The Vitality of the Reformed Faith: Facing the Challenge of the Charismatic Movement

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The Specific Challenge of the Charismatics, and the Differences between the Reformed and Charismatics

As Reformed believers seek to face the challenge of the Charismatic movement, we must first of all identify that challenge with which we are facing and the movement with which we are dealing and the specific differences between that movement and the Reformed Faith. The challenge we face is the assertion of the Charismatics that they have the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, with the implication implied, if not asserted, that we might think that we have sound doctrine, but what is that compared to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The Charismatics hold that the extraordinary spiritual gifts of the Spirit continue (regarded as extraordinary by the 16th century reformers), and that they should be sought and utilized by Christians today.1 Thus they do not hold that these special gifts have ceased, as do the Reformed2, but rather continue.

The Sources of the Charismatics with which we are dealing

Among the Charismatics there are various differences among them on various points, but on the continuation of the special gifts they are virtually identical. As we consider them in this paper, we will recognize that the book Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?: Four Views categorizes them into at least four groupings: Pentecostals, Charismatics, Third Wave, and a newer category called “open but cautious.” The editor (Grudem) puts himself in the last category, but has proposed a new way to understand

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1 W. Grudem (ed.), Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?: Four Views (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, and Leicester: IVP, 1996), 11-15. Of the four writers for this book, three hold that the miraculous gifts continue, and one does not.

2 Cf. the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.1, “... to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God’s Revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.” For a fine study of this statement see the doctoral dissertation of G.H. Milne, The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Cessation of Special Revelation: The Majority Puritan Viewpoint on Whether Extra-biblical Prophecy is Still Possible (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2008).
New Testament prophecy that is not held by the representative of that category. This book published rather recently in both North America and Britain contains essays by competent proponents of each view, and also an excellent interaction among the four writers. Furthermore, each writer summarizes in some detail, with biblical arguments adduced, the various views held by the group he represents. This work is the basic source for our study, with some attention also being paid to W. Grudem’s view of New Testament prophecy.

How should we analyze the four episodes in Acts?


One of the most important differences between the Reformed, and the Pentecostals and some Charismatics, is the belief of the latter two that the Book of Acts is our guide for the special gifts and that the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as it appears in Acts, occurs as a special act subsequent to regeneration by the Spirit. Thus they cite Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41), the Apostles and the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-25), Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10 through 11:18) and Paul and the John’s Disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7). In these episodes they say those who were already regarded as disciples were then baptized by the Holy Spirit, and this they say is the model for Christians for today.

Pentecost [the Apostles] (Acts 2:1-41)

An examination of these passages shows, however, that each passage displays a specific reason for the timing of the baptism by the Holy Spirit that is recorded, and that reason is unique to each situation and therefore is


4 A Cessationist View is represented by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., An Open but Cautious View by Robert L. Saucy, A Third Wave View by C. Samuel Storms, and A Pentecostal View and A Charismatic View are both represented in one article by Douglas A.Oss; they are rather fully identified on pages 14-15 of W. Grudem (ed.), Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?: Four Views (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

5 See, for his main works on the subject, footnote 3.

6 Grudem (ed.), Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?, 11; for a further clarification of these views see esp. 242 for the Pentecostals and 257 for the Charismatics, and also the pages between.
not intended to be a model for others. First, the Pentecost experience itself fulfils Jesus’ words to his disciples that they would receive “the promise of the Father” in being “baptized with the Holy Spirit” and “will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you will be my witnesses ... to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:4,5 & 8). That power comes upon them not only in that “from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind” filled the house and the “divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them” but also in that “they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (2:2-4). This was the filling with the Holy Spirit and endowment with power that could come only from the ascended Jesus Christ, who was giving the promise of the Father, and his own promise, to his disciples. This was their experience because they had lived both before and after the resurrection and ascension and had become believers before the promise could be given. These spectacular phenomena of wind and fire are not, however, given again, and even the speaking in tongues seems not to have been as significant as when each person was able to hear them in his own language.

What did Peter, standing with the eleven, say to those who were listening? He gave them the Gospel and then said to them “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (2:38-39). Here Peter offered to the hearers that which the apostles had received in two stages (forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit) as one complete offer to be given and received simultaneously. It is this that is the model for today, not the unique experience of the apostles, and notice that the hearers were not asked to wait, as the apostles had been asked to do (Acts 1:4), nor did they, but responded immediately (2:41). Nor is it recorded that they received the spectacular signs that the apostles had received, nor that they spoke so that those in different languages could hear and understand. The passage goes on to say only that these believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer” (2:42). Only of the apostles does the Acts account say that “many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles” (2:43b).

