



Notes on Holy Spirit Controversies

A guide for pastors

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Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The baptism in the Holy Spirit	3
Chapter 2: The gifts of the Holy Spirit	9
Chapter 3: Are there apostles today?	13
Chapter 4: Advice to leaders	17

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Introduction

The Holy Spirit empowers the church.

This is made clear from passages like Acts 1.8: Speaking to his disciples, the Lord Jesus said, 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'. See also Luke 24.49; Acts 2.1-4; Acts 7.55; Ephesians 4.16; Ephesians 5.18. The ever-blessed third Person of the Trinity lives in the hearts of believers and it is through him that the church is given strength, resilience and power. And it is worth noting that the Spirit's power is particularly power to witness for the Lord Jesus and to preach the gospel, Acts 5.32; 1 Thessalonians 1.5.

Lack of balance

It is unsurprising therefore, that the devil, the great enemy of Christ and his people, should do everything he can to unbalance the church concerning the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. Satan does not want to face Spirit-empowered believers and a Spirit-filled church. He does his best to sow the seeds of confusion and doubt concerning the Spirit so as to leave Christians and churches either almost avoiding Biblical teaching about the Spirit or taking on board extreme and damaging views of the Spirit which do not match what Scripture has to say.

Sadly, there has been a track record, especially during the last half of the twentieth century of erroneous ideas about the Holy Spirit and his work splitting churches and causing individuals to be so disillusioned as to walk out on the Christian faith altogether. As an example of this, when I was a pastor in Guildford, we had a woman who lived in our street who was one of the most formidable opponents to Christianity. It turned out that she had previously gone to a church with unbiblical views of the Spirit which were pressed upon her that she must speak in tongues such that eventually she felt that she was being made a fool of. Her anger was almost palpable. There were other instances from my time in Surrey of whole churches who were led astray and fell into precipitous decline, with the gospel itself being lost through strange ideas concerning the Spirit.

Light and fire

The overall effect of things like this has been that, during the first part of the twenty first century, there has been an understandable but lamentable neglect of the work of the Spirit. We have churches without light and other churches without fire. There are still many good churches today, for which we thank God. But often even they

could be far better and more effective than they are. Even they seem to have lost the Spirit's cutting edge. This is a very sad state of affairs.

It is with a desire to try to correct some of the more common errors concerning the Spirit and his connection to believers and to churches that this booklet is written. I cannot claim that this is the 'last word' on this subject. But may it be used to bring humility and unity instead of pride and division. It is written in the hope that it might do some good and bring a new zeal and spiritual fire to the churches.

Chapter 1: The baptism in the Holy Spirit

Many years ago, now, while I was a research student I decided that my Christian life was not all that it ought to be and I would give serious time to seeking God.

Over many weeks I spent some hours at lunch-times – sometimes missing lunch – in order to go to the university chapel where there were prayer rooms and you could lock yourself in and be sure of not being disturbed. During many such lunch-hours I worshipped and prayed. And without going into many details all I can say is that a day came when in the middle of such a prayer time when God met with me in a way I had never experienced before. I felt his blessing, his Spirit falling upon me like large drops of living water being sprinkled deeply into my soul. I was deeply assured of my own salvation and filled with great joy. I found myself more at ease as a Christian, more able to speak to others of Christ. In fact, sometimes I felt a little silly because for many days I couldn't stop smiling and now and then bursting into a laugh of joy. I had already been a Christian for many years. I had already known the powerful help of the Holy Spirit in my life especially during times of witness. But God had met me in a new way and filled me afresh with spiritual power.

What friends said

'You've been baptised in the Holy Spirit' my charismatic friends in the CU (Christian Union) told me. Well, something very real had happened there was no doubting that. But as I read the NT I was not at all sure they were giving it the right label.

