

The Signs of a True Living Church

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by Leonard Amechi



Barratt Ministries Publications
114 Daisy Bank Road, Manchester M14 5QH, England

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-904592-45-7

Published & printed April 2009 by **Barratt Ministries Publications**

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to RABBI. The late Rev. Godwin Uzodima Amaechi, the President, Founder and General Overseer of the Pentecostal Life Assembly, was my eldest brother. He was called Rabbi by all who knew him because of the excellent teaching gift the Holy Spirit bestowed on him. He was the first to come to the knowledge of Christ in our family. He was determined to see all of us come to the saving knowledge of Christ. We all got saved including my late mother. His church grew to about 900 members in a relatively short time in the Islamic heartland of Nigeria, Kano. He taught us to study the word of God and to teach others. Rabbi your efforts are not in vain. You made your glorious ascension in London during a short missionary visit in 2001. The legacy you left still lives on. I thank God for the privilege of having you as a brother and mentor.

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Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to the Almighty God who has called me into the Pastoral and Teaching ministry with priestly anointing over my life. I thank Him for creating a hunger and a thirst to eat from His word and drink from the fountain of life in His son Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit's enablement. These are the factors which have motivated me to continue to study to show myself approved unto God and dividing the word of truth rightly.

This book would not have materialised, if God had not prompted me to study His word to increase my understanding of who He is, the works Jesus did and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

I would like to thank my wife, Pastor Pauline Amechi for her unflinching support, my children, Jennifer, Justyn and Jordan for their encouragement. My gratitude goes to all the members of the Community Outreach Ministries for allowing me to be their pastor for the last ten years.

I would like to appreciate some unsung heroes who have by the grace of God influenced my

life briefly or in a longer term. My appreciation goes to my professor on the Applied Theology Master's programme, Dr. Samuel Thorpe, the Dean of Theology at PCHE, for being an excellent teacher and mentor. Rev. Hugh Osgood (PhD), former Senior Pastor of the Cornerstone Christian Centre Bromley for being my Pastor and mentor for three solid years. I learnt a lot by sitting under his teaching and preaching ministries. Apostle George Akalonu, the President of the International Ministers Fellowship UK Chapter, has been a wonderful brother, mentor, and Spiritual father. I have learnt a lot by observing his humility and determination to see the twenty first century church repent, revived and restored to God's glory. Finally I would like to appreciate Maurice Barratt of Barratt Ministries, who is also the Director of the Family and Marriage Directorate of the International Ministers Fellowship. Maurice is a great teacher and has written many books to bring authenticity and integrity to the Church of Jesus Christ. Thank you for encouraging me.

Pastor Leonard Amechi

Foreword

Leonard Amechi approached me as a friend during the early months of 2008 and asked if I would look at a paper he had written for his Master's degree in Applied Theology. He was interested in my views as to whether it was worth expanding this into a small book. I told him that I believe it is the duty of every man to leave some inheritance of what he believes and feels for the next generations. In fact, I am convinced it is the right, indeed bound and duty of every man, to stand up and be counted, and say whatever they feel is right and just, regardless of the cost and discomfort it may bring. This of course, must only be true if it is spoken, or written, without malice or bigotry.

It is a sad fact that because of our culture, class, denominational or doctrinal bias, we see the world through our own tinted glasses. I like very much the sermon of John Wesley entitled, "Against Christian Bigotry". He says that if a person has a view on what the bible says then they expect other people to listen with an open mind to that view. I therefore, must be obliged to do the same and listen with an open mind to

the people that I disagree with. That is, to listen to what I at present do not believe with an open and honest appraisal and be willing to change if I need to. Most people would agree on this principal, but I have found it a very different story in practice and, for myself, it has taken many years of trials and exposure to my own sinful nature and weaknesses to erase the years of bias, culture, and my own denominational bias. Those tinted glasses are so hard to remove. It is almost as if they are a part of our physical body and not removable.

Over the last fifteen years I have found it such a blessing to be able to sit down with people of any religion, philosophy or culture and listen to them, without thinking of a counter argument before they have even finished their sentences. This is a very difficult thing to do in practice, but we must love all men. John Wesley said; "True religion is the love of God shed abroad in the heart to all men"

By this will all men know you are my disciples - if you love one another.

The above scripture is a challenge to us all and an indictment to many who profess to follow Jesus Christ, for whenever we are 'of Paul', or 'Apollos', or 'Pentecostal', or 'Brethren' or 'Evangelical', we show the world that we are not one in love and unity.

This book by Leonard Amechi is meant to challenge those who believe the Gifts of the Spirit are not for this age. He is a supporter of the 'non cessation of the Gifts of the Spirit in this present age', but makes it clear that this is not

about denominations or persuasions, but is to help understanding and unity in the body of Christ. He presents his own arguments, as well as those of the cessation persuasion, and I believe his approach is not bigoted in any way. Leonard rightly points out that with, or without, the gifts of the Spirit 'love is king'. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 verses 1-3, not only includes the gifts of the spirit, but good works and martyrdom. Paul says that without love, then **all is in vain**.

I am pleased to recommend this book as a balanced study of the gifts of the Spirit and their relevance in the body of Christ today. Read it with an open mind and check the scriptures and not your doctrines.

I pray the Holy Spirit himself will enlighten you to whatever is truth.

Maurice Barratt
Director of BARRATT MINISTRIES
Manchester, UK

Introduction

This book is borne out of a paper I presented as part of my Masters Degree in Applied Theology (MTh) programme on Charismatic Gifts. I believe the content and outcome of my research should be made available to the wider Christian community because of the importance the subject plays in Christendom and the fact that the issues discussed are some of those which sadly divide the Church today. The Church of Jesus Christ is bitterly divided on a lot of issues some of which are not major and does not cause great gulf between us but on the other hand there are other issues which require clarity especially if they affect the foundation of our belief. The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church is vital for the Church to achieve the purpose for which it was birthed in the first place. There is no dispute as to whether the Holy Spirit has a role to play in today's Church or not.

The majority of Christians agree that the Holy Spirit's presence is vital. The question we should continue to ask is **“How can we know of truth that the Holy Spirit is active in today's Church?”** Can we attribute all that happens in our church meetings as the manifestations of the Holy Spirit and

does it mean that where these manifestations are not visible as evidence that He is not present. Some church gatherings display liturgical practices which are loud, vibrant, with every musical instrument employed in the worship service with people happily clapping and dancing and prophetic utterances flying from one corner of the auditorium to another. Sometimes ministers are praying and saints are being slain in the spirit as they are helped by ushers to fall gently on the floor. In some church services everybody is involved, one is raising a new song in the spirit, and another is speaking in tongues while the rest are busy waving their hands, in reverence to the almighty God with tears streaming down their cheeks. The above scenarios are akin to the Pentecostal and Charismatic settings of today's church and sometimes the Third Wave.

However there is another setting where this loudness described above is not characteristic. In such church settings, the environment is more solemn, traditional hymns are sang from hymn books as the pipe organ churns those sacred sounds that fills the atmosphere and creates the awesomeness of God. Everything is done methodically, with the help of the faithful Church wardens ushering you to your seat among the pews. In such church gatherings, the saints pray quietly and privately and occasionally participate in a call and response activity led by the person conducting the service. Church services are usually not too long and the minister keeps to the time agreed by the faithful. People leave such church services feeling a sense of relieve and satisfaction of being in the presence of God. Even though they did not speak

in tongues and prophesy or fall under the anointing, even though the minister did not shout and no demons were cast out, they still believe that the Holy Spirit has been evident in their midst and has spoken in a still small voice to each individual personally and privately without needing anybody to interpret. This assurance has kept the saints continuing and persevering in their faith.

What I have tried to describe here is my perception of what might take place in a more conservative church setting for Evangelical or the more traditional churches like Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian or even the Roman Catholic Church. Every Church setting believes that they are serving God and that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is evident in their midst and that the power of God is at work saving those who must be saved and adding them to the church.

The crucial question is **“how do we know that the Holy Spirit is indeed at work in every gathering or assembly called church”?** What signs must be evident to confirm that a church is truly a living church embodying everything Jesus intended the Church to be when it was born with power and might on the Day of Pentecost? This is what this book intends to explore and to find some answers. Is there a true living church out there still bearing the hallmark of the Church which was birthed on the Day of Pentecost to continue the work that Jesus had started before His crucifixion on the Cross of Calvary and His subsequent resurrection and ascension? It must however be made abundantly clear at this juncture, that denominationalism is not the key to understanding

and unfolding the nature of a true living church.

The true living church is not a product of ones doctrinal standing but something more significant and more tangible. The crux of the matter is to ascertain the extent to which the understanding of the nature of God is a cardinal principle in its ethos and practices, how much is this church characterized and driven by the teachings and ministries of the Living Lord Jesus Christ and how far is the Holy Spirit allowed to manifest Himself freely without human manipulation and emotional displays which find no root in the realm of the Spirit. One thing is sure; a true Living Church is not about Corinthianisation of the church or ministries where spiritual gifts abound but fall short of Godly character and fruit of the Spirit. It is about the exalted Jesus Christ and the manifestation of His Spirit who is perfecting the Body and Bride of the soon coming King who will reign forever and ever. Hopefully, the thoughts I have shared here will provoke more discussions among Christians and awaken our sensitivity towards the Holy Spirit and His ministry in our lives and the Church in general. You must maintain an open mind because the Holy Spirit will bring clarity whenever necessary as you allow Him to minister to you.

Chapter One

The Debate: Cessationists vs Non-Cessationists

The aim here is to discuss and evaluate what signs should be evident in a true Living Church. There has been an ongoing debate between the Evangelicals (Reformed and Dispensationalists) and the Pentecostals, the Charismatics and the Third Wave.¹

The main thrust of the debate is whether the Spiritual Gifts are still in operation in today's church or whether they operated in the first Century before the New Testament was completed and ceased at the close of the Apostolic Age. Most Evangelicals believe that the gifts such as prophecy, tongues and healing ceased when the New Testament was completed. This is the cessationist view. On the other hand the Pentecostals, the Charismatics and the Third Wave believe that the gifts did not cease with the apostles but are still operational in the church today.

The author will make a case for the non-cessationist. The claim of this book is that a true Living Church should still manifest the gifts of the Spirit as it was in the early church.

