The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

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While it is a pleasure to be here, it is a somewhat awesome thing to revisit the scene of one’s youthful follies, especially when one is convicted of God that the follies have not been left all that far behind. There are some of you who are present here this evening—faculty and fellow clergymen—whom I have offended. I want to ask your forgiveness. I appreciate your being here and, by virtue of that fact that you are, I take it that you grant that forgiveness and I appreciate that as well. Now, before anything else, let’s ask God’s blessing in prayer.

Our heavenly Father, we thank you for the privilege of being here this evening. We thank you for a oneness that we sense in the Lord Jesus. We are grateful for the truth of your Word, the marvelous saving power of the gospel of salvation, and we thank you that we may speak together tonight and exalt Jesus Christ, for that’s what we desire to do. We pray in his name and for his sake. Amen.

I heard a story not long ago about a broad jumper. On one particular occasion he backed up so far to get a running start that by the time he got to the line he was too tired to jump. I don’t want to do that, but I think that it will be necessary to address myself to several prefaces to my remarks on the gifts of the Holy Spirit because it has become a controversial and somewhat emotional subject that lends itself to misunderstanding. I’m going to try, then, to create a setting in which to insert what I want to say about those spiritual gifts. First, then, a theological setting. I want to tell you where I stand theologically to help you to understand what I’ll be saying subsequently.

I am confessionally Reformed. I have the honor to serve a congregation that is confessionally Reformed. Our church order prescribes and adheres to the three forms of unity with which most of you are familiar. That does not make me uncomfortable. I wrote the church order myself. I like it that way. I preach Heidelberg Catechism sermons from the Scriptures virtually every Sunday morning and delight to do so. I am committed to the infallibility and the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. I guess you’d have to say that I’m a high Calvinist. I believe in double predestination, an absolute ethical antithesis, and I reject the idea of common grace. This is my basic theological stance. As for the place of the baptism with the Holy Spirit—and that’s the term that I personally choose to use—within the Reformed faith, I understand it this way:

There are three basic aspects to the one work of the Holy Spirit. First, the Holy Spirit enters a person and regenerates so that that person can have spiritual life, repent, and believe the gospel. The evidence of that regenerating work of the Holy Spirit will always be repentance and saving faith or conversion.

The second aspect of the Holy Spirit’s work in the individual is his sanctifying work for character. The evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of his work in sanctifying the believer is the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.
But there is a third aspect of the Holy Spirit’s work. It seems to me that this is the aspect which has been sadly neglected. It is the baptism with or empowering by the Holy Spirit for service or ministry. The evidence or result of that baptism with the Holy Spirit of which we read in I Corinthians 12 is wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, the discernment of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

These three aspects constitute the one work of the Holy Spirit. I like what Dr. Mayer said earlier. (I was the one who said that “Amen.” I forgot myself for a moment.) He was absolutely right when he said that when a person experiences the baptism with the Holy Spirit, he doesn’t get more of the Holy Spirit, it’s simply that the Holy Spirit gets more of him. I believe that that’s the proper formulation of this concept. The Holy Spirit gives life, that’s regeneration; gives character, that’s sanctification; and gives power for ministry, that’s the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Rather than arguing whether a person ought to pray or pay, beg, plead, or ask for the baptism with the Holy Spirit, I call your attention to the fact that all three aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit involve both a sovereign act from God’s standpoint and also a responsible action from ours. When the Holy Spirit regenerates, does he not do that sovereignly and, as the wind bloweth where it listeth, quicken whom he will? Yet the instruction of the Scripture is very clear that we are to repent and believe the gospel. So from one standpoint the Holy Spirit regenerates sovereignly; from the other standpoint we are responsible to receive Jesus Christ, the Savior.

The same thing is true with regard to sanctification. Most arguments about sanctification can be resolved when you recognize that from one standpoint the Holy Spirit sovereignly sanctifies us positionally when he puts us in Christ, but from another standpoint, sanctification is that which we, according to the Word of God, are to seek on a day-by-day basis in the walk of obedience. The principle holds as well with regard to the baptism with the Holy Spirit. All of the Holy Spirit’s power is surely there present within the regenerate believer; yet it is the responsibility of the regenerate believer to lay claim by faith to that power. To do the greater works that Jesus did that he promises we shall do, shall I not actively and obediently ask for and receive the fullness of the Spirit’s power and exercise it in my life by way of ministry? There are then three aspects of the Holy Spirit’s work: that which gives life, that which works character, and that which empowers for ministry, each a sovereign dispensation of the Spirit, each claimed and exercised by faith.