Now this whole area of 'the baptism in the Holy Spirit' has, sadly become an area of sharp controversy over the years to the great detriment of the church. It has frequently become the instrument of dividing churches and leaving many Christians disoriented and disheartened. Also, because this area has often been high-jacked by extremists it has made many people shy away from seeking the power of the Spirit – even though the church is in such desperate need in this country. Though there's often nothing wrong with our own abilities and programmes, we have trusted in them rather than seeking the power of the Spirit. Jesus warned us, 'apart from me you can do nothing', John 15.5.

So, in this chapter, we briefly look at this subject of the 'baptism in the Spirit'. Let's try to understand what the NT teaches and let us receive the challenge presented to us as individuals.

The expression 'baptise in the Spirit' comes only 7 times in the NT. The references are Matthew 3v11; Mark 1v8; Luke 3v16; John 1v33; Acts 1v5; Acts 11v16; and 1

Corinthians 12v13. All these use the same Greek preposition (*en*) in the phrase regarding the Spirit's baptism which may be translated differently but obviously refer to the same thing. You will see that the first 6 of those references are linked with the preaching of John the Baptist, in many ways the last OT prophet, Matthew 11v9-11, as he points to the difference between himself and the Lord Jesus, the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. This promise of John the Baptist was reiterated by the Lord Jesus in Acts 1v5 and was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out from heaven and tongues of fire rested on the apostles.

How then are we to understand the 'baptism in the Spirit' according to the NT?

'Baptism in the Spirit' relates to the initial Christian experience

In other words, it is another way of talking about being 'born again of the Spirit' and is the spiritual aspect of being 'converted' or becoming a Christian. Why do I come to that conclusion? 3 reasons

1. Because the context of the references in the 4 Gospels, like Luke 3v16 show John the Baptist summing up his own ministry and also summing up the ministry of Jesus and comparing the two. He sums up the entire ministry of Jesus as bringing 'the baptism in the Spirit.' Now that cannot be a second experience for a few select Christians. It must be that which is of the very heart and essence of Christianity. And of course, when you look at the comparison between the Old Covenant and the New, the fundamental difference is the gift of the Spirit, 'And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules,' Ezekiel 36.26,27. Yes, the Spirit had been active in the OT but in a restricted way – but now he is given fully to all. This is the great difference the Lord Jesus brings. This ministry is particularly his. And that's why it is as it were 'delayed' in the experience of Jesus' disciples, because they lived historically across the change over between the Old and New Covenant. The Spirit is given once Jesus is glorified – through the cross, resurrection and ascension.
2. Because referring to what happened when Cornelius and his household were converted, Peter refers to their experience as the baptism in the Spirit, Acts 11v15-18. This made Cornelius and others Christians. They were not Christians before. But as Peter preached Christ to them the Holy Spirit came upon them and they became followers of Jesus.

3. Because of 1 Corinthians 12v13, which says, 'For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit'. This uses the same Greek expression as the other texts and tells us that to be baptized in the Spirit is to be baptized into the body of Christ – to be a member of Christ. Well, we believe that is true of every Christian.

And it is interesting that two of the biggest charismatic leaders of the last 50 years came to the same conclusion; the Anglican David Watson in his book *You are my God* and the American *John Wimber* in his book *Dynamics of Spiritual Growth*. So, if you are a real Christian, someone who has repented of your sins and personally trusts in Christ you have been baptised in the Spirit. You have been initiated into the life of the Holy Spirit. That is why you trust in Christ.

Other incidents in Acts

Now, I know some people try to argue against this by referring to the events in Acts 8 and Acts 19. But *first* you will notice that Acts 8 and 19 do not appear in the list of the 7 NT references to baptism in the Spirit. This should give us some hesitation about applying that term to them. And *second* those events have very obvious explanations without trying to make them teach baptism in the Spirit as a second stage experience.

Acts 8 sees the conversion of Samaritans. Scripture tells us that generally there was deep friction between Jews and Samaritans. So, as a one-off, in order to preserve the unity of the church God withholds his Spirit until the Jewish apostles Peter and John come. Hence, the Samaritans do not separate. Jews and Samaritans become one in Christ, partaking of the same Spirit, one church.