The structure

In order to present a well balanced argument, it will be necessary to state clearly how the different views will be presented. It will be necessary to state a working definition of what constitutes a true living church. An attempt will be made to present a case for continuity of Spiritual Gifts as a normative in a true living church. Evidence will be presented from a variety of sources to support this position. The next phase will focus on the arguments propounded to support the cessationists' view to counter the continual existence of Spiritual Gifts in a true living church. Since this book will support the view that Spiritual Gifts are given to the church to continue and extend the mission of Christ, counter arguments will be advanced to show that cessationists are ill-informed. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn to consolidate the views expressed in this book and their implications for the body of Christ. It is important to take a stand at the early stage of this work so that the reader does not lose sight of what this work is intended to achieve.

Defining a True Living Church

In this discourse it will be necessary to define what is perceived to be a true living church. For the purpose of this discussion, a true living Church is a Church that believes and yields itself to the manifestations of the

Spirit's power within it. It is the body of Christ in which the promised Holy Spirit is active through the demonstration of the gifts of graces. Jesus said in Mark 16:17-18, that certain signs shall follow those who believe. ¹⁷ "These are the miraculous signs that will accompany believers: They will use the power and authority of my name to force demons out of people. They will speak new languages. ¹⁸ They will pick up snakes, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them. They will place their hands on the sick and cure them."

A true living church is **a church where the signs promised by Jesus to those who will believe in him are completely evident, not orchestrated by human manipulation or the instrumentation of spirits from the kingdom of darkness but by the Holy Spirit himself who has baptised us into one body.** In a true living church he demonstrates his sovereignty by bestowing the graces of God on whosoever he desires. A true living Church is the church which is vibrant and embraces everything that Jesus intended the church to be. One thing is clear; the true Living Church is not detached from the head. Jesus is the head of the Church. The true Living Church must of necessity be seen to be abiding in Him and not be independent of His power and Lordship.

This working definition is important because the true living church can only justify its existence if it is replicating the ministry of Christ. The ministry of Jesus did not end at His crucifixion. Throughout His earthly ministry, it can be said that He exerted all his energy in reproducing Himself in His disciples so that they

can continue the ministry He had started. B.D. Klaus concurs with this, when he asserted that “the essential to any understanding of the church and its mission is the awareness that any ministry attempt in Christ’s name must replicate His ministry, its purpose, character and empowerment.”²

Arnold Bittlinger was more emphatic when he said “The mission of the church is the continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ”. He concluded that just as the Holy Spirit was given to Jesus for the fulfilment of His mission so is the Spirit given to His disciples to continue the same mission.³ A true living church must be a Spirit-empowered church ready to promote the same standard that Jesus stood for during His earthly ministry. If the son of God, who is both fully God and fully man, needed the testimony of the Holy Spirit to authenticate His credentials that God approves His ministry, it is hard to contemplate that a church would think that they do not need the Holy Spirit empowerment in this present age. Evangelist Luke, the third Gospel writer captured this sentiment when he penned in **Luke 3:21-23**:²¹ When all the people were baptized, Jesus, too, was baptized. While he was praying, heaven opened,²² and the Holy Spirit came down to him in the form of a dove. A voice from heaven said, “You are my Son, whom I love. I am pleased with you.”²³ Jesus was about 30 years old when he began {his ministry}.

The role of the Holy Spirit in the mission and purpose of a true Living Church is so important that Luke reiterated in Acts 1:8 when he said:⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes to you.

Then you will be my witnesses to testify about me in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” According to the evidenced stated here by Luke the Evangelist, the disciples were instructed by Jesus Himself, the Omnipotent, the Omniscient and the Omnipresent one, who is God Himself, that they should not begin the work of ministry and the evangelisation of their immediate world and beyond until they were empowered by the Holy Spirit. This instruction was relevant to them then and even more so today in a world where truth is now relative rather than absolute and society has become more hostile to the message of the cross.

Ministering in a hostile world, with world-view that is diametrically opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ requires divine intervention and unction from above. This divine presence is what makes the mission, purpose and the message of the Church relevant to a hostile world that has the form of godliness but denies the power thereof. Any Church which does not subscribe to this directive will be fighting a futile battle and will fail woefully in actualising the mandate given to the Church of Jesus Christ. The battle is not ours, but the Lord’s and must be carried out in the way He has instructed the founding fathers, who laid the foundation for the Church to continue to function effectively. This instruction must be heeded by every Church, irrespective of its denominational, theological or doctrinal persuasion, whether cessationism or non-cessationism.

Chapter Two

The Nature and Purpose of the Church

It is absolutely necessary to understand the intention of God when he brought the Church into being. The church is God's design and creation. M. L. Dusing states that "the Church is God's method of providing spiritual nurture for the believer and the community of faith through which the gospel is proclaimed and His will advanced in every generation."⁴ The church is always seen as an assembly of called out people, which is reflected in the term ecclesia. The church is also referred to as the body of believers called out by God through the work of salvation on the cross of Calvary. The view taking here is that the church represents the body of believers who have accepted the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and his subsequent resurrection on the third day as the complete atonement for their sins and total restoration to God.

This is the notion of “fellow citizens with God’s people” expressed by Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:19-22, when he wrote: ¹⁹ That is why you are no longer foreigners and outsiders but citizens together with God’s people and members of God’s family. ²⁰ You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone. ²¹ In him all the parts of the building fit together and grow into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² Through him you, also, are being built in the Spirit together with others into a place where God lives.

In other words the church is the body of Christ. Jesus Christ is the head of the church and its chief cornerstone. The church is established on apostolic foundation, the very foundation laid by Jesus Christ himself. In the words of M. L. Dusing, the “Church” comprises those who have been called out of the world, out of sin and isolation from God, and through the redemptive work of Christ have been gathered a community of faith that shares in blessings and responsibilities of serving the lord.⁵

It is a well known fact, that within theological circles, the question of when the church began has been debated and a variety of views exist. Whilst Louis Berkhof and others advocate that the church originated from patriarchal and Mosaic periods, majority of scholars conclude that the church originated at Pentecost.⁶ This conclusion from scholars who hail from Pentecostal, Evangelical or Liberal backgrounds are significant

to the thrust of this discussion. They believe that the scriptural evidence for the inauguration of the church is what happened in Acts chapter 2.

To buttress the point that the Church came into being on the Day of Pentecost, Millard Erickson argues that Jesus only made two references to the church when He said in: Matthew 16:18 “You are Peter, and I can guarantee that on this rock I will build my church. And the gates of hell will not overpower it” and in 18:17 “And if he will not give ear to them, let it come to the hearing of the church: and if he will not give ear to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-farmer”. He also argues that since Luke never used the term in his Gospel but used it twenty-four times in Acts is significant and support the view that the New Testament Church started from Pentecost onwards.⁷

What is intended here is to show that the event of Acts chapter two is the fulfilment of the promise of the Holy Spirit. It is the day Jesus had promised the disciples to wait for, before they could embark on the task of witnessing to the world. Acts 1:8 is very important. Jesus said to his disciples to tarry in Jerusalem until he had sent the promise of the Comforter. The Comforter was promised to the church and the church alone. In John 14:16-17, Jesus had this to say about the Holy Spirit who is to come, ¹⁶ I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper who will be with you forever. ¹⁷ That helper is the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept him, because it doesn’t see or know him. You know

him, because he lives with you and will be in you. In these few verses, Jesus strongly attested that the world cannot receive the Comforter because He is the Spirit of truth. Truth and falsehood or counterfeits cannot exist in the same body.

The world and its systems are outside the Church. Jesus therefore promised the Comforter to those who will continue the kingdom work after he had returned to the father. The Comforter is for those who will carry the banner of truth, which has the power to set people free from the shackles of the evil one and the hollow ideologies and philosophies of men. The Spirit of Truth must expose the dangers of buying into the systems of this world and embracing world views which are working against the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He has come to comfort those who mourn in Zion and those who are bruised and persecuted by the government of this world.

The promise is not uniquely made to the disciples, though they were the initial recipients, but all who will come into the body of Christ called the Church. Before his ascension, the disciples asked when he will fulfil the promise, he reiterated and told them to go and wait in Jerusalem. He warned them not to proceed to do the great and mammoth task of establishing the kingdom of God on this earth until they have been endued with power. Jesus knew perfectly that the world will not accept the message his disciples will bring without special graces upon their lives and ministry. He understood the opposition they would face and the need for them to be strengthened with a supernatural bestowal. He

understood that their natural capabilities would not sustain them during the onslaught and persecution of the Judaizers. He told them that they can only become effective witnesses when they are baptised with the Holy Spirit.

So on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came and they were all filled with divine empowerment and energised to go and preach everything he had taught them in the power of the Spirit of the Almighty God. In essence the Church of the living God was born on the day of Pentecost with power and authority to proclaim the gospel to the world. They were given boldness to declare the truth of the gospel by the unction of the Holy Spirit. Immediately, Peter the timid, declared the gospel and signs and wonders manifested by the power of the Holy Spirit working through Peter. The signs and wonders were evident and the people glorified God. The recipients knew that something extraordinary had happened as the disciples spoke languages which they had not previously learnt.

Many were convinced and when Peter appealed to them, they were convinced and three thousand souls were brought into the Kingdom of God. The church of the living God was born as a Spirit-empowered organism to continue to replicate the work of God from Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. It is imperative that we all understand that the power that followed Peter's ministry on the Day of Pentecost was not a natural phenomenon. Since the crucifixion, they have been hiding and maintaining a low profile. From what we know about Peter, he was somewhat an introvert and would not

ordinarily have the ability to stand and address the crowd in the manner he did. His boldness can only be attributed to the power of Holy Spirit which the Lord Jesus Christ had lavishly poured out on them all in the Upper Room. This was a baptism of fire to go into the world and turn it upside down.

No one who encounters the genuine awesome power and presence of the Holy Spirit ever remains the same. The Holy Spirit is an Agent of Change. He transforms and empowers those who receive Him to do extraordinary things beyond what they can imagine or think. Peter never imagined that he could boldly declare the truth of the gospel after he had denied any knowledge of the master before a mere servant in the courtyard in the early hours of Good Friday morning. This confirms that the Holy Spirit is our confidence booster, divine encourager and enabler and that when He takes residence in the hearts of men, the ordinary becomes extraordinary and the timid and frightful becomes a giant slayer. This is not a New Testament phenomenon. This pattern of God is ubiquitously evident throughout history and in Scripture. This is how God has ordained it from the beginning.