Now I wish to address myself to another preface. This one is a biblical orientation on the subject of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Being a Reformed preacher I am used to thinking of these things in terms of the order and structure that’s given to the faith by the Heidelberg Catechism. I recall that the Catechism, in dealing with the ascension and the session of the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God (Lord’s Day 19), speaks about Jesus pouring out the Holy Spirit and bestowing heavenly gifts upon the church. I find it fully legitimate to preach on the so-called “Pentecostal” gifts in connection with that Lord’s Day. But when I examine the Scripture on just what those heavenly gifts bestowed by the Spirit are, I find that there are four lists.

The first of those lists appears in Ephesians 4:11. You remember that when he “ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men... and he gave
some to be apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers." These gifts are the various aspects of ministry within a local congregation. Among the local presbytery or body of elders, we should expect to find those who are particularly concerned about and active in the apostolic office in the broader sense of that term, the missionary outreach of the church. The New Testament recognizes that the work of an apostle didn't end with the twelve. In Acts 14:14 both Paul and Barnabas were called apostles. The word apostle in the New Testament, as we move away from the gospel accounts, comes to mean simply missionary, one who is sent with a commission. The Holy Spirit raises up missionaries out of the local congregation and gives them to the congregation. The preacher is one among the presbytery who is particularly equipped by the Lord to point out sin and to call men to repentance and faith. Next there are evangelists, the ones among the elders who are given by God to the drawing of the net to bring men to the experience of conversion. Then we pastors, those who take a pastoral concern for the flock, and finally teachers, those who instruct. In a genuinely charismatic church, in which what Jesus gives from the heavenly throne by the Spirit is in operation, there will be a body of elders who will jointly and severally take these responsibilities. Our congregation is comparatively small, we have only seven elders. Interestingly, however, among those seven men and myself we discover that each of these particular functions is indeed represented: one who is really on fire for the subject of missions; another one who has a pastoral concern and can sense the need of people that need special attention; and a preacher (or prophet), a teacher, a soul winner, etc.

There is another list of heavenly gifts in the twelfth chapter of Romans. The list in Ephesians four deals with various ministries. The list in the twelfth chapter of Romans deals with motivation. This was opened to me by Bill Gothard's Institute in "Basic Youth Conflicts," which I have personally appreciated very, very much. He establishes (I believe validly) that the list of seven gifts in Romans 12:6ff. speaks about the motivations that spiritually "turn people on." If you take time to go through this list and explain the meaning and significance of each one to a small group or to a congregation of aware and concerned Christians, you will see lights go on one by one all over the group as people say, "Yes, that's the thing that motivates me." So, one will be motivated by prophecy, that is, the declaring of God's Word; another will be motivated by ministry, that is, the desire to be a servant; another will be motivated by teaching; another will be motivated by exhortation, the ability to visualize how spiritual truth works in the life of another person; someone else is turned on by giving—we could all use some of those—someone else is motivated by ruling or organization, and yet someone else by the showing of mercy, the manifestation of spiritual empathy. It turns out that every Christian is motivated by one of those more than any of the rest. That is his spiritual motivational gift.

The leadership of the local charismatic congregation is to fulfill the functions that we saw a moment ago in Ephesians 4:11 in order to equip the saints (members of the body) for the work of the ministry so that the body of Christ will be built up (Ephesians 4:12). That requires helping each member of the body to discern how and where God is personally calling him to build. That is accomplished by leading each member of the
congregation to recognize his own peculiar spiritual motivation from the list in Romans 12:6ff. And, glory to God, it works! It is for God's people a tremendous liberation from the burden of trying to be what they are not. You haven't been blessed until you've seen a dear man who loves the Lord and wants to serve Jesus, but when he tries to stand up and testify gets his tongue tied around his eye tooth and can't see a word he says—who feels that he's spiritually inferior because he can't do it—discover that his spiritual (motivational) gift is the showing of mercy and he doesn't have to strain to be a prophet or teacher. He can be himself, exercising spiritual empathy with the problems of others. In doing so he suddenly moves into the area of service God intended for him and he becomes God's gift to the congregation in that area. That's how motivational gifts work. It should be added that in most instances the discovery and explanation of a man's own spiritual gift sets him free to minister in all the other areas as well—majoring in that which corresponds to his spiritual gift.