1 I first learned (as a seminary student) of the significance of these passages and how they should function in the life of the church from N. B. Stonehouse, in his article “Repentance, Baptism and the Gift of the Holy Spirit,” in his publication of collected articles, Paul Before the Areopagus And Other New Testament Studies (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 70-87. This significance has grown with me as well as becoming commonplace to those dealing with this question.
The Apostles and the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-25)

The second account is found in the context of Acts 8:4-25. The account begins by recounting that “Phillip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ” (8:5). The response is given in these words: “And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Phillip when they heard him and saw ‘the signs’ that he did” (8:6, single quotes added to the word ‘signs’ for emphasis). The result is in verse 10: “But when they believed Phillip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”

The apostles at Jerusalem heard “Samaria had received the word” but that the Holy Spirit “had not fallen on any of them, but that they had only been baptized in the name of Jesus,” so when they heard this “they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit” (8:14-16). “Then they laid their hands upon them and they received the Holy Spirit” (8:17).

This episode has its own uniqueness. The Samaritans become believers and were baptized but did not receive the Holy Spirit until the hands of the apostles were laid on them. One may deduce from the text that this order of events was determined by the Lord for a similar reason as that in Cornelius’ case, when he and his household received the Holy Spirit first and then were baptized (see immediately below in Acts 10 and 11). In Cornelius’ case this was to convince the circumcised believers along with Peter and those back in Jerusalem that they should receive and welcome Gentiles as fellow believers. In this case it was to unite the Samaritans and Jews together as the Samaritans realized they were dependent upon the laying on of the hands of the Jewish apostles, and the Jews (represented by the apostles) recognized that they had to receive into one body with the one Holy Spirit their believing brothers, the Samaritans. Peter and John continued to testify and speak “the word of the Lord” to these believers in Samaria, and as “they returned to Jerusalem” it was accomplished by “preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans” (8:25).

Peter and Cornelius [the Gentiles] (Acts 10:1 – 11: 18)

The third Acts account is that found in chapters 10 and 11. There we read of Peter being persuaded by God that he should go and take the Gospel to Cornelius and his household at Caesarea. Cornelius was as “a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household ... and prayed continually to God” (10:1-2). Peter, after presenting the Gospel, concluded his remarks to Cornelius and those with
him with these words: “To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (10:43). “While he was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speak in tongues and extolling God” (10:44-45). Here again, as in Acts 2, the Gospel message, belief in Jesus, forgiveness of sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit are tied together, but this time the baptism with the Holy Spirit came on the Gentiles first in order to convince circumcised believers that they had really been saved and admitted to the people of God. See how Peter urged them to be baptized because they had “received the Holy Spirit just as we have” (10:47). This action of the Spirit not only convinced those with Peter but the circumcised believers in Jerusalem, as 11:15-18 indicates.

As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning... If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way... And they glorified God, saying, Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.

Several things need to be noted about this episode. Even though Cornelius was a God-fearing man (10:2), it is clear that Peter was directed by the angel to “declare to you [Cornelius] a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household” (11:14). Peter equated their receiving the Holy Spirit with what the apostles had experienced “when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ” (11:17). It is interesting that Peter relates that gift to the apostles’ belief in Jesus, and to nothing else, even though the gift came some time after their belief in him, namely, after Jesus ascension. But this perspective is exactly the way Jesus had already presented the promise of the Spirit in John 7:39, “Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” Thus this baptism of the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his household (except for preceding their water baptism) just as Peter had proclaimed and promised to the Pentecost crowd. (Acts 2:38-39) The fact that the Holy Spirit falls upon them before they are baptized was done to convince the circumcised believers with Peter, and also those back in Jerusalem (again Acts 11:15-18). So the speaking in tongues was a sign for all to be aware of the salvation and baptism of the Spirit that had happened to these, the first Gentiles believers.
The fourth episode is in Acts 19:1-7. Paul came to Ephesus and found some disciples to whom he said, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you were baptized? And they said, No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. And he said, Into what then were you baptized? They said, Into John’s baptism” (19:1-3). Paul then told them that John instructed “the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying” (19:4-6). They were believers as surely as John the Baptist was, but ones who had not heard, even though they had received John’s baptism, the declaration that Messiah had come. Hearing this good news from Paul, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, “and when Paul had laid his hands on them [aorist participle], the Holy Spirit came on them” (8:6). This was another unique experience. These men had believingly responded to a message someone had presented from John the Baptist, and being convicted of their sin, they had repented and had been baptized into John’s baptism. That is, they received “John’s baptism,” but not baptism in the name of Jesus. Hearing from Paul that John had not only called men to repentance for their sins, but also to “believe in the one to come,” namely, Jesus, they believed in him and received baptism in his name. Whether while baptizing, or thereafter, Paul laid his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came on them. This baptism of the Spirit (and its attendant salvation in Jesus) was signified to them and to Paul by these disciples “speaking in tongues and prophesying” (19:6).

What should we learn from these four episodes?