In the Old Testament ordinary men did extraordinary acts when the Holy Spirit rested upon them. This could explain why David defeated the mighty Goliath, the captain of the Philistine Army with mere stones. Samson, despite his many mistakes in life called upon the God of his fathers and He heard him and the outcome is humanly unexplainable - **Judges 16:28-30 (GW)** ²⁸ Then Samson called to

the Lord, "Almighty Lord, please remember me! God, give me strength just one more time! Let me get even with the Philistines for at least one of my two eyes." ²⁹ Samson felt the two middle columns on which the building stood. With his right hand on one column and his left on the other, he pushed hard against them. ³⁰ "Let me die with the Philistines," he said. With that, he pushed with all his might and the building fell on the rulers and everyone in it. So he killed more Philistines when he died than he had when he was alive.

The point I am making here is that the presence of the Holy Spirit makes a huge difference. It is not about our abilities, skills, upbringing or the environment we have been exposed to. It is all about the Holy Spirit taking residence in the believer who is the temple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore if the believer totally surrenders to Him, extraordinary feats can be wrought not by the believer but by the Mighty indwelling Holy Spirit. God moved by His Spirit in the Old Testament and has continued to do so even in our time. God is still active through the Holy Spirit He sent into the world. He continues to quicken our dead and natural bodies, transforming them to the image of the invisible God, so that we might do the works of Him who has called us out of darkness and dead works to the marvellous light of His son Jesus Christ. In Christ, we can do all things as His Spirit takes total and absolute control of our being. Paul fully understood the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit when he asserted in **Romans 8:11 (ASV)** ¹¹ But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give

life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Outside of Christ we can only do natural things according to our natural abilities which are limited.

As believers, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who has the sovereignty to bestow unto us gifts according to His will to do acts which cannot be explained in the natural. So, like Peter and the rest of the apostles, every believer has the capacity to manifest the gifts of the Holy Spirit as he is enabled, to profit the body of Christ. As long as the church remains here on this earth, and the Holy Spirit continues to dwell in believers, extraordinary acts and signs and wonders must continue to be the hallmark of the church. The same Holy Spirit who rested on Elijah on Mount Carmel to defeat the prophets of Baal (1 King 18:16-40), and revealed King of Aram's war strategy secreted to Elisha (2 Kings 6:8-12) is now living in the believer to do even greater things in the Church and the world at large.

Chapter Three

The Significance of Pentecost

In Peter's first sermon, he tried to explain the significance of what had just happened (Acts 2:14-19). He stated that what had happened was the fulfillment of the promise spoken by Prophet Joel: ¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the eleven apostles. In a loud voice he said to them, "Men of Judea and everyone living in Jerusalem! You must understand this, so pay attention to what I say. ¹⁵ These men are not drunk as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning. ¹⁶ Rather, this is what the prophet Joel spoke about: ¹⁷ 'In the last days, God says, I will pour my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will speak what God has revealed. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ In those days I will pour my Spirit on my servants, on both men and women. They will speak what God has revealed. ¹⁹ I will work miracles in the sky and give signs on the earth: blood, fire, and clouds of smoke.

The Last Days

The prophet had prophesied that in the last days God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28-29). A clarification of the term “last days” will elucidate the significance of the Day of Pentecost in relationship to the Church of Jesus Christ and its task for this dispensation. It is important to understand why God has chosen to pour out his Spirit at this time without measure and why He is now pouring Him upon all flesh without discrimination.

It is believed by many scholars and commentators that the term “Last Days” signifies that the Messiah of God has come. Peter was using this first sermon to convince the people that the person they crucified is indeed the Christ promised and that they should believe in Him and the works which He now empowers the Church to continue to do. The prophecy of Joel is now fulfilled in their very eyes. The kingdom of the Messiah has arrived. It was promised to fulfil in the last days.

Matthew Henry in his commentary sees the last days as “ the times of the gospel because the dispensation of God’s kingdom among men, which the gospel sets up, is the last dispensation of divine grace, and we are to look for no other than the continuation of this to the end of time.”⁸ In his view, Peter was asserting in this first sermon that the people should believe what had taken place because it was prophesied of and promised and they ought to expect it and should not be surprised at its fulfilment on this

Day of Pentecost. This occasion was to champion more plentiful and extensive effusion of the Spirit of grace from on high than had ever yet been.

The writer of the English Standard Version Study Bible (ESV) notes, commenting on Acts chapter two says, “The **last days** are not just in the distant future but were inaugurated at Pentecost and will continue until Christ’s return. They are the “last days” in that the coming of the Messiah, long predicted in the O.T., has now occurred. His saving death and resurrection have been accomplished, and now the work of the Holy Spirit in building the church is a key event in the history of salvation that needs to occur before Christ returns.”

Whereas in the Old Testament, the Spirit rested on men and women who were designated for special assignments, the Last Days’ outpouring will be on all flesh both Jews and Gentiles. There shall be no discrimination in terms of gender, age or social status and ranking every one becomes significant in spreading the message of the kingdom of the messiah. B D Kluas also believes that Peter clearly saw the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost as a confirmation that the “last days” had arrived. According to him, the last days is the Church Age, the age of the Spirit, it is the last age before the return of Christ to establish His kingdom on earth and that there will be no other age before the Millennium.⁹

The reason for establishing a working definition of the term, “last days” is to understand the continuation principle asserted earlier on. If the Holy Spirit came

upon the Church to empower the believers to continue the work that Jesus Christ started, then the work will not be done half way but completed at the close of the this dispensation. The Holy Spirit must continue to empower the believer to complete the work they have been called to do in this Age of the Church. Since the "Last Days" will not end until Jesus comes back to take His bride, it also means that whatever was ushered in as part of the "Last Days" package will continue and not cease until Christ comes back to reign with the saints. The true Living Church must continue to believe and practice what has been graciously bestowed on the Church until the Perfect one appears. This phenomenon has nothing to do with our natural abilities, our theology or doctrine but God's sovereignty. He will manifest Himself in the body whenever He wants to and through which vessel He chooses. We are still basking in the glory of the "Last Days" and it power to accentuate the coming Kingdom of our God and His Christ.

The assertions made by Matthew Henry, B. D Kluas and the writer of the ESV Bible Study Notes are noteworthy. These scholars are in agreement that the work started on the Day of Pentecost, which ushered in the Last Days" phenomenon will continue until Christ returns. The words of the writer of the ESV Notes: "...now the work of the Holy Spirit in building the church is a key event in the history of salvation that needs to occur before Christ returns" connote that as long as there are sinners to be brought to the saving knowledge of Christ, the "Last Days" continues and ends when Christ comes back the second time for the church. All those who to be saved

must experience salvation through the work of the Holy Spirit who now indwells the believer, empowering him to share the good news to the people who are still walking in darkness. For the message of the cross to be meaningful to the hearer, the Holy Spirit must bring the conviction and clarity required to make sinners reject the Christless life they live to embrace and accept the love of Jesus in their hearts.

Chapter Four

Why the Manifestation of the Spiritual Gifts is not an option

In Acts 1:8, Jesus promised the church the gift of power to fulfil all that she needed to do in these last days before He returned to establish His kingdom fully on earth. Power and authority are necessary prerequisites to accomplish anything in this world. C. J. E. Kingston spells it out very emphatically, when he affirms that the disciples were able to speak with authority and power on the Day of Pentecost because the Spirit gave them utterance to speak with clarity and certainty out of an experience of revealed truth interpreted by the Holy Ghost. His view is that every Christian church must have the same experience of divine empowerment for service as did the early Christians. He concludes that if this was not “our own” experience, that is, the type of Christianity we see around us, then there must be some defect or error somewhere.¹⁰

Kingston is not alone in this view, Harold Horton states it even stronger, when he said, "there can be no fully acceptable conformity to God's pattern of divine worship in a church where Spiritual Gifts are despised, or neglected or abused. Spiritual Gifts are not an option in the word ... they are, in addition necessary instruments of power in service." He gave a stark warning that the church will be like the old Israel who failed to please God even though we (the Church) maintain our observance of sacraments and strict orderliness but without power and supernatural accompaniments.¹¹

It is abundantly clear that the Church of the living Christ must be a living organism. It must be full of life and dynamism as the Holy Spirit continues to energize it to accomplish the purpose for which it was birthed in this world. If the church is going to impact the world it must have authority with signs and wonders demonstrated to show that the living Christ is still at work in the midst of His body, the church. The early Christians transformed lives, changed their world, confounded their critics and overcame persecution because the power of the Holy Spirit was evident in their ministries. Today's church faces the same problems encountered by the early church. If they overcame their problems by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, who gave them boldness and manifested miracles, signs and wonders among them, then the twenty first century church needs this power with greater intensity. As it is stated in the scripture, where

sin abounds, much grace abounds.

A Panoramic Portrait of the Twenty-First Century Society

I believe that one cannot fully appreciate the importance of the Holy Spirit in our days until they have a full picture of the society the church has to contend with. Understanding the contemporary society will accelerate our knowledge and help us to devise a proper strategy to do the works of Christ to a generation who do not believe in the universal truth of the gospel. We will also understand the gulf that exists between "faith thoughts" and contemporary mind set better. We are living in a time and an age where the Church has lost her influence and secular pluralism has taken the centre stage in many western societies. The ideological mind sets espoused by such cultural shifts are at variance with fundamental Christian beliefs and principles. This is not to say that this is the first time culture and faith has clashed.

What I am saying is that because the Church has lost her influence in society, secular education system has overrun Christian institutions that previously shaped the great minds in society. In the past most people who have made it in politics, industry, science and commerce have also received educational training that was embedded in Christian ethos. With secularisation, has come doubts and relativism of truth. In other words truth is no longer absolute and the Bible is no longer seen as the

authority that should guide us in all matters of life. Pluralism means that truth is what a community believes to be truth for them. This truth cannot be imposed on other societies who are not part of our community. These shifts have serious implications in terms of the way we witness and minister to non-Christians. Our society has embraced pragmatism, which means, doing only that which works in their view, regardless of what other views might be advocated by others. If I cannot prove it then it does not hold, as it is not practical or pragmatic. This is the mantra of the postmodern culture of the 21st century. But we know that faith is an assurance and one has to believe first before manifestation. Of course, this is not a politically correct thing to say. Political Correctness is another societal move that has affected the way believers can articulate their faiths. One could be brought before the Law if statements which are biblically sound are deemed to contravene the political correctness principles. It is not politically correct to say that same sex marriages, abortions or euthanasia are at variance with biblical principles in our society. In this politically correct and pluralistic world you will be swimming against the tide if you say that Jesus is the way, the truth and the light and that no one can come to God except through Him.