But there is more. In I Corinthians 12:28f. we read that "God has set some in the church; first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." I take it that those are the expressions or functions of ministry within the local body of believers: church planting (missionary activity), pointing out sin and calling to repentance, instructing the flock, looking to God prayerfully for miracles, anointing and laying on hands for healing, helping the distressed, maintaining order and the expression of praise. The exercise of each of these areas in the worship service is the Spirit's gift to the body through individual believers. That really excites and blesses. Perhaps it is just that I have an orderly soul, but I really love that text at the end of I Corinthians 14 about decency and order. Frankly, I am offended by the brand of formula Pentecostalism that seems to equate total confusion and disorder with freedom and blessed movings of the Spirit. However, I am also aware that whenever the Lord's people are encouraged to minister to one another and participate freely in worship in accordance with the motivations that God has given to them, it's very easy for flesh, ego, and confusion to reign instead of the Jesus whom the Spirit is supposed to be glorifying.

It appears to me from I Corinthians 12:28 that God will have these functions "set in the church," that is, in the worshipping body. It is not only possible, but the responsibility of vigilant elders to encourage someone whom they observe (for example) to have the motivational gift of teaching to participate in the worship service by giving a few minutes of teaching on some missionary theme from the Scriptures. Or, the elders may encourage someone in the congregation with the motivation of showing mercy to remind the body of the needs of individuals who need prayer or blessed attention. In this way, under the supervision and encouragement of the elders whom God has given to minister to the congregation, using their insight into the spiritual (motivational) gifts of members of the congregation, all these functions that God has set in the church can, in fact, be in operation—decently and in order. This in no way supplants the pastor as preacher and teacher of the congregation. The elders continue to designate him as principle prophet and teacher. But in that function he is supplemented and complemented by the members of the body so that it can be built by that which every joint supplieth (Ephesians 4:16).
Now we have spoken about ministers (Ephesians 4), motivations (Romans 11), and functions in the worshipping congregation (II Corinthians 12:28). It seems to me that this is the background against which these nine gifts of the Spirit, that appear in I Corinthians 12:8-10 ought properly to appear. The nine “Pentecostal gifts” are tools; the tools of ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. They are given not for the purpose of status but rather for the purpose of service. That rounds out the picture: the local congregation is supervised and led by ministers (Ephesians 4:11) who guide the saints to find their unique motivational gifts (Romans 12:6-8) so that the saints can build the body by exercising various functions in it (I Corinthians 12:28) by means of the tools (I Corinthians 12:8-10) which the Holy Spirit gives. There are deep basic truths concerning gifts of which I constantly remind our fellowship.

1. The Pentecostal gifts (I Corinthians 12:8-10) are given through the individual who exercises them to the fellowship of God’s people. It’s not that one person has the gift of tongues or that another has the gift of prophecy, or that yet another has the word of knowledge. Rather, God bestows these gifts through individuals to minister to the body of the Lord’s people. The gifts are for ministry to the body. It is the body that has the gifts. The gifts are tools to serve the body in the power of God. They do not confer status but usefulness.

2. “Brown’s Law” (which has come to bear my name because I speak it so often to our people) states that, in the Christian faith, nothing substitutes for anything else; absolutely nothing substitutes for anything else. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not a substitute for obedience. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not a substitute for doing the will of God. The gifts of the Holy Spirit don’t have anything directly to do with sanctification. That’s the sanctification aspect of the Holy Spirit’s work, and it is important that we keep it distinct from the Spirit’s empowering work. A person who asks for and receives the baptism with the Holy Spirit and begins to exercise spiritual gifts is not thereby made holy. A person can be filled with the Spirit and still sin. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not for character. That’s quite another matter. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are for service, for doing the “greater works than these” (John 14:12) among God’s people and for reaching out from God’s people to the world that’s in terrible need all around us.