These four episodes are not models for the Christian church to follow because they have no consistent and uniform pattern. The first (Pentecost, Acts 2) and this fourth one (the Ephesians, Acts 19) are the closest to one another, but even here there is a difference. Some of the apostles had been disciples of John the Baptist, but they heard his message pointing to Jesus, and they turned to Jesus in true faith as believers, and therefore they had waited for the ascended Lord to send God’s promise of the Holy Spirit. These disciples of John in Ephesus had not come as far as the apostles, but had only heard and responded to the initial part of a John-the-Baptist-type message, that is, repentance, but had not heard the part about believing in the one who was to come after John the Baptist. But none of us, or those that we reach with the Gospel, find ourselves in that situation, and we, or they, never will. Nor are we Samaritans (Acts 8), very much disliked by the Jews and disliking them equally, who having heard the Gospel and
responded to it, need to recognize that only through the hands of Jewish apostles will we receive the empowering and energizing and uniting work of the Holy Spirit. As we shall see below from Paul, we received the Spirit when we believed, and did not need to wait for the apostles, or anyone else, to lay on hands. Yes, we are Gentiles, like Cornelius and his household (Acts 10 & 11), but we should not expect that we should speak in tongues to convince circumcised believers that we are really Christians. All of us (who live outside these special and transitional situations) are in the same position as those to whom Peter proclaimed the Gospel right after the Pentecost episode: “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

What do we learn from Paul about Christians being baptized with the Holy Spirit?

To this truth Paul also testified, as in 1 Corinthians 12:13, where he stated: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and were all made to drink of one Spirit.” Paul’s double use of “all” buttressed by the reference to Jews, Greeks, slave and free, and underlined by his triple use of “one” (Spirit, body, Spirit) makes it clear that “all” believers have been brought into the one body of Christ by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and are being nurtured by that one Spirit. This use of the word “baptize” with the Holy Spirit indicates that the same activity of that Spirit has worked in us “all” that worked in different ways for specific purposes in the book of Acts. Paul in several verses in Romans 8 reminds Christians how dependent they are on the Holy Spirit and that without his presence in their lives they are not Christians. He emphatically asserts in verse 9, “anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him,” and he also asserts in verse 14 “… that all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” Finally, he reminds the Romans, and ourselves, “you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father! The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (8:15-16; cf. Gal. 4:6-7). Notice that this work of the Spirit is not only that of regeneration and conversion, but also that of leading believers now (8:14), of causing us to know that we are his children, of being able to know that he is our Father (8:15-16), and that having “believed in him, [we] were sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it” (Eph. 1:14). Indeed, it is the entire work of sanctification.
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What should we learn about the filling and fullness of the Holy Spirit in Acts?

This brings us back to the book of Acts where Jesus’ promise to the apostles was that they “will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you [them],” and that Holy Spirit given “power” will enable them to “be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8). It is this aspect to which we should give further attention as it occurs in Acts, particularly with the use of two verbs for “fill” and a cognate noun of one of the verbs that means “full of.”

First we look at πλήρησις. It is this power of the Holy Spirit that enabled their preaching to be powerful and effective, and through that power they were rightly esteemed by others as having “boldness” (Acts 4:8 & 13, “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them . . .,” and “they saw the boldness of Peter and John”). These two elements are tightly tied together in Acts 4:23-31. Peter and John and the Christian community asked the Lord to “grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness” (4:29), and their prayers were answered “and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness” (4:31). Thus “filling” came upon Peter, as an example, one who had already been baptized with the Holy Spirit (2:4, the word actually used is “filled”), and who had already been said to be “filled with the Holy Spirit” (4:8). Likewise Paul was promised that he would “be filled with the Holy Spirit” when he regained his sight (9:17), and 13:8 attested that he had been so filled.

Next consider the noun πλήρης. The church at Jerusalem was instructed to select men “full of the Spirit and wisdom” (6:3). The church chose such, and about Stephen in particular is it said he was “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (6:5), and this is repeated of him in 7:55. Likewise a similar description is given of Barnabas: “he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (11:24).

The last of the three words is the verb πληρέω. This verb is used in concert with the other verb πλήρησις in Acts 2. The wind “filled the entire house where they were sitting” (πληρέω, Acts 2:2) and “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (πλήρησις, Acts 2:4). Also it is written that “the disciples [of Antioch] were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit” (πληρέω, Acts 13:52).

8 One Greek verb is πλήρησις, and it is used of the filling of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17 and 13:9. Related to this verb is the verb πληρέω, which is also used with the filling of the Holy Spirit in Acts in 2:2; 13:52 and Ephesians 5:18, and its cognate noun πλήρης which is also used with the filling of the Holy Spirit in Acts in 6:3, 5; 7:55 and 11:24.
What is Ephesians 5:18 teaching us?

The significance of the interconnected usage of these words in Acts is that Paul addressed Christians in his letter to the Ephesians and exhorted them to “be filled with the Spirit,” using one of the same verbs as was used in Acts (Eph. 5:18, παληροθεί, present passive imperative of παληρω). Paul explicitly recognized that they had been “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” and that they should not “grieve the Holy Spirit” who already indwelt them (1:13; 2:22; 4:30). He is not asking Christians to seek the Spirit or have him baptize them or fall on them, because his other letters show that he knew that this is already true. But he did ask Christians to seek to be filled with the Spirit. No matter how we understand the preposition used before the Spirit in the phrase “be filled with the Spirit,” this statement correlates the verb “be filled” and “the Spirit.” “Be filled with the Spirit,” is an imperative, which by definition, is a command. It is in the passive voice: “be filled.” Christians are to seek that “filling” to happen to them by the action of God.  