The Agnostics, the Atheist, New Age and Eastern faith groups will challenge such a statement under the Law. It is possible for the believer to face prosecution under the "Law against incitement of religious hatred" for advocating the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. The Church is no longer operating in a

familiar or friendly territory but a somewhat hostile environment. The terrain has shifted so much even in the so called Christian nations, where the Church must now see itself as a missionary in a strange land. Missionaries have always survived in strange lands and cultures when they anchor their faith in God, knowing without a shadow of a doubt that the Holy Spirit is with them. They always believe that the Holy Spirit will guide them to manoeuvre through the uncharted waters which are alien to them. Testimonies abound, when missionaries have faced difficulties and the extraordinary has taken place, like the healing of the village chief, or a word of knowledge has been uttered in a given situation and the storm calmed. It is assuring to know that when you are about the Lord's business disappointment is never a vocabulary in your dictionary. The Holy Spirit who lives inside of you always manifests Himself in every situation confirming that He will never leave you alone and the fact that He is the comforter to whisper to us that it is well with us. The portrait of the contemporary society signifies that it is only by the wisdom and counsels of the Holy Spirit can the Church continue to effectively do the work which Jesus started. This is not the time to use human wisdom which has been enthroned above the wisdom and counsel of God by this generation. It is the time to look unto Him who has called the Church as the bride of the soon coming King, to evangelize the world and prepare for the establishment of His Kingdom on the earth. We desperately need Him who knows and understands the mind of God. He also understands our frustrations and he Himself is

groaning for our adoption as the sons of God.

Jesus having been here fully understood the struggles the Church would face. This is why He promised not to leave us comfortless but to send the Holy Spirit to guide and encourage the Church to do the works which He initiated. The manifestation of the Spirit's power is a must in the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to a dying world. Jesus promised that Supernatural signs would give confirmation to the gospel (Mark 16: 9-20). Just as the Holy Spirit had to energize and convince and convict the world in the Apostolic Age, the same manifestation is needed today in a pluralistic world where truth is now relative and not absolute. When signs and wonders accompany the proclamation of the gospel, heathens are confronted with the reality of the living, invisible and yet powerful almighty God, who is the creator of the heavens and the earth. These signs must surely follow the believer as they advance the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As I have mentioned, the Holy Spirit has continued to strengthen missionaries in strange lands where the Lord has sent them as witnesses. Many missionaries have testified about how the manifestation of the power of God has made the difference in their ministries around the world. David Lim attributes the growth of Christianity around the world, especially in third world countries where people are still receptive to the word of God to the powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit. In his view the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have grown so fast because spiritual gifts are at work and

advancing God's kingdom through their efforts and obedience.¹² As long as there are unsaved people in the world, God will continue to use the church to bring the good news. As He bestowed the necessary unction for service on the Day of Pentecost and throughout the Apostolic Age, He will continue to empower the church to fulfil the great commission here till the end of this dispensation. As John Rea clearly stated, charismatic gifts will be operative wherever the exalted Christ is present in power and freedom. The church must recognize that the Living Lord is in the temple and must be given the freedom to manifest his power and glory.¹³ If we are going to experience the move of God in our local assemblies and our world in general, the key is to be receptive to the Holy Spirit who has been bestowed in the Church and dwells in the body of the believer who is the temple of God. We should not in any way either in our practices or ordinances, despise, neglect or abuse Him as He manifests Himself in our midst. He is a gentle Spirit and will not impose Himself or usurp authority. He will wait for us to yield to Him, and then He will demonstrate the power of God in the Church.

Chapter Five

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church (Part 1)

The Call to Edify

Spiritual gifts are given to the church not just to evangelise and confirm the gospel. Millard J Erickson has identified the edification of the believers as the second major function of the church. He notes that even though Jesus laid greater emphasis on evangelism, the edification of the believers is logically prior.¹⁴ Melvin Hodges' view is that the church's mission is facilitated by three interrelated aspects of ministry. He believes that each is equally important and complementary. He asserts that "the church is called firstly to minister to God through worship; secondly to minister to the members of the church itself. His view is that the members of the church are to exercise the gifts and the koinonia of the Spirit in a relationship with one another."

Thirdly, the church is called to minister to the world (proclamation of the gospel and all these interrelated ministries should be the hallmark of the local assembly¹⁵). It is obvious that both Erickson and Hodges agree that the body of Christ must minister to itself. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians 4: 7-16, has a strong message for the church in this regard when he writes: ⁷ God's favour has been given to each of us. It was measured out to us by Christ who gave it. ⁸ That's why the Scriptures say: "When he went to the highest place, he took captive those who had captured us and gave gifts to people." ⁹ Now what does it mean that he went up except that he also had gone down to the lowest parts of the earth? ¹⁰ The one who had gone down also went up above all the heavens so that he fills everything. ¹¹ He also gave apostles, prophets, missionaries, as well as pastors and teachers as gifts {to his church}. ¹² Their purpose is to prepare God's people, to serve, and to build up the body of Christ. ¹³ This is to continue until all of us are united in our faith and in our knowledge about God's Son, until we become mature, until we measure up to Christ, who is the standard. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be little children, tossed and carried about by all kinds of teachings that change like the wind. We will no longer be influenced by people who use cunning and clever strategies to lead us astray. ¹⁵ Instead, as we lovingly speak the truth, we will grow up completely in our relationship to Christ, who is the head. ¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together and unites it through the support of every joint. As each and every part does its job, he makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

The gifts of God has been given for the edification and perfecting of the body of Christ. Every member of the church has been given the gift of grace freely (v7) and in v.12; the purpose of this gift is clearly stated – perfecting the saints, the work of the ministry and the edification of the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit must manifest these gifts in the church if these goals are to be achieved. The gift would not be given, if Jesus did not believe that the church needed such empowerment. Greg Ogden sees the Church's ministry in terms of sharing in divine life; a process he describes as "relationship inter-reliance" that is the body of Christ belonging to each other, needing each other and affecting each other.¹⁶ The church must not neglect or despise the gifts of God within her, but recognize and exalt the giver so that He can freely manifest himself in building up the body and neatly fitting every frame together. The church cannot make itself perfect but through the manifestation of the diversities of Spiritual gifts within her. The Holy Spirit is the gift of God to the church to make it perfect for the coming bridegroom. This is the only way v13 can be fulfilled. The Holy Spirit will instil Godly character in the believer. This is the only way the Christian can truly become an instrument of blessing both to himself or the lost world. Only the person who has experienced the power of salvation enshrined in the Gospel can dispense the same to somebody else. Many Christians have acquired head knowledge of God but have had no real encounter with the Christ of the Bible or the Holy Spirit who is given to the Church. No one can truly give what they do not possess. This could explain the drought in the

ministry life of the Church.

Edification and body ministry to one another according to Biblical paradigm is missing in many church gatherings. The emphasis has gradually shifted from what was received from apostolic teachings to platonic and stoic philosophical thinking which have no place in the agenda of Jesus Christ when He birthed the Church. Consumerism and gimmicks have taken the place of sound biblical teaching which gives life and breeds the character of God in a man. Without God's character formation in the believer, no fruit which can stand the test of time will be produced. The Church will fossilise into irrelevance as its power and authority is continually eroded. There can be no real power if the fruit of God's life is lacking in the Church. A true Living Church is one built on God's character as revealed in the Holy Word. This Church has an unflinching relationship with God and Christ remains the centre of its existence. This is the Church where the Holy Spirit is busy perfecting the saints for the imminent appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The theme of edification and the role of Spiritual gifts in its realisation run through Paul's writings. In 1 Corinthians 14: 4-5, he writes, "4 When a person speaks in another language, he helps himself grow. But when a person speaks what God has revealed, he helps the church grow. 5 I wish that all of you could speak in other languages, but especially that you could speak what God has revealed. The person who speaks what God has revealed is more important than the person who speaks in other languages. This is true unless he can interpret what he says to help the church grow".

In these verses he exalts prophecy above speaking in tongues in public worship. Even though he privately spoke in tongues more than them, his argument is that speaking in tongues in public worship did not edify anybody except the one who was speaking, the communication was directed to God and not the audience in the local assembly. The only way to edify the congregation was if the tongue was also interpreted.

The view is that the people gather to be edified by what they can hear and understand, like prophecy (v3) which, edifies, exhorts and comforts the assembly. In v12, he acknowledges their zeal to aspire for spiritual gifts but recommends that their goal must be to excel in edifying the body. Paul is encouraging the local assembly to manifest these gifts. He recognises their imperfection, their human failure, but still encouraged them to covet these gifts. All he wished for them is that everything will be done in order (v26). Everybody should profit as a result of the manifestation of Spiritual gifts (1 Cor.12:7) so that all will be edified and God will be glorified. He was not rebuking them for the wonderful manifestations. After all it was God himself who has lavishly poured out the gift without measure, sovereignly distributing to all without discrimination for the benefit of all. The Holy Spirit will continue to energize the body of Christ to experience greater fellowship, unity, oneness and common affirmation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over his Church. He himself through his Spirit has baptized every believer into the Church, He made them drink the same Spirit (1 Cor.12:12-13). He has also given to the church Pastors and Teachers to

provide instructions and teaching, to empower and to entrust insight and revelation they have received through in-depth study of the word to reliable members who will be able to teach others (2 Tim. 2:2). This is the way the body of Christ is edified. Jesus is the one building his church by the power of the Holy Spirit. He promised to build his Church His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Mat 16:18)

Chapter Six

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church (Part 2)

The Call to Worship

The church is called to offer worship to God. In ministering to God in worship, He alone becomes our focal point. Worship is directed to him alone. This is the main reason believers go to church, to worship God. Every religious practices or liturgical activities of the church, must aim to get the people to pay attention to God. Even though, God is the primary focus, the worshippers also get some benefits. They are edified especially when everything is done in order and everyone gets greater understanding from the diversities of gifts in operation as inferred by Paul (1Cor. 14: 15-17). The Holy Spirit empowers the believer to offer true worship to God. B. D Klaus states that worship should be marked by the varied ministries of the Spirit that build up the worshippers spiritually

and give honours to God. He sees spirit-empowered ministry to God through worship as a process which produces believers who amongst other things have a desire to be part of Christ's continuing ministry.¹⁷

During the worship believers are compelled and energized to go and demonstrate the love of God to a needy and dying world through the proclamation of the gospel. This resonates well with the interrelationship echoed by Melvin Hodge about the calling and purpose of the church.¹⁸ It is important however to state that not every liturgical activity or religious practices direct the peoples' attention to the almighty God who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Different activities such as music, lighting, colour coordination etc. have been used to create certain ambience which is expected to invoke the presence of God in worship. These activities play on the emotions of the worshippers and wrongly lead them to believe that God is in their midst. It must be made abundantly clear that only true worship invokes the presence of God.

