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit." I Cor. 12:3. See also Rom. 8:9-10; I Jn. 4:2.

⁷"for he giveth not the Spirit by measure" Jn. 3:34. See Tit. 3:5,6.

II. Concerning Life in the Spirit.

Life in the Spirit begins with regeneration." The first manifestation of this life is the believer's calling on the name of the Lord for salvation." Assurance of salvation is not based on any experience, but on the Word of God that promises eternal life to all who believe." This assurance is to be cultivated by the continual use of the means of grace."

III. Concerning the Filling of the Spirit.

The filling of the Spirit denotes the dominion of Christ in our lives and occurs when one is led willingly by the Word through which the Spirit works.¹² By their subjection to the Word of Scripture, believers grow in grace and the benefits of the redemption they receive freely through Christ.¹³ The evidence of this spiritual growth is seen in the fruits of the Spirit, which is proof of their abiding in Christ and His Word abiding in them.¹⁴ By the filling of the Spirit they are enabled to speak the truth of Christ with great boldness.¹⁵

The Scripture commands every Christian to be filled continually by the Holy Spirit, and to grow spiritually by obedience to God's Written Word and the proper use of the means of grace.¹⁶ When we neglect

¹²"And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you, I say, did he make alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses;" Col. 2:13. See also John 3:3-8; Eph. 2:1-5.

¹³"For, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Rom. 10:13-14. See also Gen. 4:26; Joel 2:32; I Cor. 12:3.

¹⁴"For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there was borne such a voice to him by the Majestic Glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: and this voice we ourselves heard borne out of heaven, when we were with him in the holy mount, and we have the word of prophesy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." II Pet. 1:17-19. See also Psa. 19:7; Jn. 17:7,8,14,17; 20:31; Eph. 2:8,9; Heb. 11-6; I Jn. 5:13,18-20.

¹⁵"So then, my beloved, even as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure." Phil. 2:12,13. See also Acts 2:41, 42; II Pet. 1:3-11.

¹⁶"If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk." Gal. 5:25; See also Rom. 8:4,13,14; Gal. 3:3; 5:16,17.

¹⁷"Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth." II Tim. 2:15; See also II Tim. 3:16,17.

¹⁸"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you." John 15:4-7. See also Gal. 5:22,23.

¹⁹Acts 4:13

²⁰"They then that receiveth his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers." Acts 2:41,42. See also Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 5-18.

or ignore His Word or are disobedient to it, we are guilty of quenching and grieving the Holy Spirit.¹⁷

IV. Concerning the Gifts of the Spirit.

Spiritual gifts are granted to every believer by the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each Christian "individually as He wills."¹⁸ Christians are to use these gifts to serve Christ in the work of His kingdom and for the edification of the body of Christ.¹⁹ All true believers receive some spiritual gift or gifts.²⁰ No spiritual gift is to be despised, nor is it to be misused to bring glory to any other than to Christ.²¹ Specific spiritual gifts noted in Scripture are found in the following passages: Romans 12:3-8; I Corinthians 12:8-10; I Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11-16.

Some spiritual gifts plainly have ceased, such as the founding office of apostle. Others are obscure and cannot be clearly defined, such as "helps". Others are clearly seen today, such as "teaching" and "giving". Some have received undue prominence in recent days, such as "tongues", "working of miracles" and "healing".

A. Tongues.

It seems evident that the tongues described in Acts 2 were foreign languages known to the hearers there present. It is more difficult, however, to resolve the question of the exact nature of the tongues mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. It is also difficult to determine with certainty the relationship of the modern tongues phenomenon to the New Testament experience. The General Assembly suggests however, that:

1. Any view of the tongues as experienced in our time which conceives of it as an experience by which revelation is received from God is contrary to the finalized character of revelation in Scripture;

2. Any view of tongues which sees this phenomenon as an essential sign of the baptism of the Spirit is contradictory to Scripture; and

3. Any practice of the tongues phenomenon in any age which causes dissension and division within the body of Christ or diverts the church from its mission is contrary to the purpose of the Spirit's gifts.