And again, if you read the story in Acts 19 you will find that those who received the Spirit as Paul laid on hands, were not even Christians before Paul met them. They were followers of John the Baptist, not Jesus, and had never even heard about the Holy Spirit. Rather this is the Spirit being given when they are converted.

Very well, but now a question arises...

How should we view experiences of the Spirit subsequent to conversion?

What should I believe about what happened to me when I was a research student? What should you think perhaps about different experiences of the Spirit which you have had? As we consider this, there are three things to say.

- *Harm comes from teaching a two-tier Christianity*

Why make such a big fuss about this? It is because the terminology 'have you been baptised in the Spirit?' gives the impression that some Christians are in a totally separate category to others. The idea of a second experience which puts certain Christians on a different plane, in another category, from ordinary Christians is very divisive. It is tailor made to split the church. 'I have it and you don't.' That is what has caused a great deal of trouble and division in churches. It has puffed some Christians up 'I have it.' And it has greatly discouraged other Christians, 'I'm no good, I don't have it!' So, let's not go there. And let's oppose this 'second-blessing' teaching wherever it raises its head.

- *There are many degrees of empowering and personal holiness*

Christians are not in two or three separate categories. They are part of a continuum of progressive growth in holiness, power, assurance and maturity. All Christians know what it is to be take steps forward in the Christian life and also sometimes to fall back. For example, for many years after first becoming a Christian I struggled to establish a daily time of prayer. I'm sure others have experienced the same. But now, praise God I have. But that doesn't put me on a different plane from others. And also, it doesn't preclude the possibility of sometimes me falling back and having to set that going again. We all live on a spectrum. So it is that the NT speaks in terms of Christians being transformed into Christ's likeness with 'ever increasing glory', 2 Corinthians 3.18 and of Christian growth. There are not Christian grades. We are all called to 'grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ', 2 Peter 3v18. And yes, through a wonderful experience we might take a big leap forward, put on a growth spurt, but it doesn't put us in a different category from other Christians.

- *Subsequent experiences are usually spoken as 'knowing' and being filled with the Spirit*

Ephesians 1v3 says 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...'. It is all ours. There are no second-class Christians. It all belongs to us in Christ. But the actual experience of what is ours may come to different people, at different times in different ways. It is like unwrapping a present. The present is ours, but it needs to be unwrapped, brought out, experienced. And as with children at Christmas that might happen in different ways. Some kids tear off the wrapping quickly. For others it takes ages. For others, Mum or Dad unwraps it for them. Just to show you this is a Biblical model look at the end of Ephesians 1. Having read v3, look what Paul says in Ephesians 1.17-19. He is praying that 'the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of

glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation of the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe...' You have all this, but I'm praying you might know it! Or again look at 3v17-19 where Paul speaks of 'comprehending with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge'. Know them, feel them, experience them!

And Paul goes on in Ephesians to use the term 'filled with the Spirit', Ephesians 5.18 and from the tense used there, and from the occurrences of the term in Acts we understand that filling with the Spirit was not a one-off event but something which can occur many times in the Christian life. We know that on the day of Pentecost Peter was filled with the Spirit, but it happens again in 4v8, and again in 4v31.. But also, being filled with the Spirit can be a long-term characteristic of a person's life, like Barnabas, Acts 11v24. He's made that growth spurt and he's stayed there and not fallen back. So that is the best term for subsequent empowerments and blessings of the Holy Spirit. 'Be filled with the Spirit'.

How can we be filled with the Spirit?

Ultimately, of course, it is a sovereign act of God, and sometimes it happens even without our seeking it, because God knows we need it in the situation we are facing, like Stephen, Acts 7v55.

But what can we do to put ourselves in that position where God we can receive what God wants to give us? Well, you will not find a formula in the NT – except the way which is always the way of God's kingdom – to repent and believe. The way you first become a Christian is the ongoing way to make progress as a Christian, Colossians 2.6,7. Turning from sin with God's help, rededicating your life to Christ and believing God's promises about the Spirit and the spiritual riches you have in Christ. That's always the way. That's what I suppose I was up to seeking God in the university chapel prayer room.