The Holy Spirit cannot be cajoled or manipulated to manifest His presence. This is not to discount the importance of these activities, but ultimately every activity should awaken the worshippers to meet the true and invisible living God. In this regard, C. S. Lewis asserts that the "perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God". He called for uniformity rather than liturgy, because he believes that "novelty" in the worship service at best turns our attention to the novelty and at worst turns it to the one who is enacting

the liturgy.¹⁹ J. M. Boice states that "true worship occurs when that part of human beings, their spirit, which is akin to the divine nature (God is spirit), actually meets with God and finds itself praising him for his love, wisdom, beauty, truth, holiness, compassion, mercy, grace, power and other attributes."²⁰ Man needs to connect and commune with his maker in a true act of worship. William Barclay captures this better when he wrote: "The true, genuine worship is when man, through his spirit, attains to friendship and intimacy with God. True and genuine worship is not to come to a certain place; it is not to go through a certain ritual or liturgy; it is not even to bring certain gifts. True worship is when the spirit, the immortal and invisible part of man, speaks to and meets with God, who is immortal and invisible."²¹ None of these spiritual activities can be attained without the manifestation of the spirit power and presence in the church. The indwelling Holy Spirit directs the spirit of the regenerated man to offer God a true and genuine act of worship. A true living church must manifest within its worship that is acceptable to God.

In the words of Paul, the believer must present himself as a living sacrifice to God and this is his reasonable act of worship (Rom. 12:1). The Holy Spirit fills the believer and he is able to totally surrender his sovereignty to God. The worshipper is no longer in charge, God is given the ultimate right to direct our action and we gain his full attention, when we cease to be in charge. Every one of our acts of service or ministries must motivate us to worship him. The mind of the believer is renewed and made to conform to the will

of God. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. He has come to develop the character of Jesus Christ in the Church. This work will continue until we are like Him beholding his glory (2 Cor. 3:18).

Chapter Seven

The Case for Non-Cessation

The case for the continual manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the church is strong. It is difficult if not impossible to see how the church can fulfil its' God-given mandate without yielding itself to the Holy Spirit's empowerment and continual manifestation. The nature and calling of the church and the tasks set before it demand the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The Church will not be able to replicate the work of Christ effectively without the manifestation of the Spirit's gifts in the life of the believers in the local assembly. There are diversities of views within the Church in terms of what exactly constitutes the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Some of the doubts are legitimate in the light of the Corinthian experience and also what is obtainable in some circles of today's modern day church.

Evaluating practices and activities which are

ascribed to the Spirit's manifestation is healthy. After all we are warned about counterfeits and advised to test every spirit to know if it is of God. Therefore one sees nothing wrong with people asking questions and trying to understand what is going on in church life. Where the problem lies is where people become so sceptical that any manifestation is ruled out and seen as something outside the realms Christianity. This is ignorance and should be disregarded.

The Church is not totally and completely divided when it comes to the manifestation of Spiritual gifts in church. There is consensus when it comes to the distinction between natural abilities or natural talents and spiritual gifts. There is a general agreement that natural gifts are not the same as spiritual gifts. Natural gifts are what we are born with and also a product of our upbringing and exposure. They are learnt. However one should not forget that it is also God who puts natural abilities in us, but they are not the same as spiritual gifts. John Rea made this observation when he said "These gifts are not to be thought of as natural abilities or as permanent possessions but are supernatural (and often sudden) manifestation of the Spirit Himself." ²² Many Church leaders and scholars alike, also agree on the on the fact that the Holy Spirit is sovereign and bestows the gift on whomsoever He chooses and that it is not for the benefit of the one through whom the manifestations takes place but for the whole assembly. It is also generally agreed that no one person possess all the gifts and that the lack of manifestation does not necessarily mean that one is not baptized by the Spirit. Some have however contested this view and will question why the gifts

are not manifested if the Holy Spirit is indeed present in a believer's life. It is indeed refreshing to note that consensus exists in the church regarding this important doctrine.

Chapter Eight

The Cessationist Argument

Despite the consensus on a lot of issues regarding the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and Spiritual gifts, the Church has differing views on the question of whether these Spiritual gifts are still in existence in the Church today. The question usually asked is whether the gifts were temporary or permanent. The cessationists believe that some of the gifts were temporary especially the sign gifts. They argue that sign gifts like tongue, prophecy and healing ceased at the end of the Apostolic Age. The proponents of cessationism have used both scriptural and scholarly evidence to make their points. What exactly are these views and how balanced and cogent are they?

The Gift of Tongues

One of the foremost scriptures used by cessationists to validate their point on this matter is 1 Cor. 13: 8, where Paul wrote "Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease;

as for knowledge, it will pass away.”

The speaking in tongues has been identified as one of the controversial gifts that divide the church. It has attracted a lot of attention and criticisms. It is absolutely important that one has a clear understanding of what this phenomenon is. Harold Horton defines it as “a supernatural utterance by the Holy Spirit in languages never learned by the speaker – not understood by the mind of the speaker – nearly always not understood by the hearer”.²³ Donald Gee writes “... the gift of tongues consisted of a power of more or less ecstatic speech, in languages with which the speaker was not familiar”.²⁴

Despite the assertion made by Gee and Horton, the cessationists have argued that historically sign gifts have ceased and that they were not known throughout most of the history of the church. Anthony Hoekema looking at those who spoke in tongues in the early church days says “when they were present, it was generally in isolated groups characterised by unorthodox beliefs on a number of other major doctrines.”²⁵ It means that during this time these isolated tongue speakers were not seen as genuine Christians. They were probably seen as counterfeit Christians and this might have increased the intensity of the prejudice accorded to them.

This prejudice has persisted in certain quarters where the speaking in tongues is perceived as something demonic rather than of God. Millard Erickson has noted that tongues are not mentioned in v9 and 10 of the above text. He therefore concludes that this

is because tongues have already ceased and needed not be included in the reference to the imperfect gifts (prophecies and knowledge), which will pass away when the perfect comes.²⁶ Others have argued that the speaking in tongues is not Holy Spirit inspired phenomenon as there are parallels with other religions. Millard Erickson has argued that glossolalia was not unique with Christians even in biblical times. He cites examples of utterances made by voodoo witch doctors and the Oracle of Delphi, near Corinth, making ecstatic utterances similar to that seen in Corinthian Church.²⁷ William Sargent, too has suggested that in Psychology, there is a parallel between speaking in tongues and certain cases of heightened suggestibility caused by brain washing or electroshock therapy.²⁸

There have been discussions on whether the tongues of today are similar to the one spoken in Acts on the Day of Pentecost. Some believe that they are actual language that one who spoke it would be able to understand and interpret, but others differ on this view. William Samarin, has challenged those who hold the view that today’s tongue is actual human language, to explain the fact that scientific evidence shows that tongues do not display sufficient number of the characteristics of language to be classified as such.²⁹

Apostolic Foundation

Other important verses of scripture used by cessationist to buttress their argument include Ephesians 2:20, which states, “You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus

himself is the cornerstone” and in Hebrews 2:3-4 he writes, “³ So how will we escape punishment if we reject the important message, the message that God saved us? First, the Lord told this saving message. Then those who heard him confirmed that message. ⁴ God verified what they said through miraculous signs, amazing things, other powerful acts, and with other gifts from the Holy Spirit as he wanted”. These have to do with the Apostles to whom Christ entrusted the message of salvation. The view is that the church is being built on the foundation of Apostles and Prophets with Jesus as the chief cornerstone. The fact that a foundation is something that is built ones and for all is used to explain that the Holy Spirit gave the gifts to the Apostles and ceased dispensing them at the end of the apostolic era. Martyn Lloyd-Jones puts it this way “by definition a foundation is something that does not continue”. ³⁰ The conclusion is that since the gifts were given to test their apostolic authority, now that the canon is established and apostolic teaching accepted as true revelation from God there is no need for such gifts thereafter.

What the cessationists are arguing is that, since the scripture comes by inspiration and prophecy, and that since this ceased to be produced at the death of the last apostle, then there is no need for God to work exactly the same way as he did in the first century. The discontinuity of God’s activities, in the twentieth century as they perceive it, raises the question whether the sign gifts are normative Christianity. Daniel B. Wallace writes “The more we see discontinuity, the more we affirm that the purpose of the sign gifts was authentication rather than a display of normative

Christianity.” ³¹ In his discontinuity argument to support the cessationists’ view, he asks further questions about the place of miracles today apart from healing; he also questions the citation of Mark 16, especially verses 17-18, which is normally used by non-Cessationist to argue for continuity of the manifestation of the sign gifts. He concludes that there is doubt among scholars as to the authenticity of verses 17-18 and sees them as verses added by later hands. In his opinion these verses see sign gifts as authenticating signs rather than normative manifestation.

