

# THE GIFTS OF



*Are they available today?*

# The Gifts of the Spirit

## *are they possessed today?*

THE CLAIM is sometimes made that followers of Jesus Christ in these days possess the gifts of the Holy Spirit, enabling the performing of miracles and other acts of a supernatural character. The claim to such powers, however, is no proof of actual possession. Such a claim cannot be dismissed lightly, since genuine manifestations of divine power must command respectful attention. On the other hand, an attempt to impute to the Holy Spirit phenomena which arise merely from the emotional operations of the human mind is a disservice to the Scriptures: it may well engender in the perceptive onlooker both ridicule and apathy towards God's word, in the mistaken impression that the Bible authorises such proceedings, and that the manifestations of Spirit power in apostolic days were in any way comparable with the performances of present day claimants to the gifts of the Spirit.

It is proposed, then, to examine what the Bible has to say concerning the gifts of the Spirit-their bestowal, their purpose, their nature, their limitations-so that the claim to possess them today can be tested.

In the days of the Spirit-gifted apostles, it was not unforeseen that some would make false claim to the possession of the gifts of the Spirit. The apostle John wrote: "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" (1 John 4.1) Since "*all Scripture is given by inspiration of God*" (2 Timothy 3.16-17) being itself given by the power of the Holy Spirit, (2 Peter 1.20-21) it must follow that the Scriptures are the only reliable means whereby men's assertions may be `tried' and correctly assessed, whether in regard to religious doctrine in general, or in particular to the claim to possess the gifts of the Spirit. *To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*" (Isaiah 8.20) The operations of the Spirit of God have always been meaningful and

purposeful. Jesus said: “*if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you*” (Matthew 12.28 ) and he held to be guilty of blasphemy any who should deny the force of the compelling evidence afforded by the operations of the Holy Spirit in authentication of his teaching. Conversely therefore, and by implication, it cannot be less than blasphemous to make unfounded claim to possession of those powers of the Spirit.

## THE PENTECOSTAL OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT

When Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection from the dead he said: “behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24.49). In the Acts of the Apostles, it is recorded that Jesus further said, immediately before his ascension into heaven: “*ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*” (Acts 1.8 ). Some ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, after the ascension of Jesus into heaven, this promised ‘*power from on high*’ descended in visible form upon the disciples, now assembled in Jerusalem. The effect was that “*they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*” ( Acts 2.4 ). Reference to the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles will show that when the apostles addressed a multitude on the day of Pentecost in this way, not fewer than fifteen distinct nationalities were represented in the crowd. Yet “*every man heard them speak in his own language*” Acts 2:6.

But the gifts of the Spirit were not confined to the ability to overcome difficulties of language. They also gave the power to perform “*miracles and signs*” (Acts 8.13) and to “*prophesy*”, or teach and expound publicly. (Acts 19.6) To some were imparted the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, or faith; to others, gifts of healing. 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

## THE PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS

When Jesus ascended into heaven, he gave a parting commission to his disciples saying, *'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. . .'* (Matthew 28.18-20 ). During the ministry Jesus had said, *' . . . he that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.'* (John 13:20) The apostles therefore were to be the means whereby God's message to mankind concerning His purpose in Jesus Christ should be made known to the world.

Whenever God has spoken to man, His chosen method of doing so has always been such as to leave no ground for reasonable doubt that it really was God who was speaking. To Moses and the children of Israel in the wilderness, God revealed himself audibly at Mount Sinai; and the fact that they had received so clear a proof that the word spoken was from the Almighty was made the ground of their accountability to Him, should they reject it. (Deuteronomy 4.32-40). Similarly, when God spoke again through Jesus Christ, the message was supported by the simultaneous performing by Jesus of miracles, and the fact that the word of God by him had been so authenticated was made the ground of responsibility on the part of the hearers: Jesus said, *'If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.'* John 15:24

When, therefore, the time came for the apostles to carry to an incredulous world God's message of life and hope, and in particular the news that Jesus had risen from the dead, it was necessary that their words should be accompanied by irrefutable proof of their divine origin. This vital authentication of the words spoken by the apostles in the course of their preaching was provided by the performance by them of a diversity of supernatural works, of a kind which compelled attention to the message from God which was preached. So irrefutable was the attestation thus divinely provided in support of the word of the apostles that, in one day alone, some three thousand people believed the gospel which they

preached, and were thereupon baptised, (Acts 2:41) while others were added to their number daily. Acts 2:47.