The Lord as we know has been doing astonishing things in China in the last 40 to 50 years with millions being saved, and more Christians in China than card-carrying Communists! It is interesting to read the agreed statement of faith put out by the Chinese house churches in 1998. 'In Christ God grants a diversity of gifts of the Holy Spirit to the church so as to manifest the glory of Christ. Through faith and thirsting, Christians can experience the outpouring and filling of the Holy Spirit.'

With the low state of our country, and the great need for people to take Christ seriously, we ought to be very thirsty for the Spirit to be outpoured afresh and us to be filled. But when that happens, we don't see ourselves as 'superior' and others as second-class. Rather we humble ourselves before God's grace.

Chapter 2: The gifts of the Holy Spirit

The subject of the gifts of the Holy Spirit has sadly caused much trouble and division in the body of Christ over the last 60 years in this country.

The context of Paul's comments on the Spirit's gifts in 1 Corinthians is that there was friction between different groups – the 'haves' and the 'have nots' – in the church there too. Paul's central thrust is that the gifts are only approached and used rightly if we have love and humility towards others in our hearts, 1 Corinthians 13. This is essential and cannot be stressed enough. In fact, drawing on the example of Judas, who presumably 'healed the sick and cast out demons' just as the other apostles did during Jesus' ministry, it is possible to be gifted to the point of performing miracles and yet not be saved. The fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5.22,23 has precedence over the gifts of the Spirit.

There are 7 basic questions about spiritual gifts which we need to answer.

1. How can we tell what is genuinely of the Spirit?

The word translated 'spiritual gifts' in 1 Cor 12.1 actually just means 'spiritual things.' He is speaking generally about what is of the Spirit. He is not talking particularly about how to discern false prophets – everyone would know that if someone said, 'Jesus is cursed' they are a false prophet. Christian prophets did not prophesy in a trance-like condition, 14.32. In v2, Paul refers to 'dumb' idols. So, he is not focussing in on prophecy.

Rather what Paul is doing is giving the fundamental truth showing who has the Spirit and who does not. Anyone who genuinely confesses Jesus is Lord has the Spirit. He starts here because, some say 'unless you have experienced something miraculous you may be a Christian, but you don't have the Spirit.' Paul denies that. Anyone who seeks to follow Christ and has Jesus as Lord of their lives has the Spirit.

2. Who is endowed with spiritual gifts?

Paul's most frequent description of the church is 'the body of Christ.' Romans 12:4,5; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4:4 etc. This is a picture which pre-supposes every part of the body (the church) with a gift of some kind which functions for the edification of the whole – just like the different parts of a human body – hands, eyes, etc.

- a. Romans 12:4-6 assumes all Christians are gifted in some way.

- b. 1 Corinthians 12:7 speaks of each one being used by the Spirit for the common good.
- c. Ephesians 4:7 tells us that each one of us has received grace for the building up of the body of Christ.

The idea of 'haves' and 'have nots' when it comes to spiritual gifts in the church is directly opposed therefore by Paul. It cannot be said by any church member to another 'I don't need you,' 1 Corinthians 12:21. You need that brother, that sister, because they are gifted to help you. Equally no church member can say, 'I am not needed' 1 Corinthians 12:16 etc. They do need you because you have a part to play. This, therefore, lays a responsibility on all church members to use the gifts they have been given for the good of the church.

3. What are spiritual gifts?

As we review the whole NT we find that there are a number of parts to the answer to that question. Spiritual gifts are

- a. Any talent or ability which is empowered by the Holy Spirit (motivated by Christian love) and used in a way so as to bless the people of the church or the church's ministry.
- b. They are often enrichments of abilities someone had before becoming a Christian, 1 Corinthians 1:5,7; Romans 12:7,8. Paul himself was obviously a leader of people before his conversion, Acts 9:1,2. But God redirected and enriched that natural leadership ability for Christ, making him an apostle. Matthew the tax-collector, used to writing, was used to write Scripture. Peter, often the first disciple to say what he thought, is the apostle who, filled with the Spirit, becomes the Church's first preacher.
- c. Sometimes they are special new abilities given by God, Romans 12:6. Timothy, for example, received some gift from God through the laying on of Paul's hands, 2 Timothy 1:6.
- d. The disciples received the gift of speaking in tongues on the day of Pentecost though they presumably could not speak those foreign languages before, Acts 2:7,8. Up until then God had spoken only to the Jews. Now he speaks to the world.