3. The gifts of the Holy Spirit always operate under the strict discipline of the written word of God. They are inseparable from and integral with the ministry of the Word of God to his people. Any exercise of spiritual gifts, Pentecostal experience, or practice in worship which cannot bear the rigorous scrutiny of the Word of God may not be considered to be of God. It is Scripture, not men’s feelings, that judges and validates such worship.

4. Although spiritual gifts are given graciously and sovereignly by God, they are to be responsibly sought, claimed, and utilized by spirit-filled Christians in accordance with the present need for ministry. God gives spiritual gifts; we are responsible to exercise them.

5. The gifts of the Spirit are not an ecstatic experience. The Scripture says that the Spirit is subject to the prophet (I Corinthians 14:32). Here is Isaiah busily writing the Word of God: exercising the gift of prophecy. Suddenly he has to sneeze. He
doesn’t miss any words. He stops, puts down his stylus, takes out his handkerchief, sneezes, wraps it up, puts the handkerchief back, picks up the stylus, and God is still at the point at which Isaiah left off. He doesn’t miss anything. That’s what it means that the Spirit is subject to the prophet. God wasn’t carrying Isaiah along in some ecstatic sort of trance. Isaiah was writing. What he wrote was the very words of God. But when Isaiah stopped, God stopped. When Isaiah started again, God started. The gifts of the Spirit then are not an ecstatic experience in which a person is carried away in a great sweep of emotion. They are, rather, the manifestation of the power of the Spirit of God for the ministry to which that person is called at that particular time. They are not an ecstatic experience to which the Spirit-filled Christian is subject, but rather a scriptural experience in which the Spirit-filled Christian is a responsible actor under the power of the Holy Spirit. This affirmation is necessary because unbiblical, disorderly “Pentecostal” worship is frequently justified as the leading or moving of the Spirit over which the worshippers have no control.

Now we come to the list of the gifts of the Spirit as given in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. I will seek to define each gift and then illustrate its place in the life of a charismatic congregation. Wisdom is by definition the ability to see things from God’s point of view. Jesus Christ is wisdom because he always has the right point of view on everything. Wisdom comes from Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:30) by the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God. The word of wisdom is the ability or insight to see a particular situation at a particular moment from God’s point of view. Recall what we have said above about the relationship of the four lists of spiritual gifts. Suppose that in a given congregation there was a deep, thorny problem to which a lot of discussion was given seemingly without resolution. Wouldn’t it be a great thing if the elders of the church, discerning that there were some individuals within that congregation who were motivated by prophecy (that is the ability to see clearly into a subject and discern the right and wrong of it, Romans 12:16) would ask those individuals to share the insights that God gives to them as they claim from God a word of wisdom in that particular situation? I am sure that in many congregations (charismatic and non-charismatic) there are persons known to exhibit unusual wisdom. Scripture says that the wise in heart shall be called prudent (Prov. 16:21). He will get a reputation for being prudent. As a Spirit-filled believer evidences divine wisdom, the elders should encourage him to lay claim specifically to the word of wisdom so that he is able to speak to perplexing situations in the life of the church or of other believers with an insight that comes from God.

I want here to emphasize that that word of wisdom is never beyond or at variance with the written Scriptures. Never! On that I am adamant and refuse to budge. I am sorry that there are some Pentecostals who take the position that a word of wisdom or of knowledge or of prophecy may reveal things that go beyond or that are outside of the Word of God. The truth is that the gift of wisdom is the gift of being able to see things in a clearly biblical perspective. How urgent and necessary such a gift is among the Lord’s people!