For the newly formed and rapidly growing christian church, authoritative guidance, instruction, and leadership were indispensable. The urgency of the need is appreciated when it is remembered that the New Testament Scriptures, with their full exposition of God's purpose in Christ, had not at that time been produced. Many of the converts were of no less humble origin than the apostles themselves. The Old Testament Scriptures gave abundant testimony concerning Jesus Christ, but to that testimony was in a form requiring authoritative exposition, which, in the case of his disciples, Jesus himself had provided after his resurrection: *'Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.'* Luke 24:27

Now it became needful that similar enlightenment should be imparted to the thousands who were responding to the apostolic preaching concerning the risen Christ. The need was met by the purposeful and meaningful operations of the Spirit of God. Whilst he was still with his disciples, Jesus had promised.

*'I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth . . . The Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you'*  
John 14:16-17.

## TO WHOM THE GIFTS WERE GIVEN

The gift of the Holy Spirit was not confined to the apostles themselves. In the course of his preaching in the power of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Peter said, *'Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call'*: Acta 2:38,39.

It should be noted however, that not all of the believers, even in apostolic days, had the gifts of the Spirit, and it appears that only Timothy, apart from the apostles (and not all of them), had the power to transmit the gifts to others. Thus, in the record of the preaching of the gospel by Philip at Samaria, it is written: *'When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women.'* (Acts 8:12). On hearing of these things at Jerusalem, the apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria: *'Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit: (for as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit'* Acts 8:14-15 Yet not all of these Samaritan believers received the Holy Spirit, for one Simon, also a baptised believer, even offered money to the apostles that he might receive the gift. From this record it is to be noted that even Philip appears to have been without power to transmit the gifts of the Spirit, though possessing them himself.

The method of bestowing the gifts of the Spirit was by the laying on of the hands of certain of the apostles ; Acts 8.18, but it is clear from the apostolic writings that the gifts were not bestowed upon all believers without exception. Thus, Paul counselled the exercise of discrimination and discretion in so doing: *'Lay hands suddenly on no man . . .'*

1 Timothy 5:22.

The operations of God by His Spirit are never aimless; therefore the gifts of the Spirit were not for men's gratification, for exhibitionism, or to amuse the idly curious. The apostle Paul showed that the selective bestowal of spiritual gifts in the several and diverse forms that are enumerated, were for the edifying and the profit of the church as a whole; the operation of each spiritual gift in its particular function served in the same relationship as an individual member of the human body to the whole, resulting in the health and proper function of the entire body. (1 Corinthians 12). The overall purpose of these diverse operations by the Spirit of God in apostolic times is stated to be:

*'For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and*

*of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' . . Ephesians 4:12-13*

The bestowal in apostolic times of the gifts of the Spirit, therefore, served the purpose of securing the firm establishing, the organising and the instruction of the newly created christian church.

## FULFILMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT PREDICTIONS

In any consideration of matters relating to christian faith and practice, it is helpful to keep in mind the essentially Israelitish character of the gospel. The question as to the present possession of the gifts of the Spirit is no exception to that rule. Jesus said, '*Salvation is of the Jews*', (John 4:22) The apostle Paul spoke of '*the hope of Israel*' in reference to the gospel, Acts 28:20, and declared that the hope of the gospel involves the fulfilment of the promises that God made in Old Testament times to the Jewish fathers, Abraham and David (Galatians 3:8) Throughout their preaching, divinely inspired as they were by the Holy Spirit, the apostles made constant reference to the Hebrew Scriptures in support of their testimony concerning Jesus

Christ. When, therefore, we read in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles of the first public attempt after Christ's resurrection to preach the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, it is noticeable that the message preached and the occasion chosen for its initial public proclamation, the day of Pentecost, were both closely related to matters of Israelitish history and law.