4. How many gifts are there?

Scripture itself seems to throw up this question by the fact that no two lists of gifts in the NT are the same. They always differ in some way.

- a. Lists of gifts are found at a number of points in the New Testament. Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 1 Corinthians 12:28-30; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:10,11.
- b. 1 Corinthians 7:7 names a gift that is not in any of the other lists.
- c. Paul probably thought of many more gifts that he listed.
- d. God gives gifts appropriate to the needs of the day and the situation of God's people in the church. For example, Samson's strength was obviously a gift of God appropriate to its time.
- e. No two people's gifts are exactly alike, e.g., in 2 Peter 3:15,16 it is clear that the apostle Peter found some of what Paul had to say difficult to understand.
- f. Conclusion: There are an unnumbered variety of gifts – all tokens of God's varied grace.

5. How can the same gift differ?

First, if a gift is an enrichment of an ability related to that man or woman's particular personality, then obviously there is room for a variation. Both Dr Lloyd-Jones and Billy Graham were gifted preachers, but they were different in the way that gift was expressed.

Also reading the NT it is clear that gifts may vary in strength.

- a. Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 14:18; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6. A helpful analogy is that we should see the gift as controlled by a light dimmer not just an on/off switch.
- b. Even though it is not true that every believer has every gift, (1 Corinthians 12:29,30 assumes a negative reply), yet we can say that every believer potentially has every gift, simply because they are gifts of the Spirit and every believer has the Spirit.
- c. There are gifts strong enough to function for the whole assembled congregation and gifts which are given for helping individuals.
- d. Gifts can be stirred up, 2 Timothy 1.6. We must also leave room for improving a gift through experience and learning. Though the Lord Jesus gave his disciples power over demons, yet still they learned from experience, Mark 6:7; 9:28.

6. What does Paul teach about tongues and prophecy?

There are three points to pick up on here.

In church prophecy is superior to tongues

a. 1 Corinthians 14.1-5. Some people think prophecy and tongues should constitute the main part of a Christian meeting. No. He is simply discussing the possible public use of tongues and prophecy and his first guideline is that in public prophecy is superior v5. Tongues directed to God v2, but prophecy to people, v3.

b. In the church usefulness depends on intelligibility v6-12. Prophecy has that, tongues (on its own) does not.

c. Without interpretation tongues is to be kept for private devotions only and not used in church, v13-19. Note especially how strong Paul is on this in v19. 'In the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.'

7. What attitude does Scripture recommend towards spiritual gifts?

a. We are not to quench the Spirit but to seek his activity among us. 1 Thessalonians 5:19,10; 1 Corinthians 14:39.

b. But we are to be discerning and not gullible. We must not accept every claim but must test all things by Scripture. 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 1 Corinthians 14:29; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 2:2. (This needs to be done because even genuine NT prophecy, unlike Scripture is not infallible – but generally prophets own understanding of what Spirit is saying – see Acts 20:10-15 / Paul).

c. All gifts in a congregation must be exercised in a helpful, humble and orderly way, Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 14:26, 40.

d. Without love the gifts are completely worthless and bring more harm than good, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

e. Generally speaking, we must say that because the church continues as the body of Christ until the Lord comes, so spiritual gifts must also continue until the second coming, 1 Corinthians 1:7. However, this should be nuanced by the fact that we now have a complete and inerrant NT which the very early church did not have – since things like Paul's pastoral epistles or the book of Revelation had not then been written when the letter to the Corinthians was sent. It is always Scripture which is authoritative over all else.