What should we learn about “filling” from Luke, Acts and Ephesians taken together?

Here the Lord’s teaching in Luke 11:13 is helpful in giving us a proper understanding of the Ephesians 5:18 teaching. In the second half of that passage Jesus said, “how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!” Since the regenerating work of the Father is not a result of one’s asking for the Holy Spirit, nor is the baptism or sealing work of the Holy Spirit dependent upon asking for the Spirit to be given to Christians, one must ask what is it that Jesus is teaching with reference to the Spirit? Here I think that the Lucan passage is speaking about the same phenomenon of the Holy Spirit as the Ephesians passage is, namely, the filling or empowering of the Spirit for the work of serving the Lord. We see an illustration of this aspect in Acts 4:29-31: The disciples prayed “grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all

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9 The English translation usually used is “with.” The Greek statement is παληροθεί ἐν πνεύματι. Some render the Greek ἐν with the word “with” to indicate the sphere in which they are filled, and others render it with the word “by,” indicating the instrument that does the filling. See H. W. Hoehner, Ephesians (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 703-705, and P. T. O’Brien, The Letter to the Ephesians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 391-393; both opt for the instrumental usage and would render the Greek preposition with the word “by.” See also A. J. Köstenberger, “What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit? A Biblical Investigation,” JETS 40 (June 1997): 229-240.

10 This understanding accords with the parallel passage in Colossians: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . .” (Col. 3:16).
boldness .... And when they had prayed ... they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” Those that so prayed had already been regenerated by the Spirit and had received the Spirit. But they prayed for his filling and asked him to use them enabled by his Spirit.

This combination of passages in Ephesians, Luke’s Gospel and this and other passages in Acts, show Christians should still be seeking and praying for the filling of the Holy Spirit for empowerment in their Christian service. Yes, it may seem a little strange to speak about the command for being filled with the Holy Spirit, but this is the language of the apostle Paul. Paul prayed that God would grant Christians to “be strengthened with power through the Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you being rooted and grounded in love ... may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:16-19). So we should pray for ourselves, and our fellow Christians, to be strengthened by “being filled with the Spirit.” But, what about the extraordinary displays of the Spirit’s presence and work, such as the gift of healing, and signs and wonders, which we read about in Acts 4:29-31, for example? Those must await our consideration of signs and wonders, and the gift of healing.

What about prophecy (and its related terms) in the New Testament?

The noun “prophecy,” and its related words, the noun “prophet” and the verb “prophesy,” are used in the New Testament, as in the Old, of the revelation given by God to the prophet to be proclaimed.11 This is evident in the first usage of this concept found in the New Testament church in Acts 2:14 ff., especially in verses 17 and 18 where the verb “prophesy” is used once each in both verses, and where Joel 2:28-32 is cited as being fulfilled. Paul dealt at length with the concept of prophecy in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 11-14, especially in chapter 14. There he tersely referred to prophecy with the word “revelation” in verse 26, and in verse 30 wrote about “a revelation” being given to one of the “prophets,” who should by this act of God be allowed to “prophesy” forthwith, and the other one speaking should “be silent” so that his brother may do so.

11 For a brief but rather thorough study of this question of prophecy and its related terms see my booklet, Prophecy in the New Testament (Concerned Presbyterians, 2nd printing 1996).
A word about Grudem’s view of New Testament Prophecy

The Reformed community and most of the Charismatics have agreed on this understanding of New Testament prophecy. Dr Grudem, and those that follow him, distinguish New Testament prophecy from Old Testament prophecy, as he has asserted about New Testament prophecy that it does not “possess a divine authority of actual words.” Grudem regards New Testament prophecy as “speaking merely human words to report something God brings to mind,” or, “as something which God can use to bring things to our attention, but as something which nevertheless can contain human interpretation and mistakes.” He seeks to demonstrate this view by appealing to various prophecies in Acts, and especially to Agabus in Acts 21:10-11 and maintains that “using OT standards, Agabus would have been condemned as a false prophet, because in Acts 21.27-35 neither of his predictions are fulfilled” [i.e., “Paul was not bound by the Jews ... and he had to be delivered from the Jews ...”]. Agabus had said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles” (Acts 21:11). Notice that, contrary to Grudem, Paul used very similar words to those of this prophecy to describe to the Jews why he was imprisoned in Rome: “Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans” (Acts 21:11, “deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles,” Acts 28:17, “yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans”). The word “bind,” if understood in its metaphorical sense of the ones responsible for his being bound and being brought to Rome, certainly has the Jews in view according to Paul.