Pentecost was observed, in conformity with Mosaic law, on the fiftieth day after the Passover, and reference to the 23rd chapter of Leviticus will show what the day of Pentecost was. Israelites were then required to make certain offerings, sin offerings and peace offerings, and these included what is termed '*a wave offering*' of loaves of bread prepared from the firstfruits of the ground for that year. In Jerusalem each year there assembled devout Jews from many parts of the world for the purpose of keeping the feast of the Passover and, fifty days later, the feast of Pentecost.

It was to these people that Peter and the other apostles began on the day of Pentecost to preach the message of the risen Christ, as is recorded in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. When *'they were all amazed and marvelled'* at the gifts of the Spirit patently manifested in the apostles, Peter directed his hearers to the prophecy of Joel; he showed that the remarkable events they were witnessing were in fact related to that which was foretold by that prophet, that *'in the last days'* God would pour out of His Spirit upon His servants, resulting in the providing of an opportunity to all who should be willing to *'call on the name of the Lord'* for deliverance and salvation. Joel 2:28-32

The Passover, observed fifty days previously, commemorated the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage, and prefigured the deliverance from sin and death to be achieved in Jesus Christ. Now that Jesus, as *'the lamb of God'*, had made the sacrifice of his own self, he had fulfilled all that was prefigured in the Passover. To obedient believers he was the Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). Similarly, the feast of Pentecost had its close association with the events subsequent to the death of Jesus. Pentecost involved the offering of *'a sheaf of the firstfruits of (the) harvest'*. (Leviticus 23:10) The crux of Peter's message in explanation of the dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit after the ascension of Jesus was expressed in the words: *'Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.'* Acts 2:36

The risen and ascended Christ described himself as *'the beginning of the creation of God'* ; (Revelation 3:14) the apostle Paul alluded to him as *'the first-fruits of them that slept'*; (1 Corinthians 15:20), and the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Peter and his fellow apostles amounted to a public attestation by the Almighty of these facts

*'Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear'* Acts 2:33.



## A PROMISE OF THINGS TO COME

Firstfruits are the earnest of a harvest to come. The Jewish feast of Pentecost was an occasion of celebration and thanksgiving for the fact that in the goodness of the Creator, a full harvest some months later was in prospect. Pentecost was therefore a celebration of auspicious beginnings; comparatively a *'day of small things'*, yet carrying the tokens of the assurance of a fulness and a completeness to come in due time. In like manner, the selective bestowal of the powers of the Holy Spirit in apostolic days was to all who should believe and obey the gospel the earnest of the inheritance (Ephesians1:14) of eternal life, honour, and the full powers of Spirit nature which will be enjoyed at the promised *'times of refreshing (that) shall come'* (at the second appearing of Jesus) . . . *'the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.'* Acts3:19-21

Since the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit was divinely intended to be in the nature of an *'earnest'*, a firstfruits, a token of the coming *'restitution of all things'*, it will be clear that this event was but a partial fulfilment of the words of the prophet Joel to which Peter on that occasion made reference. Consideration of the context of the words of Joel shows that this promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit relates in its fulness to a time subsequent to the delivering of Israel from all her enemies, and the removal far from her of *'the northern army'*; (Joel 2:20) to a time in which *'the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine* (both emblematic of the nation of Israel) *do yield their strength'* ; a time in which, consequently upon *'the restitution of all things (here) spoken by the prophets'*, it will be appropriate to say to Israel: *'Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil.'* Joel 2:18-24

*'Afterward'* God is to pour out of His Spirit upon all flesh.(Joel 2:28) Here is indicated a second and more ample outpouring of the powers of the Holy Spirit, the two manifestations being comparable respectively with firstfruits and harvest. Ezekiel likewise was caused to write of these

yet future days of prosperity and harvest for the nation of Israel, culminating in a second and more universal outpouring upon them of the Spirit of God:

*'For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land . . . A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you . . . and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye 'shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers: and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.'* Ezekiel 36:24-28.