Chapter 3: Are there apostles today?

The Greek noun *apostolos* is used throughout the NT of those who have been 'sent forth' or 'sent' by another party. It carries a variety of meanings which depend upon who did the 'sending.'

The Lord Jesus as Apostle

In Hebrews 3.1, Christ is described as an apostle. This should not surprise us given the emphasis throughout the NT, especially in John's Gospel, that God the Father 'sent' his Son into the world as the Saviour, John 3.17; 3.34; 5.23; 17.3, etc. Being sent by the Father, Jesus is the first, the greatest and ultimate source of all true apostleship. In Hebrews 3.1 there is a highly significant comparison between Christ and Moses. Christ is like Moses in being the apostle or envoy of God (see Hebrews word *shaliach*), except he is far greater than Moses as a son is greater than a servant, Hebrews 3.5,6 Jesus, is above all others, God's envoy, representative, messenger, ambassador sent by the Father with full power to act on the Father's behalf.

The Twelve

In his high priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus declares to the Father, that, just as he was sent by the Father, so he has sent (*apostello*) his disciples (those in the upper room) into the world, John 17.18. These were those he had chosen to be his apostles, that they might be with him, and that he sent out with his authority, Mark 3.13-19. Judas having defected, at the end of his earthly mission, Jesus commissions the eleven to continue his work as his representatives and witnesses to all that has happened, Luke 24.48; John 20.21.

Among the many who observed Jesus' ministry, the 12 undeniably represent a special group. Others like the 72 were sent, Luke 10.1, 17, but none apart from the 12 are designated apostles. Even the number 12 is significant as these apostles are representative of the 'tribes' of the 'New Israel' being brought together in the church of the Lord Jesus, Revelation 21.12,13.

When the fall of Judas brought about the necessity of a replacement apostle, the full qualifications for these foundational apostles become clear. Peter explains that three are things required, Acts 1.21-26.

- They must have witnessed Jesus' earthly ministry and teaching
- They must have seen the Lord Jesus in his resurrection body
- They must be personally chosen and sent by the Lord Jesus

Obviously, no one today can fulfil these conditions. All claims to such apostleship today must therefore be deemed false. The apostles sent by Jesus, share in the mission of Christ himself, are communicators and writers of 'all truth' John 16.13 (Scripture), and together with Christ constitute the rock, the foundation and the pillars of the Church, Matthew 16.18; Galatians 2.9; Ephesians 2.20. These men were given to perform 'the signs of apostles' as ongoing credentials of their status 2 Corinthians 12.12

The theologian Hermann Ridderbos puts their unique and definitive role like this: 'The apostles, unlike those invested with other ministries in the Church, do not come forth from the Church, but rather the Church owes its genesis to them,'¹ No church leader today meets these requirements for apostleship with authority over the churches. Rather our authority is the original apostles and their teaching known through their NT writings.

Paul

Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, would not naturally qualify for apostleship by Peter's definition in Acts 1. But as one 'born out of due time', 1 Corinthians 15.8, the other apostles did recognise him as part of this foundational group, alongside Peter, Galatians 2.8.

The conversion of Paul (at that point 'Saul') on the Damascus Road, with the unique circumstance of the risen Lord Jesus himself acting as the evangelist, is the key to understanding this, Acts 9.1-19; 22.2-16; 26.9-23. All three qualifications are met in this remarkable incident and what followed. Paul saw the risen Lord Jesus, Acts 9.4-6; 1 Corinthians 9.1; he was specifically commissioned and 'sent' by the risen Christ, Acts 26.17, 18; and linked to this incident Paul explains that he did not receive the gospel from man, but 'by revelation from Jesus Christ' Galatians 1.12. In other words, he had received the teaching of Christ.

In this Paul is 'abnormally born' (rushed to birth). As people questioned Paul's apostleship Paul makes the literal reply 'and lastly of all even as if to an abortion he was seen by me also,' 1 Corinthians 15.8. 'By "last of all" Paul means that Christ's appearance to him was the 'last' in the sequence of separate appearances of the risen Christ. Paul belongs to that sequence, though he comes 'last' in that sequence.