B. Miracles.

Much discussion and debate continue throughout the church of Christ on the subject of miracles. In the Scripture certain clusters of miracles were associated with various servants of God and related to the giving of revelation, such as, Exodus 4:1-9; I Kings 17:23-24; John 2:11; 3:2. Such miracles were signs by which God communicated divine

¹⁷Eph. 4:25-30; I Thess. 5:19-22.

¹⁸I Cor. 12:11; Heb. 2:4.

¹⁹"What is it then, brethren? When ye come together, each one hath a psalm, hath a teaching, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying." I Cor. 14:26. See also Eph. 4:11-12; I Cor. 14:12.

²⁰"But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal." I Cor. 12:7.

²¹Jn. 16:14; I Cor. 10:31; 12:21; 13:1-3; Eph. 1:13-14.

truth or confirmed that the speaker indeed spoke from God. These miracles related to revelation have ceased, since revelation was completed with the closing of the Canon in the New Testament era.

Scripture also uses the term "miracle" or wonder to describe the acts of God in all areas of creation and providence.²² The power of God in response to believing prayer to work wonders and to heal the sick cannot be limited.²³ Such wonders certainly do continue to this day and are all for the glory of God not man.

Finally, the General Assembly would speak a word of caution against an obsession with signs and miraculous manifestations which is not indicative of a healthy church, but of the opposite.²⁴ The Spirit provides all that is necessary for the equipping of the saints through His presence and power in the lives of the regenerate.²⁵ The true basis of faith and spiritual growth is the work of the Holy Spirit in believers as they are made subject to His written Word, which is sufficient in itself for spiritual growth to complete maturity.²⁶

The General Assembly would also urge a spirit of forbearance among those holding differing views regarding the spiritual gifts as they are experienced today.²⁷

As the church continues to study these matters, the General Assembly would recommend:

1. Prayerful study of the Scriptural teaching on the Holy Spirit and His gifts;

²²"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep." Psa. 107:23,24. See also Psa. 139:14.

²³"Is any among you sick? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him. Confess therefore your sins one to another, and pray one for another that ye may be healed. The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working." Jam. 5:14-16.

²⁴"But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah II the prophet:" Matt. 12:39. See also Matt. 24:24; John 4:48; 1 Cor. 1:22,23; 14:22; II Thess. 2:9-12.

²⁵"Every scripture inspired by God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." II Tim. 3:16,17. See also Luke 16:31; Jn. 14:16,17; 16:7-16; I Cor. 12:1-11; 13:1-14:1; Gal. 5:22-23.

²⁶Rom. 10:17; II Tim. 3:16,17; II Pet. 1:16-21.

²⁷"But thou, why dost thou judge thy brother? or thou again, why dost thou set at naught thy brother? for we shall stand before the judgment-seat of God. For it is written, as I live saith the Lord, to me every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess to God. So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge ye this rather, that no man put a stumbling block in his brother's way, or an occasion of falling." Rom. 14:10-13.

"Wherefore receive ye one another even as Christ also received you, to the glory of God. Now the God of hope fill you, to the glory of God. Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit." Rom. 15:7. See also Rom. 12:3,16; I Cor. 7:7; I Cor. 13; Eph. 4:7; Phil. 2:2-4; I Pet. 4:8-11.

2. Study of the church's Standards on such areas as Scripture, Trinity, Doctrines of Grace;
3. Careful training, examination and selection of officers and others in the place of teaching and leadership in the church to assure a consistency of commitment to Scripture and the Reformed faith and to the health and unity of the church;
4. Preaching and teaching of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and His work as taught in Scripture and the Standards of the church; and
5. The promotion of a charitable spirit in the whole church.

Respectfully submitted,
Jack B. Scott, Chairman

A Pastoral Letter to the churches and members of the PCA adopted by the Second General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in America.