### DEPARTURE FROM THE TRUTH FORETOLD

The fact that there were thus to be two distinct outpourings of the Spirit of God necessitates an intervening period without such manifestations. Failing this, the two manifestations would merge to become one continuous event. The Jews as a nation rejected the message of Christ and the apostles, attested though it was by manifestations of the Spirit of God. The Gentiles in general considered the preaching of Christ to be foolishness; and from among the comparative few who did believe there arose, as the apostles foretold, men *'speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them'*, men who turned away their ears from the truth and were turned unto fables, false teachers, bringing in heresies, many following their pernicious ways. (Acts 20:29-30:1 Timothy 4:1-2; 2 Timothy 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1-2). Since those days, the condition obtaining throughout the world, amongst Jew and Gentile alike, has been of the kind to be expected in view of the prophetic words of Micah:

*' . night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God.'*  
Micah 3:6-7

## GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT WITHDRAWN

The fact that the gifts of the Spirit would eventually be with drawn was not only thus implicit in the words of Peter and of the prophets, but was clearly stated by the apostle Paul. Having explained to the Corinthian believers the relative importance and functions of the various gifts of the Spirit, (1 Corinthians 12) the inspired writer proceeds to demonstrate that those gifts, whilst serving the function there defined, were not a guarantee that the individual recipient of the gift was necessarily acceptable with God. It was possible that a man might have any of the gifts, and yet be *'as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal'*, and that he might be *'as nothing'* 1 Corinthians 13:1,2.

The indispensable requisite to acceptability with God was to be a love begotten by the word of God and the knowledge of Christ, and therefore rejoicing *'in the truth'*. Such a love *'never faileth'*, will never become unnecessary. On the other hand, the various gifts of the Spirit would *'fail'*, *'cease'*, and *'vanish away'*: *'Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.'* 1 Corinthians 13:8.

Already in the days of the Spirit-gifted apostles and elders there was apparent on the part of many the tendency to turn away from the purity of divine truth, as revealed in the gospel, and with that widespread departure from the faith, manifestations of the Spirit amongst such as professed the christian faith ceased, as had been foretold.

There remained, however, the Spirit inspired Scriptures, now completed by the addition of the records of the ministry of Jesus and of the work of the apostles, together with their letters, and, finally, the prophetic and exhortative message from the ascended Christ himself, the Book of Revelation. These writings, together with those forming the Old Testament, were able thenceforward to give to all who should study them the instruction and guidance which initially had of necessity been provided by Spirit-gifted teachers. The latter, in the early years of the christian era, were the chosen vessels whereby God made

known to mankind His means of salvation in the gospel. Thereafter, and down to the present day, the medium of instruction has consisted of God's written word, the Bible, concerning which the inspired apostle Paul declared:

*`. . . the holy scriptures . . . are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works'. 2 Timothy 3:15-17*

### PRESENT-DAY CLAIMS

Nothing that man may do can make any worthwhile addition to these comprehensive functions that pertain to God's written word. Indeed, it is significant that whilst, in apostolic times, the operations of the Spirit ministered to the instruction and the edification of the church, such benefits are entirely absent from the activities of present day claimants to the gifts of the Spirit.

The ability in these days to perform acts of healing otherwise than by medical treatment is not an evidence of the working of the powers of the Holy Spirit, since some who make no profession of Christianity, but who are able to make use of the undoubted influence of mind over body, have been able apparently to cure bodily disabilities. These phenomena of healing, including the miracles which from time to time have been alleged in connection with the veneration of so-called shrines and sacred relics, are entirely out of character with the miracles recorded throughout the Scriptures, and in particular those which accompanied the operations and manifestations of the Spirit in the days of the apostles.

For instance, no one in these days would claim that he had witnessed a manifestation of the Spirit of the kind that occurred in the case of the apostles on the day of Pentecost, involving, as it did *'a sound for heaven as of a rushing mighty wind'*, together with the appearance of *'cloven tongues like as of fire'*, and accompanied by the ability to speak

intelligibly and simultaneously to people of several different nationalities and tongues. It has not been reliably reported that any claimant to the gifts of the Spirit today has the power to detect untruth and to inflict death upon the liars, as occurred in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, or that any can by the Spirit heal a man aged over 40 years and crippled from birth, as did Peter and John Acts 3.1-6 .