¹ *Paul: an outline of his theology*, by Hermann Ridderbos, SPCK 1977, page 450

If Cephas (Peter) was the first to whom Christ appeared Paul was the “last”.² This would imply that Paul is the ‘last apostle’ – there are no more like him or the 12.

Though the apostle John later saw a vision of Christ, Revelation 1.12f, Paul saw the risen Christ himself. The addition of Paul to the 12 does not upset the parallel with Israel. In OT Israel, often referred to as the 12 tribes, there were in fact 13 groups, since Joseph’s two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, were both included in place of their father. The addition of both Matthias and Paul is therefore congruent with the OT parallel.

So closely associated with Jesus the suffering servant, his apostles were marked by much suffering in their ministry, 1 Corinthians 4.9ff; John 21.18,19. It is this following in the footsteps of the suffering Christ which Paul uses to mark out true apostles from false in 2 Corinthians.

Other ‘apostles’ in the NT

We do find other references to ‘apostles’ in the NT which do not refer to the Twelve and Paul. At first sight this looks confusing until we go back and remind ourselves of the root meaning of the word. It means one sent out by another, and therefore it is a perfectly legitimate word to be used of those sent out by others, although not directly by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The word ‘apostles’ may therefore be applied in a lesser sense.

It is used sometimes of missionaries. For example, although Paul himself is of course a foundational apostle, nevertheless he and Barnabas are referred to as ‘apostles’ in Acts 14.4, 14. Here we need to bear in mind that these two had specifically, at the Holy Spirit’s prompting, been ‘sent out’ (apostello) on mission to spread the gospel, by the church at Antioch, Acts 13.3. In this sense they were ‘apostles’ of the church. Similarly, as he writes to the recently planted church in the town of Thessalonica, Paul refers to himself and the rest of his missionary band, including Silas and Timothy, as ‘apostles’ 1 Thessalonians 1.1; 2.6.

Along similar lines the word ‘apostle’ is sometimes used of representatives or messengers sent on behalf of the churches to perform various tasks. Paul refers to Epaphroditus as ‘your apostle’ (Gk, *apostolos*) as he writes to say ‘thank you’ to the church in Philippi. Epaphroditus had been the one who had been sent with gifts from the Christians in Philippi to help Paul as his was in prison, Philippians 2.25.

² 1 Corinthians, by Paul Barnett, Christian Focus, page 279

Again, as Paul seeks to organise a collection among the churches to help the poor Christian Jews in Jerusalem, he speaks of representatives from the churches who aid the project. In the original he speaks of them as 'apostles of the churches' 2 Corinthians 8.23. Though it is a tricky question it is probably along these lines that James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus, should be understood as an 'apostle' and a 'pillar' of the church in Jerusalem, Galatians 1.19; 2.9 since he speaks up (notice after Peter and Paul) as leader of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, Acts 15.13f.

In the past it was thought that possibly Paul referred to women apostles in Romans 16.7 when he mentions Andronicus and Junia. However recent translations based on more up to date linguistic research translate this verse not that these two women were 'outstanding among the apostles' but rather that 'they are well known to the apostles' having been Christians before Paul was saved.

Chapter 4: Advice to leaders

We thank God for the way many Bible churches have grown in recent years. But with people on the move in our very mobile society, frequently churches these days are composed of people originating from many different theological traditions and church backgrounds. True Christians of whatever brand know instinctively they need to be Bible-based in their faith. But the pre-history of many church members may well contain a variety of ideas concerning the function of and how we relate to the Holy Spirit.

With such things in mind, a pastor might find himself facing a potential controversy brewing in his church concerning the work of the Holy Spirit. How is he to handle that? It is probably not good to sit back and do nothing and hope that the problem will just go away. That is very unlikely. Those with a concern to see the Spirit at work often have a genuine passion for the vitality of God's church. Pastor, it would be improper of you simply to hope that these folk will just lose their zeal for the cause of Christ. Part of your job as a pastor is to encourage Christians in their faith, not be a wet blanket.