Permanent v Temporary Gifts

There are those who argue for discontinuity on the basis of permanent and temporal gifts. They argue that gifts like apostleship, which was foundational and cannot be repeated, has ceased; prophecy be it forthtelling or foretelling has also ceased since the scripture is completed. The gift of miracles and healing are claimed to be temporary gifts. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, makes a great distinction in terms of the gift of healing when he said “... the gift of healing, by which I understand that certain people had been given the gift by the Holy Spirit whereby they themselves could directly heal people.” ³²

It is inconceivable that any seasoned believer who is well-informed about the role of Spiritual Gifts can claim that they themselves directly heal the people. Martyn Lloyd-Jones assertion does not pass the test of scripture and not in consonance with what Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 12. The gift of healing is

orchestrated by the Holy Spirit at will. The believer is a mere instrument and therefore cannot claim to be responsible for the healing. This claim is akin to modern day faith healers who claim to have the ability to heal. This is quite different from the biblical teaching contained in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 where Paul says,⁷ The evidence of the Spirit's presence is given to each person for the common good of everyone.⁸ The Spirit gives one person the ability to speak with wisdom. The same Spirit gives another person the ability to speak with knowledge.⁹ To another person the same Spirit gives {courageous} faith. To another person the same Spirit gives the ability to heal.¹⁰ Another can work miracles. Another can speak what God has revealed. Another can tell the difference between spirits. Another can speak in different kinds of languages. Another can interpret languages.¹¹ There is only one Spirit who does all these things by giving what God wants to give to each person.

The Holy Spirit bestows the healing gifts to each one just as he determines. The glory returns to God, who is the ultimate healer. The Church should part company with one who claims that they can heal anybody by themselves. This is not Biblical; the word of God makes it abundantly clear when it states "I am Jehovah that healeth thee." The healing that comes from God and directed by the Holy Spirit is far from what is ubiquitous on our television screens, where glory and honour as well as adulation goes to men and women who elevate themselves on a high pedestals. They have created hero worshippers for themselves and sign autographs after their meetings. Biblical healing is not a show and does not always

take place in the stadia. It is not the multi-million psychics and psychotherapist money making industries that have plagued our society today.

When you receive healing orchestrated by the Holy Spirit, you will need nobody to tell you because humans will be irrelevant in such activities. The vessel used by God will not drag you to the television station to testify about how anointed he or she is and how they are special in the move of God. When man heals you, the glory goes to man, when God heals you, as in the case of Jesus' ministry, He will tell you not to tell anyone. He will move swiftly out of the limelight. This is what makes the difference in the work done by the Holy Spirit and that done by man for the glory of man. God is still healing and restoring lives to those who will come to Him believing that Luke 4:18-19, is still possible in today's Church as the Holy Spirit decides.

Also included in the lists of temporary gifts which have ceased are tongues and discerning of Spirits Gifts which were identified to be permanent, included some from 1 Corinthians 12, such as the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, the ability to teach, the gift of ministering and helps and all the other gift found in Romans 12, mostly regarded as service gifts. Many people have no problem with these service gifts because they are not almost always subject to abuse and not dramatic, when compared to healings, miracles and speaking in tongues. Notwithstanding, it is still by the same Spirit.

Chapter Nine

Affirming the Continuity Stance

Despite the scholarly arguments proposed by the exponents of cessationists' view, it is difficult to agree with the premise they hold. It is difficult to rationalise the notion that the Holy Spirit has ceased to operate the gifts of graces in today's church. The scriptural evidences tended by them to substantiate their claims are not strong enough. The scripture is very strong in supporting the ongoing manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Body of Christ to the end of the age. This is abundantly clear in 1 Corinthians 13:10, Paul states that "But when what is complete comes, then what is incomplete will no longer be used and in Romans 11:29, he says, "God never changes his mind when he gives gifts or when he calls someone". These imperfect gifts will continue until the perfect one comes and the irrevocability of the gifting and call of God are implied here. What God intended for the Holy Spirit to do in a true Living Church is clearly chronicled from

the prophecy of Joel in the Old Testament through to the Gospels and the Epistles in the New Testament. The enormity of reference accorded to the work of the Holy Spirit in the entire Bible demonstrates that it is not incidental but significant and permanent in the agenda of and the church. The amount of time and energy Apostle Paul devoted to it in his writings is indicative of the importance of the subject. Nowhere in the scripture has God stated that He will withdraw the gifts from the Church. Paul affirms in Romans 11:29 that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." This means that there is no turning back or withdrawal of the gift He has generously poured out into the church. He sets these gifts and offices in the Church and has not announced their withdrawal or cancellation.

Why Cessationism does not hold

1 Corinthians 13:8 is the trump card of those who argue that Spiritual gifts will cease. This scripture does not in any way affirm the cessation of these manifestations. To accept this conclusion is completely to take everything Paul said out of context and to misconstrue what he actually said. The key word is when the "perfect one comes." This must be explained accurately. This passage makes it abundantly clear that the period of cessation will be when Christ returns and makes the church perfect. Until then the Holy Spirit must continue to perfect the body of Christ by manifesting Himself in the Church through the believer. Donald Gee warns against any attempt to whittle down the New Testament pattern for Christians to suit our own experiences and opinions.³³ Discontinuity is not

contemplated here by Paul and as such nobody should misconstrue his intention. Apostle Peter encouraged his readers in 2 Peter 1:3-6, amongst other things to make every effort to add to their... knowledge and ...love. This is not mere acquisition of knowledge by self, but by the divine power enabling the believer to gain more knowledge and understanding of God and our saviour Jesus Christ. Logically, it means that knowledge will not cease until Jesus comes back for the saints.

The cessationists hold a view that history proves that Spiritual Gifts ceased with the apostolic age, Gee sees this as both true and false.³⁴ He agrees that there has been a diminution of the gifts not only after apostolic age but also toward its close. The explanation for this was due to the waxing cold of the love of many rather than a withdrawal of these gifts by God. The church became lukewarm and as a result the manifestation was not evident. This is in line with Paul's admonition in Romans 12, the Holy Spirit will operate in living bodies which have been presented and totally submitted to God as a living sacrifice, not lukewarm and dead bodies. There is evidence that the gifts did not completely cease as attested by historical figures like Irenaeus, Tertullian, Chrysostom and Augustine who claim to have witnessed these manifestations in their time."³⁵

There is another notion that the gifts ceased when the New Testament canon was completed. Gee argues that to take this stance is to misconstrue the purpose of the gifts and to "assume that in the early church utterances through these gifts had all the authority of

the Scriptures, but the New Testament utterly disapproves of such ideas.”³⁶ God had a distinct purpose for the bestowal of the Holy Spirit gifts in the Church. As it has been argued throughout this book, God’s intended purpose is to equip the church for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4) not just pending when the canon will be completed but until the perfect one comes or to the close of the age. The outpouring was not an interim measure but a lasting blessing upon the church throughout its lifetime in this world.

The view that the Holy Spirit is not needed today because the world does not need any more conviction is a weak argument. There are many people in the world today who have not heard about the gospel and still need to be convinced by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. As Paul said, the word of God is the power of God unto salvation, but people still have to be sent and they need the same magnitude of divine power as the early Christians to convey the message with power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit’s power. In a pluralistic society where everything is relative and void of absolute truth, one would think that this should make the role of the Holy Spirit in convincing and convicting the world a must.

Chapter Ten

What is Apostle Paul’s view?

The Apostle Paul devoted a lot of time and energy to teach the proper conduct that should be visible in a true living Church where the Holy Spirit’s manifestation is evident. I strongly believe that if we critically examine his teachings we will be able to determine what should be acceptable in the assembly of believers. Sound knowledge and understanding of his teachings will remove cynicism that surrounds the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in today’s church and among those who hold that His ministry has ceased. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians was set out among other things, to provide a biblical paradigm for the operations of the Gift of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the life of the believer.

The first chapter of this letter (1Cor. 1:4-9), made it abundantly clear that the Corinthian Christians were endowed with all Spiritual Gifts. Their acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the author and object of their faith has meant that they have become rich in

every spiritual endowment. God had manifested Himself powerfully in their midst and therefore lacked nothing when it comes to Spiritual Gifts. This is not to say that every member of the assembly possessed all the gifts, but that none of the gifts was lacking. They manifested in different people as the Holy Spirit desired. The same Jesus Christ who was present in their midst as He was in other churches has graciously bestowed gifts of graces on them. Therefore, the Corinthian Church was not inferior to any other church. The point is that the same Jesus Christ who is the Lord of all and the head of the Church has not in anyway discriminated against them in His bestowal of Spiritual Gifts to the Churches. They were especially enriched in gifts of utterance and the knowledge of the word.

The utterance gifts included teaching, preaching, prophecy and the gift of tongues. The Apostle congratulated them for allowing the Holy Spirit to manifest these gifts in them. Verses 8-9 are quite crucial as Paul makes this assertion: ⁸He will continue to give you strength until the end so that no one can accuse you of anything on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God faithfully keeps his promises. He called you to be partners with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. My understanding is that Paul is saying that because of God's faithfulness, the Holy Spirit will continue to manifest in their midst. They will not be inferior because the same Jesus who is Lord and God is faithful and will not negate His promises. He will faithfully keep them and strengthen them and the partnership will never be broken by God. What God has promised, He will continue to make provision, and He will continue

to make all things work out His plans and purposes in the true living Church. This promise of enduring power of the Holy Spirit is not peculiar to the Church in Corinth but to every assembly where it can be testified that Christ is the author and object of faith. The faithfulness of God will continue to the end and the end is when Christ will come back to take His bride. God has called the Church to be partners with His son. The God who has begun this work in the Body of Christ will carry it through to completion until Jesus comes.

Apostle Paul devoted the whole of 1 Corinthians Chapter 12, to discussing the use and abuse of spiritual gifts especially when it comes to the utterance gifts of prophesying and speaking in tongues. No one who had read the New Testament with an arresting interest and understood the content exegetically speaking, will doubt the impact the outpouring of the Holy Spirit made on the Apostles and the their hearers on the Day of Pentecost and post Pentecost. As prophesied by Prophet Joel and promised by Christ Himself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a remarkable phenomenon. The church was bestowed with diversities of gifts of graces to continue the work of Christ. It was an empowerment for service by the Holy Spirit who is sovereign and manifests on whosoever He wishes for the profit of all in the Body of Christ.

The Church is the Body of Christ but filled with human beings who are not perfect by any stretch of imagination. These imperfect beings are bound to manifest imperfection in whatever they do, even when

carrying out God-given, God-directed and God-inspired activities. This is an important point. Whenever we forget that, the Pastors, the Teachers, the Evangelists, the Prophets and the Apostles are mere human vessels whom the Lord has chosen to use for the benefit of the Church, we will make the wrong judgements about them. This is the reason why many are condemned by us when they fall short of our expectation, and we also exalt some above the giver of the gifts because we think it is about them rather than the giver of the gift. Understanding the purposes of these gifts and the nature of their manifestation in the Church will remove the aforementioned cynicism. If the recipients of the gifts understand the mind of Christ for placing the Holy Spirit in the Church, they will never attempt to elevate themselves or abuse the use of the gifts that is manifesting through them.