In our times the miraculous opening of prison doors has not been demonstrated, yet this occurred in apostolic times on no fewer than three occasions; (Acts 5.9-23; 12.5-10; 16.26) nor have any by the power of the Spirit been able to raise the dead, as did Peter in the case of Dorcas. (Acts 9.36-41). Bold indeed would be the claimant to Spirit powers who, when confronted by a poisonous reptile, would trust to his 'gift' to provide immunity from harm by snake bite; yet such was the protection afforded to Paul by the power of the Spirit, (Acts 28.3-6 54 ), this being in direct fulfilment of the promise made by Jesus. Mark 16.18.

None can pretend that, by contrast with the real and powerful operations of Spirit power in apostolic times, the allegations of miraculous works and manifestations of Spiritual gifts at the present day are otherwise than puny, ludicrous and childish. The claims sometimes made would be amusing, were it not for the fact that their effect is to make a mockery of the authentic, powerful, and purposeful manifestations of Spirit power which the Scriptures record.

Whenever in apostolic times, the gifts of the Spirit were possessed, their presence was known with positive certainty and was never a matter for controversy or doubt. The miracles performed by the operation of the Holy Spirit were manifest to all as works of superhuman and awe-inspiring power, so that none, not even such as would dearly have loved to do so, could deny the evidence of the operation of the hand of God. When therefore Peter and John healed the lame man, (Acts 3 ) the rulers, *'being grieved that they taught the people', were nevertheless obliged to confess 'that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.'* Acts 4.16

Thus it is clear that the miraculous events of apostolic days were in no way comparable with the reports of supernatural phenomena that are made from time to time in these days, such reports being in general enshrouded in obscurity and superstition.

## SPEAKING WITH TONGUES

Similar considerations are applicable to the question as to whether present day claimants to the gifts of the Spirit do in fact *'speak with tongues'* in the manner described in the New Testament. The ability to make unintelligible, meaningless, ecstatic utterances, apparently beyond the control of the speaker, is not, as is sometimes alleged, a gift of the Spirit, such phenomena being observable amongst fakirs and others making no profession of christianity, when in a state of highly wrought emotional excitement. By contrast, the utterances of those who in apostolic times were able to *'speak with tongues'*, whilst sometimes needing the services of a Spirit-gifted interpreter, (1 Corinthians 14.27-28) were always coherent, articulate, and meaningful, and, under interpretation, capable of yielding edification . 1 Corinthians 14:5.

It is not without significance that the facility of speaking with tongues was accounted by the apostles to be of less value than the ability to teach and expound the word of God (1 Corinthians 14.5) the latter being held to be of greater usefulness than even the gifts of miracles and healing. (1 Corinthians 12:28). Yet it is to these more spectacular gifts of the Spirit, involving miracles, healing and gifts of tongues, that claim is made in our times, to the exclusion of those which by the apostles were held to be of greater value.

If the gifts of the Spirit were a present possession, they would all be present in full measure, not at least those which were accounted the most valuable for the purpose of the edifying of the church. Yet in fact, amongst those who claim present possession of the gifts of the Spirit, the more valuable gifts, that would enable the continuance of the expository work of *'apostles, prophets, and teachers'*, are not claimed; moreover, there exists amongst such as now claim possession of Spiritual gifts, teaching that is demonstrably opposed to that of the Spirit word of God, such as the doctrine of the Trinity and that of the immortality of the soul.

## THE SPIRIT OF GOD

The Scriptures show that the Spirit of God is His power by which all things were created and are sustained in being. Thus it is written that at the inauguration of the Creation, *'the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters'* (Genesis 1.2 ) This creative function of the Spirit of God was operative in the formation of man: *'The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living Soul.'* Genesis 2.7.

The fact that man was created, and is sustained by the operation of the Spirit of God is further demonstrated by the words of Job: *'If he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust'*. Job 34:14-15.