Right along with the word of wisdom is the word of knowledge. The Lord Jesus said that when his disciples would be delivered up and beaten in the synagogues and
called before magistrates, we would not have to worry about what to say because what to say will be given us in the time of need (Matt. 10:18-20). Note that he says that the Spirit will speak through us the words that we need to say. I have never yet been delivered up to magistrates and I haven't been beaten in the synagogue, but I can testify to you to the working of that word of knowledge. Every afternoon except Saturday I have an hour long live question-and-answer radio broadcast originating out of Hammond, Indiana, and reaching across most of the Chicago-land area. I have been doing this for a number of years and have begun to get a little bit used to it, but I am in the vulnerable position of saying into that open microphone, “Ask me any question.” The answer is to the question that is asked?’” The answer is: I don’t always know the answer to the question. But I made a commitment to the Lord years ago when I started to do question-and-answer radio broadcasts. I promised him that I would do my homework in the Scriptures, study the Word every day and know what God says as best I can, and that every day before going on the air I would simply bow for a moment and say, “Lord, I claim from you now the gift of wisdom so that I can have a biblical point of view on every problem and question that arises, and the gift of the word of knowledge so that somehow or other you will put into my mind, Lord, the words that are necessary, the text that’s needful to be able to speak to each question from your Word.” All I can say is that I have been doing it now for seven years in Chicago, and I did it for two years in Grand Rapids prior to that time, and it works. It works consistently. Time and time again a question will come and I will think to myself, “I don’t know the answer to that.” At first I would feel panic. Then I would remember Psalm 81:10 “... open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.” It was as if God said, “Open your mouth and start answering.” I thought, “That’s presumption.” But it isn’t. It is simply faith that God’s spiritual gifts will indeed operate in the present day for the benefit of the person who has called in the question and really needs a solid answer. Suddenly verses that I may have read, studied, and even memorized in the past but haven’t been thinking of at all, begin to be there. That is the operation of the gift of knowledge. God the Holy Spirit does it. Once again—the gift is not for me but for the body of Christ. It is always a mark of unauthenticity when a charismatic says, “Look at me, I’ve got the gift of knowledge!” The authentic charismatic testimony is: “Look at Jesus! He always comes through with a gracious word of knowledge and insight in time of need.” I am persuaded that we are living in a day when that kind of ministry is not just an option: It is a necessity.

I was pondering this morning a passage from Deuteronomy 11:10ff. where the Lord says to Israel, when you go into the land of Canaan it is going to be different than it was in Egypt. When you were in Egypt the river was right there at ground level. All you had to do was dig a little trench with your foot, and the water would flow in and irrigate the land. So, God said, you could water Egypt with your foot. But in Canaan it is going to be a different situation. Canaan is a land of hills and valleys. The only way to water Canaan is with the rain that comes from heaven. This is a picture contrasting two types of ministry. Anyone who went to seminary, listened part of the time, and
has a few years experience in the ministry can water with his foot. He can choose from a glut of books that tell him how to do this, how to do that, all illustrated with glowing reports of other men's successes. He can launch innumerable carnal, Egypt-type programs that will stir activity, have some temporary and some lasting results. But we have reached a day when, whether as a result of sophistication or cynicism, the typical spiritual and moral drought in men's souls caused by rejection of the Word of God craves the rain from heaven, not the sluggish water of Egypt: a powerful, incisive, fresh word from God, not a rehash of tired motions, programs, and organizations. Notice that I do not place the rain from heaven in opposition to the preaching and teaching of our historic biblical Reformed faith. I rather call for a radical and exclusive dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit, upon his supply of the gifts of the Spirit to make the Reformed truths the mighty, powerful rain they are supposed to be. The Reformed truth needs Pentecost to set it afire and fulfill its claim to be the theology of the mighty Word of God.

The gift of faith. In all three of the aspects of the Holy Spirit's work, faith plays a vital part. Faith is one of the results of the Holy Spirit's quickening work. Together with repentance, it makes up conversion. That's how people are saved. Faith is also a fruit of the Spirit, for faith is a necessary prerequisite for and an essential element of Christian character as a result of the Spirit's sanctifying work. But faith is also a gift of the Spirit necessary for powerful ministry. Brother pastors, may I testify something to you out of my experience? I am as ambitious as all of the rest of us are. And I used to envision my career in the ministry of the gospel as moving from one large, prestigious pulpit to another and eventually retiring with great dignity. Somehow, however, that isn't the way that the Lord has led my life. Then I see the (at least apparent) successes of others. If I am not to be devastated by a jealous discontent with the ways of God, I must come to the point where I am willing to say, "Lord, I have faith and confidence to believe you and to praise you for the way in which you are leading in the ministry which you have given to me." Faith is necessary to ministry if only because there is nothing that is so debilitating to a Christian than jealousy concerning the accomplishments of others, or the feeling that he has been passed by because others are more successful than he. Spirit filled Christians serve Jesus effectively according to their spiritual motivational gift (Romans 12:6-8) in proportion as they claim the gift of faith to affirm: "the calling, abilities, results God has given me are the best of all possible worlds. Praise his Name!"