So, just hoping these things will disappear will not do. Issues need to be addressed. People need to be taught.

The priority of Christian love

As a Christian leader who is concerned for both the unity and the spiritual health of your congregation it is best not to start on a note of confrontation. It may eventually come to confrontation if those with over-zealous and divisive ideas are trenchant in their stance. But that is not the place to start. Rather it is better, if, recognising whatever positives you can in those who differ from you, you seek to show humble love and to build healthy relationships with them. This is the priority. You are then in a much better place to speak into the situation.

The advice of the apostle Paul to the younger leader Timothy as he grappled with those who opposed him is as follows: 'Have nothing to do with foolish controversies; you know that they only breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth and they may come to their senses...' 2 Timothy 2.23-26. Here, Paul seems to have more hardened false teachers in mind, but his approach would certainly apply to those who are brothers and sisters in Christ who have simply

not such a good grasp of what Scripture teaches. Notice those words ... patiently...correcting...gentleness.

The second suggestion in dealing with controversial topics is to teach clearly from Scripture. This would mean a series of sermons to the whole congregation – for example on chapters 12 to 14 of 1 Corinthians³. Delving into those passages will reveal just how balanced and nuanced Scripture itself is concerning the work of the Holy Spirit. If you teach the whole church, it might save you from the accusation that you are ‘picking on’ a particular group.

Don’t quench the Spirit

Sometimes there is a certain spiritual ‘fire’ associated with the powerful activity of the Holy Spirit. This is alluded to by John the Baptist when he speaks of Jesus as the one who will ‘baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire’, Matthew 3.11. On the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the church for the first time, ‘tongues of fire’ accompanied the event, Acts 2.3.

Such power can be both uncomfortable and unnerving for those of us too used to a quiet, personal and more cerebral Christian faith.

But as leaders we are not to put out the Spirit’s fire. ‘Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything, hold fast to what is good, Abstain from every form of evil,’ 1 Thessalonians 5.20. This is Paul’s word to us.

Scripture is the touchstone by which we test everything. I remember one group in the Guildford area years ago who said that they had received a prophecy that they should hire the local swimming pool so that all the adult men and women of the church could bathe together naked! Such things should never have been contemplated. The leadership should not even have given it houseroom. It was clear immediately that this idea had not come from the Holy Spirit, but from sinful human imagination. Testing all things goes hand in hand with abstaining from all that is evil. A church leadership must have the backbone to say an emphatic ‘no’ to some things even when the leading of the Holy Spirit is claimed. Needless to say, that group eventually split up and dissipated.

But on the other hand, when truly led by the Spirit against the prevailing culture of the time, the great 18th century evangelist George Whitefield decided that he must

³ *Showing the Spirit: A theological exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* by D A Carson provides an excellent resource

preach the gospel in the open air instead of inside a church building in order to reach the masses of ordinary people that was something which was both loving, zealous and Scriptural (e.g., Matthew 5.1; Mark 4.1) and was hugely blessed by God.

Good leaders

We must have the discernment to see what is of God and what is not as good Christian leaders. We must be able to distinguish what is of the world and its ways from what is from heaven.

A pastor and his elders must work with the Spirit in such a way as to reassure those in the church who are nervous types that your judgment can be relied on, and that you have the unity of the church in mind, and do not give in to the latest wild idea that comes along. But at the same time, you must not be so wedded to the way the church has always done things that God is 'unable' to lead you to pastures new for his glory and the good of the congregation. This requires leaders to have renewed minds, deeply rooted in a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures and a close and prayerful walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a challenge to those in pastoral ministry.

It is worth reflecting on the fact that through such a dedicated leadership team the Lord started the first mission into the countries of the Mediterranean, Acts 13.1-3. They did not quench the Spirit's guidance but saw the truth of it and set apart Paul and Barnabas. A new phase of the Church's mission thus began.