The Holy Spirit, by the operation of which the gifts of the Spirit were bestowed in apostolic times, is shown by the Scriptures to consist of the same creative Spirit of the Almighty, directed towards the accomplishment of a particular object in which the hand of God is to be openly and visibly discernible. In Scripture, the word *'holy'* denotes separate, or set apart, and examples of this kind of operation by the Almighty are afforded by the virgin birth of Jesus, the performing of miracles, and the operation of the gifts of the Spirit, all of which are represented in Scripture as instances of the operation of the Holy Spirit.  
Luke 1.35; Acts 10.38; Acts 8.17-19.

The words of Job that have been quoted have shown that the employment of the Spirit of God in the creation and sustaining of man does not involve the concept of inherent immortality. Man lives until such time as God in wisdom *'gathers unto himself his spirit and his breath'*, in accordance with the sentence of death passed upon sinning mankind, *'Dust thou art, unto dust shalt thou return.'* Genesis 3.19

Such therefore is the extent of physical participation by mortal man in the Spirit power of God. When, however, a man becomes enlightened by, and obedient to, the word of God the effect of his belief and obedience is that he becomes subject to the teaching of the Holy Spirit. It was by the Holy Spirit that God made known His mind and purpose through

the inspired writings of the apostles and prophets; and by knowledge and belief of those writings the instruction of the Holy Spirit can become the controlling influence in the minds of men. This is the teaching of the apostle Paul where, in speaking of the operations of the Spirit of God in relation to the baptised believer of the gospel, he wrote

*'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit . . . Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.'*  
Romans 8:1,9

### THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

Believers of the gospel who are baptised thereby *'put on Christ'* (Galatians 3.27) and become *'members of his body'*. (Ephesians 5:30). When such continue thereafter in obedience to Christ's commandments they become *'conformed to the image'* of Jesus Christ. (Romans 8:29). In him the Spirit of God dwelt without measure, not only in regard to the manner of his birth and his possession of the powers of the Holy Spirit, but as the ruling principle of the mind, *'bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience'* of the Father's will, as revealed to him by the Spirit. When that principle is allowed to operate, through the influence of the Spirit-inspired Scriptures, on the minds of men they become *'spiritually minded.'* (Romans 8.6) and partakers of *'the Spirit of Christ!'*

In the Scriptures this result is not represented to be a gift, or a mystical indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but rather as the outcome of effort on the part of the baptised believer, involving his diligent application of the teaching of the Spirit word of God. Thus, when the apostle Paul exhorted believers to cultivate the same disposition of mind as was found in Jesus Christ (Phillipians 2:5) he added *' . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure':* (Philippians 2:12,13). Similarly to the Colossians Paul wrote, *'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom . . .'* (Colossians 3.16) To the Father Jesus prayed, *'Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth'* ; (John 17.17 ) and Paul, in taking leave of the believers at Ephesus, said, *'I commend you to God,*



*and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.'* Acts 20.32.

## THE FUTURE PROSPECT

When the Spirit-given word of God is thus assimilated, the Spirit of God thereby assumes control of the mind of the obedient believer of the gospel, leading to the manifesting of *'the fruit of the spirit'*. (Galatians 5:22-26). The promise of the gospel is that at the second appearing of Christ *'God . . . will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life'*. (Romans 2:5-7 ) Such an inheritance will entail the experience in full measure of the gifts of the Spirit. The receiving of those gifts in apostolic times was in the nature of a foretaste of *'the powers of the world to come'*, (Hebrews 6:5) an earnest of the promised harvest, and in the kingdom which Jesus Christ will establish on earth it will be the privilege of those who have believed and obeyed the gospel to bring blessing and healing, by their exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, to the peoples of the world, as it is written

*'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.'* Isaiah 35:5-6

The issue involved, then, in the present consideration is shown to consist of the teaching of the Spirit word of God against the unproven and manifestly untenable assumptions of men. The only reliable and infallible guide in these days lies not in human assertions and feelings, but in the unchangeable word of the Almighty which we have in the Scriptures. The course of wisdom is to accept without demur God's own revelation concerning the operation of His Spirit as unfolded in the Scriptures of truth.