I have opportunity to minister in some pretty odd places, especially in the city of Chicago. Before moving to that area I would have said that anyone who would go to some of the places that I have been invited to preach or minister to people would be quite out of his mind. There is genuine physical danger involved. But I have discovered that claiming the Holy Spirit gift of faith gives immediate confidence of God's protection and sets me free to minister faithfully and unhindered.

Maybe God is not going to call you to minister in the jungle where you will need faith to stop the mouths of lions; maybe he is simply calling you to minister in a situation in which you will have to tell your wife and children that the salary is much less and sacrifice is in order. Under any circumstances, to minister faithfully and unhin-
dered for God requires the gift of faith. As God has moved and forced me away from the traditional procedures of Egypt—watering with the foot—and to depend on him to pour out the rain from heaven, I have found myself saying some things that are mighty unpopular. I teach, for example, that it is the responsibility of the wife to be obedient and submissive to her husband in everything because that is what the Scripture says (Ephesians 5:24). You have no idea how unpopular that is in certain quarters! But it is what the Word says and therefore it must be taught, believing God to carry me through the storm of protest and resentment that follows. I know that I could never be a faithful teacher of the radical demands in the Word of God apart from the gift of faith to believe that God will instruct in this truth. And I want to teach the members of my congregation to lay claim to faith for radical, unhindered ministry, so that when they begin to feel the heat (as we all surely will in the days ahead) they won’t leave the kitchen.

The gifts of healing. Notice the plural. Scripture opens to us a spectrum of ministries in the area of healing: (1) We pray for healing skill for the Doctor who attends; or, (2) We pray for the person who is ill and ask God to heal him; (3) We lay on hands and exercise a gift of healing which we have claimed from God; (4) The elders of the church anoint with oil in the name of the Lord and ask God to heal. We do this last in our church regularly and it is a blessed experience. Every Sunday evening at the close of the service the elders are there with a bottle of olive oil. People with physical needs who desire healing are invited to come. We counsel with them for a moment, anoint them with oil, lay on hands, and pray the prayer of faith asking God to heal (James 5:15). I could tell you countless stories about remarkable physical healings that God has granted in this way. Healing is surely in the cross of the Lord Jesus. He has born our griefs ... carried our sorrows ... he was wounded for our transgressions ... and with his stripes are we healed (Isaiah 53:45). Those words are applied in Matthew 8:16, 17 to Jesus’ physical healings. I take the position that God is pleased to heal every Christian sooner or later. Sometimes that “later” will be in the new heaven and the new earth when everyone will be healed and enjoy a resurrection body. But that the Word speaks of gifts of healing now encourages us to ask for and receive that inheritance now. And although the sovereign God has the right to decide whether he is going to heal a person now or in the new heaven and the new earth, Jesus said concerning believers: “The works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father” (John 14:12). When he went to his Father, the Holy Spirit was poured out bestowing gifts of healing on his people to be claimed and exercised as a part of the ministry of the people of God.

I teach our people that, when in the home a youngster is sick, prayer with the laying on of hands (Mark 16:18) comes before calling the doctor, going for the aspirin bottle, opening the medicine cabinet. Jesus said, “They shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.” I teach a father to lay hands on his children, or his wife or himself for that matter, and ask God to heal, claiming the gift of healing. I encourage asking the elders of the church to anoint and pray before making any commitment to seek medical treatment. There is nothing wrong in going to a doctor or to a hospital. It may be that God will choose to answer prayer for healing by medical means. Our trust, however, is in the living God; he is the healer for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.
Prayer, claiming the gift of healing first, delivers believers from the inversion of priority which brought God’s curse on King Asa (II Chronicles 16:12).