The gifts do not manifest in any of us because we are special or favoured, it has nothing to do with our abilities or standing. It is not a sign that we are spiritual and holier than all others. The Holy Spirit chooses who to manifest which gifts through, where and when and for the benefit of whom He desires. Notwithstanding what I have said, it is obvious that some people in the Church in Corinth misunderstood the proper use of the gifts bestowed on them. As an imperfect assembly, there were imposters, there were those who coveted other peoples' gifts thinking such gifts were superior or higher than what manifested through them. There were those who loved public display of whatever gifts that was manifesting through them and this created chaos and disorder in the Church; confusion, cynicism and disunity became rife

in the Corinthian Assembly. Everyone who had a gift wanted to manifest it almost at the same time, this must have created a rowdy assembly.

I believe there were some in the assembly who did not like the confusion and the way things were going on in the Church. There were those who believed that there was a better way. There were those who knew that God was not the author of confusion, but God of orderliness. These ones must have written to Apostle Paul asking him, to bring clarity to the situation. They wanted him to use his apostolic authority to correct the situation and to stipulate what should be the norm in a true Living Church. When you read and understand what Paul is saying in this chapter and the next two chapters, you will not fail to admire the wisdom of God that was upon his life. He rose up to the occasion and his apostolic edict should guide the Church to avoid the mistakes that were inherent in Corinth. What exactly did Paul say to the Corinthian Church with regard to Spiritual Gifts in these three chapters?

Chapter Eleven

The Biblical Way to use Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 (GW)

¹ Brothers and sisters, I don't want there to be any misunderstanding concerning spiritual gifts. ² You know that when you were unbelievers, every time you were led to worship false gods you were worshipping gods who couldn't even speak. ³ So I want you to know that no one speaking by God's Spirit says, "Jesus is cursed." No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴ There are different spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. ⁵ There are different ways of serving, and yet the same Lord is served. ⁶ There are different types of work to do, but the same God produces every gift in every person. ⁷ The evidence of the Spirit's presence is given to each person for the common good of everyone. ⁸ The Spirit gives one person the ability to speak with wisdom. The same Spirit gives another person the ability to speak with knowledge. ⁹ To another person the same Spirit gives {courageous} faith. To another person the same Spirit gives the ability to heal. ¹⁰ Another can work miracles. Another can speak what God

has revealed. Another can tell the difference between spirits. Another can speak in different kinds of languages. Another can interpret languages. ¹¹ *There is only one Spirit who does all these things by giving what God wants to give to each person.*

Every church will mirror the sociocultural as well as the geopolitical make up its environment. In other words where ever a church is located will to a great extent influence its practices and behaviour. This was no different in the Church in Corinth. As a Roman Colony, the city of Corinth attracted a cosmopolitan population which included Romans, Greeks and Jews from different parts of the Mediterranean world. With such an ethnic mix, it is expected that this same diversity will manifest in the congregation of the Corinthian Church. The cultural mix will also reflect in the way people behaved in the Church especially those who were not thoroughly grounded in the new found faith. There is always a tendency for new believers to bring their cultures to worship services. In such a situation clarity is needed to determine what should be accepted as the norm in the Church. Even in today's cosmopolitan Church settings, difficulties exist when it comes to choice of songs, mode of worship, preaching methods, seating arrangements and many more. The city of London is to my mind the capital city of not just of the United Kingdom but of the world. Every nation is represented in this great city. Big Churches sometimes consist of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds with different cultural interpretation of what the Church service should look like. This can cause a lot of problems especially if one group tends to dominate at expense others. Those

who are marginalised will feel they are not wanted as long as they continue to see worship services and practices from their own cultural perspectives rather than from biblical standpoint. These can cause chaos if not addressed. It must be addressed from a biblical lens rather than human stance because all human ideas are the product of their cultural upbringing or origin.

Paul had to address the problems inherent in the Church of Corinth, which I believed stemmed from their cultural mix and their former religion and value systems. Most of the people in the congregation were pagans who had practised pagan worship and rituals. They had developed certain practises, which they probably thought could be transferred or imported into their new found faith. The assertions were fundamental to the issues that Paul had to address. The first point of correction Paul raised in this chapter focused on misunderstanding of Spiritual Gifts.

There should be no misunderstanding about Spiritual Gifts

There is definitely a difference in the Christian faith the Corinthian believers have embraced compared to their past pagan religion. In their former faith, they worshipped a dumb god who could not speak but relied on the priests who purported as an oracle to the gods and spoke the minds of these dumb gods. Paul contrasted the former experience to the Christian experience where the manifestation of Spiritual Gift

especially utterances were inspired by the true Living God, who has the ability to speak through His chosen vessels. The gift of utterance is a sign that the Spirit of God is indwelling the one making the utterance.

This is in contrast to what is obtained in paganism especially in the oracles of Delphos which was not far from Corinth; and of course many of the new believers had participated in worshipping. Every spirit must be tested. No one who speaks by the Spirit of the Almighty God can call Jesus accursed as was in the case of the pagan priests. The Spirit of God cannot cohabit with the spirit of pagan gods. Therefore the test of a man who truly manifests the gift of utterance, divinely inspired, is that he cannot at the same time say Jesus Anathema or Jesus Accursed. In a true living Church, believers profess God from a pure heart and their Gifts of utterance should be divinely inspired and the fruit they bear must also corroborate these manifestations. This is one of the challenges Paul posed to the Church in Corinth.

1. The gifts are different manifestations of the same Spirit in the true living Church

The manifestations of diversities of Spiritual Gifts are attributable to one divine source. This statement is very important to bring about unity of purpose and cohesion in the Church. Even though each has different ministration or offices, the source is the same. The source is the same Spirit. The Holy Trinity consisting of the Spirit whom we have been baptized into and

now manifests in the Body of Christ bestowing these gifts, the exalted Lord Jesus Christ who has mandated the Holy Spirit to empower the Church to render services to the body and God the father who completes all these works in our minds.

The triune God is working in absolute unity to perfect the Church for the soon coming bridegroom, Jesus Christ our saviour. There should be no divisions or competitions; no one should be esteemed higher than the other because of the nature of manifestation bestowed on them. It is all the work of the Holy Trinity to work the grand purpose of God in the Church.

2. Understanding and knowing the different gifts

The different gifts are given for the common good of all. No gift is given for selfish gains or for the profit of the individual or the elevation of the vessel being used. The gift should profit the body of Christ or the local assembly where it is being manifested. The gift of God should never be perverted. Such perversion or abuse is a sin against the giver as well as those whom God desired to benefit from such manifestations. Spiritual Gifts as Paul is teaching here is never intended for self-elevation or aggrandizement.

Paul asserts here that the same Spirit decides to give to some the gifts of intellect namely wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom helps the body to reveal divine truth while knowledge ensures that the church teaches

unerringly what God has revealed to the apostles and prophets. The gifts are still necessary in today's church even though the scripture has been canonized. The dangers of false teachings and ungodly prophecies are still with us today. Only when true wisdom and sound knowledge of God's revelation exist side by side in the body of Christ, can the church truly become, all that God intends for it to be. Wisdom and knowledge will never cease from a true living Church. They are the flames that burn into chaff every wind of doctrine that proceeds from humanism, appearances of godliness, eastern religions, new ageism and importation of Judaic practices into the church.

The same Spirit gives others gifts that depend on special faith. It must be stressed that this faith is not the same as saving faith or the faith that come by hearing. It is rather faith to perform miracles or do or believe in extraordinary things. This gift of faith is so strong that one will be prepared to die (martyrdom) as in the case of Stephen who did not plead to be released or Peter who was crucified upside down. It is not the faith we all possess as believers. Every believer has general faith; every believer can have this special faith if the Holy Spirit decides to bestow it on such a person or persons. The bestowal however does not make the recipient special or holier than any one else. It is a bestowal by the sovereign will of the Holy Spirit and the individual cannot manifest such gifts at will but by the prompting and enabling power of the Holy Spirit to profit all.

So this special gift of faith can result in the Holy Spirit manifesting the gift of healing or the workings

of miracles as well. Those endowed this gift of faith also do have the divine enablement of discerning spirits and distinguishing between those who truly manifest gifts of the spirit and those who exhibit fake or counterfeits. Satan has continued to disguise himself as an angel of light and has deceived many to make shipwreck of their faith. Many believers have been led astray by those who claimed to have heard from God; there are those who have believed and acted on words of prophecy by certain self-proclaimed prophets and this has caused confusion in the household of faith and in some cases split families. These occurrences have caused others to doubt such manifestations even when they come from God. God is active through His Spirit in the Church separating the sheep from the goats, the real from the unreal and the truth from lies coming from the pit of hell.

The remainder of the gift discussed here have to do with tongues. The gift of tongues has continued to be debatable issues in today's Church as they were in the Church in Corinth. Paul has identified and discussed the ability to speak diverse languages and their interpretation. This gift enables the recipients to speak languages they have not previously spoken. This is similar to what happened on the Day of Pentecost, when the apostles spoke and the hearers understood them clearly, as they spoke about the mysteries of God in foreign language even though they were Galileans.

There are those who question the rationale of speaking in a language one has not previously learnt in a Church gathering if no one in that assembly

needed to be addressed in such a language. The question is legitimate and reasonable. When the apostles spoke to those foreigners, I believe that was a sign to convince them that God was at work. Another reason I believe is for those hearers to hear the revelation of God and take it back to their countries as they were visiting Jerusalem. They would later become effective witnesses in their own countries as it happened in Rome.

To hear the gospel preached to them in their own dialect must have been an extraordinary experience that will leave an indelible mark in their minds. God works in mysterious ways and no one can counsel Him. He is perfect in all His ways. God can still by His Spirit use believers to communicate the gospel to natives who need to hear the gospel. I believe this will be a great manifestation in mission fields and a witness to the awesome power of God to heathen nations. In world evangelization, missionaries have travelled across the globe bringing the good news to all nations. Sometimes, language has been a barrier to effective communication of the gospel. I have heard people give account of how this gift has manifested through them and the gospel has been preached in languages they had not previously spoken. God is not limited. While it is true that we cannot build doctrines on the experiences of individuals, who we might not be able to authenticate their account, we can maintain an open mind, knowing that God will judge everyone's claims and testimonies.