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12 Sometimes the word concept is used to indicate preaching in its popular usage, so that one may hear of a preacher being seen as prophetic in his proclamation, but this is only by extension of its meaning and usually, as the New Testament does, preaching and teaching on the one hand and prophesying on the other are recognized as distinct and different activities. The prophet communicates directly the message given to him by God. The preacher or teacher communicates the message already given by God.


14 The first quotation is in the table of contents, 7-8, and in chapter subheadings, on pages 67 and 89, and the second is found in The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today, 114.

15 For the interaction with Grudem on Acts 21:4, “And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem,” see Prophecy in the New Testament, 6-7, note 1.

16 The Gift of Prophecy in I Corinthians, 79.
Paul wrote that after the Romans had “examined me, they wished to set me at liberty .... But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar ...” (Acts 28:18-19; cf. also the testimony of Felix, “And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison,” Acts 24:27; note also the numerous times where it is indicated that the Jews are prosecuting the case against Paul, Acts 21:27; 22:30; 24:1-2; 25:2,15,24). So not only is this case of prophecy, and others in Acts, inadequate to make Grudem’s case, the thesis itself on its face is not compelling.\(^{17}\)

**What may we deduce from Scripture about the extraordinary gifts?**

This leads to the question that separates, in general, the Reformed perspective from that of the Charismatic, and that is whether or not the extraordinary spiritual gifts continued after the apostolic age. This question like other related matters (do the apostles continue?, is the canon of the Scriptures closed?) cannot be solved by citing some one or more Scripture passages, but only by that “good and necessary consequence [which] may be deduced from Scripture.”\(^{18}\)

**The cessation of the apostolic and prophetical offices**

First consider the cessation of the apostolic and prophetical offices and their gifts. The word “apostle” as it appears in the New Testament designates the twelve, Paul (and perhaps a few others [cf. Acts 14:14]) and refers to those appointed by Christ as eyewitnesses of his resurrection, to be first in leadership and authority in his church, to communicate his revelation, and to be the foundation for his church.\(^{19}\) The word “prophet”

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\(^{18}\) Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.6. The sentence as a whole reads as follows: “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.”

\(^{19}\) See G.W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 58, for the biblical references for each of the items mentioned above. In addition to this predominant New Testament usage, in a couple of places the word designates the “messenger” or “delegate” sent by the church, for example, 2 Cor. 8:23 and Phil. 2:25, and the word for apostle is also used sometimes to designate “false” apostles (2 Cor. 11:13; cf. also 11:5 & 12:11).
in the New Testament (when joined with the word apostle) designates a New Testament person and not an Old Testament figure. This is deduced from the fact that Paul affirmed that the apostles and prophets had been "appointed in the church" by "God" respectively "first" and "second," that is, that they are the first and second most necessary gifts for the church (to which teachers are then named as the third most [cf.1 Cor. 12:28]). These two, apostles and prophets, are among the gifts God has given to the church (1 Cor. 12:28-31). Compare also 12:4-11 that speaks of the "varieties of gifts" given by "the Spirit for the common good" and includes among them "prophecy".

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians mentions “apostles and prophets” in three very important situations (Eph. 2:20; 3:5 and 4:11). In 4:11, these extraordinary gifts, (as well as ordinary gifts that continue), are given by the ascended Christ. In 3:5, they are the receivers and bearers of “the mystery of Christ” which has been made known to them, being “revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” In 2:19-20, they are identified as “the foundation” on which “the household of God” is “built” with “Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” In 4:11, these apostles and prophets are clearly distinguished from each other, as they are in 1 Cor. 12:28, and thus also in 2:20 and 3:5²⁰.

**The foundation of the apostles and prophets**

Paul referred to apostles and prophets as “the foundation” in Eph. 2:19-20, meaning by this that the church is “built out and up from the revelation given by Christ, with the apostles and prophets elaborating and explaining the mystery, which has been made known to them by the Holy Spirit (3:4-11, esp. v. 5).”²¹ The data in the New Testament shows that once Judas (the betrayer) was replaced, there were no more replacements for the other apostles, and the same evaluation is implied for the prophets joined so closely with the apostles. The non-replacement of the apostles is evident in the reference in the Book of Revelation that states that the wall of the

²⁰ In Eph. 4:11 both apostles and prophets have their distinguishing definite article in the Greek, and also a distinguishing μεταφορα. Grudem’s assertion that the references in Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5 should be understood to mean “the apostles who are also prophets” (The Gift of Prophecy in I Corinthians, 105) must candidly be said to be a case of special pleading for his argument that New Testament prophecy continues. He appropriately recognizes that Eph. 2:20 indicates the foundational and non-repetitive character of the “apostles” and therefore from his perspective (that “prophecy” continues) the passage must not be understood as referring to “prophets” themselves.