Now, let me say it once more. In the last analysis, the issue is not whether you believe that a person ought to get the baptism with the Holy Spirit and claim the gift of healing. In the last analysis, the issue is not what you understand to be the relationship between regeneration and the baptism with the Holy Spirit. I’ve spelled out what I believe it to be, but that really isn’t the issue. The real issue is, are you willing to believe that the Holy Spirit can bestow in and through you the gift of miraculous healing? If you are willing to believe and claim it, you are charismatic (at least with a small c).

I so delight to see this among my own children. We have a little girl, of five. Whenever she bumps her head she comes to me and asks me to pray for her. And I suppose that you could say, ‘That’s kind of silly: it’s not an important matter, why bother God?’ But if I had to take my choice I would surely rather have that five-year-old come to me for prayer than for a pill. I would want her to begin life believing that even her little childish problems need the touch of a sovereign, all-sufficient Jesus by the power of his Holy Spirit. I praise God that Della is saved (and knows it) and is filled with the Holy Spirit.

Miracles (vs. 10). Most of the miracles about which we speak are in the area of healing, but I believe we ought to teach our people to believe that the Holy Spirit will work miracles in other areas. I don’t find any place in the Scripture where miracles or any other gifts are spoken of as ceasing prior to the day when we shall see the Lord Jesus Christ face to face. As we ask God for miracles, claiming the fulness of the Spirit and reminding him that he has said that he gives the gift of miracles for us and through us, we see him do them.

At testimony time on our Sunday evening service virtually every week there is someone who rises to speak about a specific miracle that the Lord did for them in answer to prayer. Recently a lady testified that as she started to drive from the parking lot of a supermarket there was a terrible grinding, scraping noise beneath her car. She thought she hit a shopping cart but that wasn’t the case. Not knowing what to do, she simply prayed that the Lord would enable her to get that car to a service station. She had to make four or five different right-angle turns in order to get to the service station. As at each corner she turned the steering wheel and nothing happened, she prayed, ‘Lord, I praise you, You’re in charge,’ and somehow the car would turn in the direction in which she had to go. When she got to the service station, she was informed that the steering linkage was completely severed. There is no explanation for how it was possible for that car to get from the supermarket to the service station except that God took pity upon the infirmity of his handmaiden and brought her there.

I teach our people to expect God to do things like that. I teach the ladies that when there is something wrong with the washing machine, before you call the repair man, put your hands on the washing machine, pray, and ask God to fix it. And you would be surprised over how many testimonies there are to God’s doing precisely that. A man testified in a service last night that his hot water heater had been leaking. He just had a lot of expense and he could not afford a new hot water heater. He laid on hands and prayed and the leak stopped. It just doesn’t leak any more. Can God do it? Of
course, God can do it. The Heidelberg Catechism says that God is not only able to do these things for us, but he is also willing, being our heavenly Father. We can claim miracles in the present day. Personally, I’m having a lot more fun believing it than I see those who don’t believe it having fun trying to disprove it.

I have already talked about the gift of prophecy. It is simply and only the ability to speak God’s Word in the compelling power of the Holy Ghost. Sometimes it is predictive but in most instances prophecy is not predictive but simply declarative. Most of the prophecy in Scripture is declarative. I would not dream of arising before God’s people or of asking someone else to speak or testify to a congregation or even to one person without first laying claim to our heritage in the Holy Spirit. Lay claim to the gift of prophecy so that you can speak by his power. The treasure is hidden in earthly vessels but the excellency of the power is of God and not of us.