Jerusalem to come “had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:14). From the reference to the apostles and prophets being the foundation in Eph. 2:19-20, it should be clear that they are not repeated in the life of the church but serve rather as the once-laid foundation for the church. The implication is that neither the apostles nor the prophets (given by Christ as one of the primary spiritual gifts) continued beyond the foundational stage of the church (except in the book of Revelation). Thus the instruction in 1 Thessalonians 5:20 and 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14 with reference to prophets and prophecy was relevant in the apostolic age, but when that gift is no longer given that instruction is mute. This fact has further implications, namely, that not all the spiritual gifts continue in the life of the post-apostolic church.

“Signs” (σημεῖα), “wonders” (τέρας) and “miracles” (δύναμις)

When the Gospel was being proclaimed in the early church, it was accompanied by “signs” (σημεῖα), and often “wonders” (τέρας) and at least four times by “miracles” (δύναμις), and these were often (but not always) brought about by the apostles.22 The actions that are usually in view when these signs were in evidence are those of healing. Acts 4:22 says it explicitly with the words “the man on whom this sign of healing was performed.” (cf. 4:16 and the context). Similarly in Acts 4:30 where the church prayed to God that he would enable them to speak the gospel boldly “while you stretch out your hand to heal and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” The case with Philip, however, makes it clear that healing is not the only sign they performed, when Acts relates that they heard and “saw the signs that he

22 Σήμεια are aptly rendered by the English word “signs” as they are pointers to the message they accompany and do signify its truthfulness and reality. Τέρατα are used in the NT only in the plural and only with σήμεια. Those that experienced this phenomenon were amazed at what they were seeing and thus the translation “wonders” is appropriate. Notice as an example of this phenomenon Acts 8:13 where τέρατα is not used with the other two, but the verb used indicates “he was amazed.” Δύναμις generally means power or capability, but in the four or so times that it occurs with these other two words it is usually rendered “miracles.” The apostles are in view in the majority of usages in the Book of Acts (cf., e.g., Acts 5:12), but Stephen and Philip are also involved with these “signs” (Acts 6:8 and 8:6 respectively). Σήμεια is used 13x in Acts, twice each in 4 Pauline letters but not always with the same significance, once in Hebrews and 7x in Revelation, and 48x in the four gospels. Τέρατα is used 9x in Acts, once each in 3 Pauline letters, and once in Hebrews, and once each in Mt., Mk. and Jn. Δύναμις, which occurs 119x in the NT, is used 4x in Acts accompanying the other two words.
did. For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed … and many … were healed” (Acts 8: 6-7)

The most significant thing to learn from these signs is how they signify the reality of the gospel of Christ. Immediately after the passage from Joel has been quoted with its use of wonders and signs (Acts 2:19), the significance of these signs is spelled out with reference to Jesus: “Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst … “ (Acts 2:22) by the use of the verb “attested.” This result of the signs is repeated throughout Acts: “awe came upon every soul” when these signs “were being done through the apostles” (Acts 2:43); “Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles… And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women” (Acts 5:12 & 14). It is specifically said that “the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did” (Acts 8:6). In Acts, Paul and Barnabas were encouraged to speak boldly for the Lord when he “bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands” (Acts 14:3). In concurrence with the words of Acts, the words of the apostle Paul give a similar report. He summarized his ministry to the Gentiles in these words: “... Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience – by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God . . .” (Romans 15:18 & 19). Thus he wrote to the Corinthians “the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works” (2 Cor. 12:12). Finally, the writer to the Hebrews summarized the gospel message which he had received from those before him with these words: “It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (Heb. 2:3-4). The key statement is, “God also bore witness by” these signs.23 Leaving aside the references to our Lord in the Gospels and again in Revelation, only in the Book of Acts and in these words in these three epistles (which looked back to what they had seen and experienced earlier) are there these tremendous words about signs and wonders and miracles. Do not these facts themselves indicate that they refer only to the foundation stages of the church? Are these then not the corroborative works that God gave to the apostles and those who labored with them as they laid the foundation for

23 Ἀναπαρατετόμος is the Greek verb used here and it means to “testify at the same time” (BDAD) with the dative words in the Greek “signs and wonders and various miracles” signifying the means used to give that testimony.
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the church (Eph. 2:20), and have they not ceased when the apostles died and the apostolic era itself came to an end?

The waning of the extraordinary gifts in the New Testament

Speaking in tongues

Consider also some of the other special gifts and their apparent waning within the New Testament itself. Take the speaking in tongues phenomenon and associated events. In its first occurrence with the apostles (Acts 2:1-13), the phenomenon is accompanied by the fact that “suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them” (Acts 2:2-3). The most striking aspect of this is that the apostles “began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). The result was that each one in the crowd was hearing them speak the mighty works of God “in his own language” (Acts 2:6; cf. also 2:7-11 where this is repeatedly said). But in the other episodes in the Book of Acts where speaking in tongues is reported (10:46 and 19:6), the wind and fire are not mentioned nor is the ability of the others to understand in their own language, and when the speaking of tongues is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12-14 an interpreter is then required if one is to speak in public (cf. esp. 1 Cor. 14:27-28). In Corinth the one speaking in tongues no longer spoke to the hearers “in his own language” but must have someone interpret what he has said for them to understand. It is noteworthy in the New Testament, that aside from the three special occasions in the Book of Acts (2:1-13, Pentecost [the Apostles]; 10:44-48, Peter and Cornelius [the Gentiles]; and 19:1-7, Paul and the disciples of John’s baptism in Ephesus), and Paul’s lengthy instruction about these and other gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14, the phenomenon of “speaking in tongues” is not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, neither as a characteristic of a believer or as a necessity for an officer in Christ’s church. Was this one of the signs given in the foundational period of the building of Christ’s church that not only faded and changed and became less spectacular, but faded away altogether as a sign? If this be so, as I think that it is, then the words of instruction for it,

24 Compare the language of the apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 13:8 where he wrote “as for tongues, they will cease.” The voice of the Greek verb is middle whereas the other two verbs concerning prophecy and knowledge are passive. Wallace suggests for this middle the understanding of “they will cease [on their own],” or more fully in his text, “cease of their own accord, i.e., ‘die out’ without an intervening agent (indirect middle).” See Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 422 f. Not only for his treatment of this verb and
like those for prophecy, also become mute when it is no longer given as a “sign” (which both tongue speaking and prophecy are called in 1 Cor. 14:22). 25

The gift of healing

The gift of healing, one aspect of the “signs,” manifests the same waning in the New Testament. During Christ’s ministry and that of the apostles, the gift of healing was in full display, as in the extensive healing of Peter and the other apostles in Acts 5:12-16, where the people “even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats,” as well as people “from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick . . .,” “and they were all healed” (Acts 5:15-16). Think not only of them “all” being healed, but also consider the spectacular phenomenon that they had put their sick in the streets “that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on them” (Acts 5:15). During the ministry of Paul recorded in Acts, “God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of the them” (Acts 19:11-12). Here was one of those “signs,” designated by the third item in that three-fold list, i.e., “miracles” (τέρατα, translated by the ESV as “extraordinary miracles”), with its result that “fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was exalted,” and “so the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily” (Acts 19:17 & 20). Except for the examples in the Gospels and the Book of Acts, and the three references to the “gifts of healing” in 1 Corinthians 12 (9, 28 & 30), the rest of the New Testament does not characterize Christians or officers in the church as possessing this special gift. Rather Paul, through whom God had done many miracles with the handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched his skin (Acts 19:11-12), later in his ministry prayed that God would take away “a thorn ... given me in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7) and learned that the thorn would stay and that God’s grace was sufficient for him (2 Cor. 12:8-9). Furthermore, and even more telling, Paul “left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus” (2 Tim. 4:20), rather than personally healing him! Finally, note Paul’s statement about Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25-27. Paul states that he had been ill and underlines his statement with these words: “Indeed he was ill, near to death” (2:27a). After this vivid description of his illness, he writes thankfully of God’s mercy in raising him from his illness and out

its understanding but also for his defense of that understanding over against the dominant opinion among NT scholars that the verb is future deponent and therefore active in meaning. See also footnote 26.

25 Σημεῖον the same word as was used in the Acts accounts when it spoke of signs, wonders and miracles.
of the near death situation. We read “God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow” (2:27b). Paul’s statement about God’s mercy on him most likely implies that God did the healing. What conclusion can be drawn from these situations? Is it not appropriate to deduce that the extraordinary sign of healing had done its work in undergirding the laying of the foundation of the Gospel, and that it has ceased as a sign gift. Indeed, God still does heal in answer to prayer, but not by means of one who has the gift of healing, and not always, as the two examples from Paul make evident. The Christian should indeed ask God to heal, if it is God’s will, and be willing to accept the verdict, whatever it may be, as the expression of God’s will. On the matter of public prayer for the one who requests it, James wrote these instructions for the elders as well as the one requesting their prayers: “Is anyone 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 will save the one that is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And, if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:13-15).

The deduction about the cessation of the apostles and prophets and sign gifts

Thus one can deduce from this survey of the evidence that God has laid the foundation for his church in the apostles and prophets, and that he gave to them and those with them certain signs, wonders and miracles to collaborate the Gospel proclaimed and the foundation being laid. With the cessation of their task, the ministry of the apostles and prophets ceased and the signs given to them also ceased (even beginning to do that within the New Testament itself). Thus we can deduce that the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit are no longer being given to the church. At the same time, we must still gladly say that the ordinary spiritual gifts are still given and are still needful for the church and for Christians.

How can we deduce such a deduction? Not because we are wiser or more perceptive than the Charismatics. But only because we have searched out God’s Word and want to be obedient and resigned to it.

26 In this argument we are not appealing to “the perfect” as meaning the close of the canon in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12, as some others have done, because we think that Paul is writing about something else there and not about the subject we are addressing (for my fuller treatment of this passage see Prophecy in the New Testament, 21-22 footnote 12). But see also footnote 24.
What spiritual benefit has this study been?