To another, the discerning of spirits. This gift, like all the others, operates in accordance with the written Word of God. It enables a person to detect and discern the presence of evil spirits at work in a particular situation. Illustration: a lady in our congregation began to hear voices speaking to her in terrible self-accusation. As our elders began to deal with her about this problem which she had brought to me as her pastor, we discerned that the trouble was demons. Here is how that discernment worked. I have learned from the Scriptures that there are three areas of sin that open the door for the activity of demons. The first is insubmission to human authority. The second is unforgiveness toward someone who has wronged you. The third one is involvement with the occult, Ouija Boards, astrology, seances, fortune telling, etc. It turned out that this lady was vulnerable on two scores: (1) She had steadfastly refused to submit herself to the authority of her husband, and (2) she had picked up the staff of authority in her own home and had discovered that by witchcraft (which is not at all unusual) she could maneuver and manipulate her husband and children. But, after a time, things began to get out of control and she was under terrible demonic torment. In summary, the Holy Spirit revealed, through the Scriptures, that we were working with a demon problem. She was a Christian but she was being vexed by evil spirits which she had let into her life by sin against the Lord. We talked about the areas of sin. She repented. Once she had repented, we claimed the authority of Jesus Christ, his shed blood, his righteousness, the power of his Holy Spirit, and in a very calm voice commanded those demons to come out, naming themselves. They came out beginning with witchcraft and then an army of others, some so vile I would not want to name them here. Today that woman’s problem is solved. It did not require any psychiatric treatment. The problem was demonic. I do not say every problem is demonic, but when the door is opened, by sin, demons do come in to vex and torment believers (Matthew 18:34, 35). What is needed in the care of souls is to ask God for a scriptural discernment to know when the problem is demonic. That discernment is a gift of the Spirit, a Pentecostal gift, if you will, that I should hate not to have in the ministry of the Word.

And, finally, tongues and interpretation. I believe that tongues are the usual first manifestation of a person having claimed the fulness of the Holy Spirit because that is where they seem to stand in the instances recorded in the Book of Acts. How did they know that people were filled with the Spirit? Answer, they began to speak in other
tongues. I began to pray and praise God in other tongues about thirteen years ago after asking God to fill me with the Holy Spirit as he had filled believers in the early church. God just gradually led and instructed me in the use of the gift of tongues. This gift has become a great blessing to me in my own private praise and worship. It is a blessed thing to be able to pray in the Spirit when you don’t know what you ought to pray for with the understanding. I find nothing in the Scripture against speaking in tongues. 1 Corinthians 14 regulates the use of tongues in public worship but it doesn’t say one single thing against their use. To speak against the abuse of an automobile is not to speak against using an automobile. I believe that tongues are the expression of prayer and/or praise. I believe that when interpretation comes, as it ought, when tongues are uttered in a public meeting and there isn’t anyone to interpret, no one else ought to speak in tongues. If someone speaks in tongues it will always be paraphrase, quotation, or concatenation of Scripture. Scripture says that tongues, like prophecy, ought to be by course, one at a time, not everyone speaking in tongues at the same time. The common Pentecostal practice of simultaneous tongue speaking is anti-biblical. Tongues are to be one at a time and followed by interpretation.

Is the gift of tongues important? The key to the answer to that question is that tongues is included among the nine Pentecostal gifts for ministry. There is a good reason for that: praise is ministering to the Lord himself. The other gifts minister to men . . . tongues minister to God. Call the gift of tongues unimportant from a practical point of view; it is paramount from that of worship. And practically speaking, one of the great weapons that God gives to his people is the weapon of praise. The praisers were to march out at the front of the conquering army. Victory follows praising and glorifying the Lord (11 Chron. 20:20ff.). I love Psalm 68. That is the one that Cromwell’s soldiers sang as they went to battle. At the sound of praise God does arise. Well, there is a real war today, a war with the principalities and the powers, the world rulers of the darkness of this present age. A people who give themselves to engage the enemy in battle need to march with the praises of God constantly upon their lips and in their hearts. Psalm 68 promises that the Lord then rides on the cloud of dust above this praising, victorious people. What a glorious, magnificent picture! That is where tongues have their proper use: praising and glorifying the Lord. As the Spirit gives utterance in public, interpretation is added so that others can join to that praise and say “Amen” at the giving of thanks.

The gifts of the Spirit ought to be cultivated in the congregation of God’s people in accordance with the Word of God in order to build a ministering congregation able, because they are equipped with the tools that God gives to meet the needs of men in an age more anguished, more demon-tormented, and more desperate for the touch of God than ever before in human history.

A veteran seaman was building a boat. He was asked, “My friend, do you build that boat for the calm or for the storm?” The answer of the boat builder was, “I build all my boats for the storm because then they’ll be able to make it in the calm as well.” I believe in exercising, teaching, and laying claim to the gifts of the Holy Spirit because we need powerful, God-wrought gifts to make it in the storm. No ministry designed only for the calm will do. Praise the Lord!