What has this search produced that is beneficial to the soul and life of believers as well as edifying to their minds? It is that in Christ they have all that they need, and they do not need to seek something better or higher, such as a follow-up baptism of the Holy Spirit. Except for those few instances in the New Testament where God was especially instructing his church about the Samaritans and the Gentiles, that they were one with the Jewish believers and apostles, the New Testament repeatedly affirms that when people are united to Christ by faith they have in him thereby received the Holy Spirit. Thus all Christians have the vitality of being united to Christ and indwelt by his Holy Spirit. And just as with so many other of the gifts and graces of God, they are continually being urged by the apostle Paul to be filled with the Spirit and to walk by the Spirit, and not just rest content that they have once believed and once repented and once been baptized by the Spirit.

How are we to interact with Charismatics?

How then are we to interact with our Charismatic fellow Christians? When the opportunity is appropriate we should talk with them in an understanding way and try to show them why we think that the supernatural special gifts have ceased because they have done the tasks God assigned for them. When they point to their own lives as a proof positive of their Charismatic thinking, we should try to point out to them other ways of understanding their life. Were they only nominal Christians who have now come to really trust in him and therefore like those Ephesian disciples they have of course received the baptism of the Holy Spirit as they trusted in Christ? Or were they really believers who turned from their lackadaisical walk as God has heard their prayer and is filling them with his Holy Spirit in which they were already baptized?

In our eagerness to protect the Christian flock from the error of the Charismatics, we must at the same time seek to lead those who are

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27 The Holy Spirit is the one that makes us alive in our deadness in sins and brings us to embrace Christ offered in the Gospel by saving faith. God in adoption gives us the Holy Spirit, i.e., he baptizes us in him. Thus the Spirit first makes us alive, and then when we are united to Christ by faith, God pours his Spirit within us. The Westminster Larger Catechism in answer 74 puts it quite well when it says “Adoption is an act of the free grace of God, in and for his only son Jesus Christ, whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of his children, have his name put upon them, the Spirit of his Son given to them, are under his fatherly care and dispensations, ....”
involved in that error from those errors and embrace them as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

The vitality of the Reformed Faith is evidenced in the regenerating work of God immediately leading to the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the ongoing filling of that Spirit in God’s people. This work of God enables his people to understand that God has sovereignly founded his church in the apostolic age on the apostles and prophets with a display of extraordinary gifts, and also to understand that God continues to build his church on that foundation without those apostles and prophets being present today by the ordinary (but not extraordinary) spiritual gifts God still gives his church. This vitality and understanding enables those who embrace the Reformed Faith to meet the challenge of the Charismatic movement and also other aberrant variations of the Christian Faith.
Committee Report
Discussion of Paper 1
Extraordinary Gifts

We submit the following summary of the main features of the discussion of Dr Knight’s paper.

1. There is full consensus that special revelation is now fully inscripturated in line with Ephesians 2: 20 – the church built on the foundation of apostles and prophets. Thus the statement in Westminster Confession 1.1 ‘those former ways of revealing his will to his people being now ceased’ is to the point, as also Belgic Confession art. 2-7.

2. The giving of the Spirit at Pentecost is a very special event in the history of redemption. It and subsequent episodes of the giving of the Spirit in Acts 8, 10-11 and 19 are actions of the Spirit which demonstrate the unity of all believers in the one body of Christ, whether Jew, Samaritan, Gentile or disciples of John. No normative two-stage theology of Christian experience – conversion followed by a distinct baptism of the Spirit – can be derived from these episodes. Every true believer has the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:.13), and is gifted and empowered by the Spirit.

3. The point of ‘perfection’ in 1 Cor. 13: 9-11 which brings the end of partial knowledge is the return of Christ, although some think that the completion of the canon of Scripture is what is referred to.

4. Prophecy, tongues and ‘gifts of healings’ are closely associated with the foundational Apostles, and some agree with the presumption that these gifts do not continue beyond the Apostolic period; others do not agree. Since Scripture is not explicit on this question, any deductions from Scripture by good and necessary consequence need considerable care, and some doubts can remain in some minds.

5. There is some difference among us as to the precise nature of the modern phenomena termed prophecy, tongues and ‘gifts of healings’. The options, which may not be mutually exclusive, as all agree, at least to some extent, on (a) and (b), appear to be:
   a. a psychologically-based human imitation;
b. Satanic in some instances;
c. a gift of God but not revelatory in terms of point 1.

Nevertheless, the discussion suggested, some dissenting, that there is a consensus that much or perhaps all of what occurs today reflects a situation which adequate preaching and pastoral care supplant where there is genuine spiritual life and loving Christian fellowship. True conversion and the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22ff.) must be our focus, not extraordinary gifts.

6. It is vital to remember that all gifts are to be used for the building up of others in love (1 Cor. 13) under the Lordship of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 12: 3). Paul’s regulation of undoubtedly genuine prophecy and tongues in 1 Cor. 14: 26ff. reflects this concern.

Respectfully submitted.

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