Having worked with people in mission fields, I know the frustration of visiting a foreign field where language

is a barrier. It is always a great joy to find someone who can interpret because they speak both languages. However, Paul also talks about people gifted to interpret languages they have not previously learned. None of these are beyond what God can do and has continued to do even in a modern day church setting. We must guard against counterfeits and those who believe they are more spiritual when they speak in tongues rather than in a known language.

Some speak in what they call tongues and then follow it with a known language, we need to discern the spirit in operation and rebuke and correct when an erring spirit is detected and at the same time embrace when God is truly at work in our midst. If God empowered the apostles to speak in languages they have not previously spoken to declare His word in Acts of the Apostles, He can do the same today if He chooses.

3. The gifts are distributed according to the sovereign will of the Holy Spirit

The conclusion Paul draws in this letter to the Corinthian Church is that all the diversities of gift come from the same source. The Holy Spirit knows us individually including our abilities and the needs of the Church where we are planted and determines what gifts should manifest in us at any given time and place. Whatever gift we are graciously allowed to manifest is the best we can as determined by the Holy Spirit. We should not aspire or seek that which

we have not been endowed. We must appreciate what the Lord has given us and ensure that we are effective in the local assembly where the Lord has planted us.

Chapter Twelve

The Supremacy of Love above all Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (GW)

¹ I may speak in the languages of humans and of angels. But if I don't have love, I am a loud gong or a clashing cymbal. ² I may have the gift to speak what God has revealed, and I may understand all mysteries and have all knowledge. I may even have enough faith to move mountains. But if I don't have love, I am nothing. ³ I may even give away all that I have and give up my body to be burned. But if I don't have love, none of these things will help me. ⁴ Love is patient. Love is kind. Love isn't jealous. It doesn't sing its own praises. It isn't arrogant. ⁵ It isn't rude. It doesn't think about itself. It isn't irritable. It doesn't keep track of wrongs. ⁶ It isn't happy when injustice is done, but it is happy with the truth. ⁷ Love never stops being patient, never stops believing, never stops hoping, never gives up. ⁸ Love never comes to an end. There is the gift of speaking what God has revealed, but it will no longer be used. There is the gift of speaking in other languages, but it will stop by itself. There is the gift of

knowledge, but it will no longer be used. ⁹ Our knowledge is incomplete and our ability to speak what God has revealed is incomplete. ¹⁰ But when what is complete comes, then what is incomplete will no longer be used. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, thought like a child, and reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I no longer used childish ways. ¹² Now we see a blurred image in a mirror. Then we will see very clearly. Now my knowledge is incomplete. Then I will have complete knowledge as God has complete knowledge of me. ¹³ So these three things remain: faith, hope, and love. But the best one of these is love.

God is the source of every manifestation of Spiritual gifts even though human is the vehicle or conduit through which this power flows. Therefore all glory and honour should be attributed to the source rather than the conduit, because there is absolutely nothing special about the vehicle being used. Paul wanted this message to drive home clearly in the Corinthian church and the body of Christ at large. This chapter opens up with a clear cut acknowledgement by Paul that all the Spiritual Gifts discussed in the previous chapter, truly manifested in the Corinthian Church.

However a note of caution has been thrown to the body of Christ and to any individual through whom the gifts of graces are manifested. It is possible for one to be used of God for a particular manifestation, but this does not guarantee that the character of the vessel used, to be absolutely in line with the character of God. God is love and consequently, Paul expected that those who manifest the presence of God should have characters that demonstrate love. This is not any kind of love, but God's kind of love. God and love

are inseparable, because God is love. If the Spirit of God dwells and manifests in the life of a person who speaks in tongues of men or angels; if the person has the gift of prophecy and speaks mysteries; if the person manifests all the other gifts such as faith, wisdom and knowledge as well as kindness, that person is incomplete unless the full character of God, especially unconditional love is also a fruit the person must produce.

In essence, Paul believes that character formation is more valuable than the manifestation of Spiritual Gifts. It is abundantly clear that the character being advocated here is the love that comes from a relationship with God. We have seen that the Corinthian Church lacked no gift, but the unconditional love which is one of the great attributes of God was lacking in their congregation and especially in those who were manifesting the gifts. He has used powerful word pictures to convey the inevitability of love to be one of the visible characters of a true living church where the Spirit of God is in operation.

In his eyes it is inconceivable that the true Spirit of God will manifest in an environment ridden with strife or in a person whose life is full of hatred and envy. In the earlier chapters of this letter (chapters 1 and 3), he had warned them about the dangers of divisions in the Church. He enjoined them to foster the spirit of unity among themselves. He prayed for unity of mind and purpose on their behalf. He also encouraged them to display qualities that reflected the extent to which the ministry of the Holy Spirit manifested in their gatherings. They were not to heap teachers unto

themselves and have factions in Church, because even though one plants, another waters but the increase is of God. The focus is on God not the vessel that plants or waters.

Partisan mentality was the cultural mindset in the Greek community which many of the believers had carried over into church life. It was not uncommon for the various teachers of philosophy to build an army faithful disciples who became ardent followers and promoted their teachings in the marketplace. The true living Church must operate under a principle where individuals are not elevated and venerated because of the Gift of God manifesting through them. The conduit is irrelevant, because he is crucified with Christ, he is no longer the most important but the one who lives and operates in him. Christ in us is the hope of glory.

So even if we are used of God to speak mysteries or have enough faith to submit our bodies to be burned, it must be borne out of the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, which we have become partakers of as members of His body. Everything that we do in the body must be done out of love, otherwise we have no blessing from it. Nothing should be done so that men will see us, for if we seek and receive the praise of men then we forfeit the blessings of God. The blessings that flow from God to us are more beneficial when compared to any accolade that men will give us. God will reward every act of kindness, labour of love done to enhance His work in this world. We should never use the gifts endowed to us to bring anybody down or destroy them. Having the love of God in our lives will

mould us not to be proud, envious, thinking evil of others or be easily provoked. The love of God makes a man an instrument of good works and the keeper of the brethren.

Since love never stops believing and never gives up, Apostle Paul concludes that it will never cease. Love, the true character of God will follow us into eternity. It was love that brought Christ to this world, the same love will usher us into His presence. In the presence of God there is joy unspeakable and love unending. Jesus came to the world to demonstrate the love of God in this dark world, He left His love and peace with us to share in the Church. Because He loved us even before we ever loved Him, He died for us while we were yet sinners. This is unconditional love, the true character of God.

Life in the Church and Life in Eternity

What exactly is Paul saying to the Church in Corinth and the body of Christ at large? Was Paul rebuking the Church for speaking in foreign tongues or the manner in which they exercised these gifts? I believe he was saying a lot of things but three things stand out for me. Firstly, he was not satisfied that people manifested spiritual gifts but did not have love which was essentially, the character of God embedded in the life of every person who has had an encounter with God and have the Spirit of God dwelling in their lives. Secondly, he was stating the fact that love was not just an earthly thing that will cease, but something that has a permanent value will continue into eternity. There is no shred of evidence to support the assertion

that Paul was advocating cessation of these spiritual gifts. Paul was not telling the Corinthian Church not to embrace these manifestations, but to evaluate their conducts in relation to love and acceptable behaviour in the assembly of the believers. Thirdly, he was stating clearly that these gifts will cease to operate in heaven. In other words the benefits and reasons for which these gifts were given to the church will no longer be necessary.

In heaven we will no longer need faith to believe the divine God, we will no longer need to hope for anything; there will be no need to convince anyone, darkness would have disappeared because we can see Him as He is and rejoice with Him forever. Everything will be perfect and imperfection would have passed away like vapour. We will behold Him face to face, no more foretelling or forthtelling of future events and no more revelation of the mysteries of God, the bride will be finally united with the bridegroom. The immature church militant, that behaved like a child will be fully mature and needs no guidance and no preaching. It will join company with the Church triumphant. There in heaven love is perfected because God is love and the greatest manifestation of love can only be in the presence of God Himself who is love. This is why love is superior because it will outlast every Spiritual gift. As a true living church we must practice love, no matter how imperfect it might be, knowing fully well that in His presence our love will become perfect and our character will finally reflect His.

Chapter Thirteen

The Excellency of the Gift of Prophecy over Tongues

1 Corinthians 14:1-16 (GW)

¹ Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially the gift of speaking what God has revealed. ² When a person speaks in another language, he doesn't speak to people but to God. No one understands him. His spirit is speaking mysteries. ³ But when a person speaks what God has revealed, he speaks to people to help them grow, to encourage them, and to comfort them. ⁴ When a person speaks in another language, he helps himself grow. But when a person speaks what God has revealed, he helps the church grow. ⁵ I wish that all of you could speak in other languages, but especially that you could speak what God has revealed. The person who speaks what God has revealed is more important than the person who speaks in other languages. This is true unless he can interpret what he says to help the church grow. ⁶ Brothers and sisters, it wouldn't do you any good if I came to you speaking in other languages, unless I explained revelation, knowledge, prophecy,

or doctrine to you. ⁷ Musical instruments like the flute or harp produce sounds. If there is no difference in the notes, how can a person tell what tune is being played?⁸ For example, if the trumpet doesn't sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?⁹ In the same way, if you don't speak in a way that can be understood, how will anyone know what you're saying? You will be talking into thin air. ¹⁰ No matter how many different languages there are in the world, not one of them is without meaning. ¹¹ If I don't know what a language means, I will be a foreigner to the person who speaks it and that person will be a foreigner to me. ¹² In the same way, since you're eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in them so that you help the church grow. ¹³ So the person who speaks in another language should pray for an interpretation of what he says. ¹⁴ If I pray in another language, my spirit prays, but my mind is not productive. ¹⁵ So what does this mean? It means that I will pray with my spirit, and I will pray with my mind. I will sing psalms with my spirit, and I will sing psalms with my mind. ¹⁶ Otherwise, if you praise God only with your spirit, how can outsiders say "Amen!" to your prayer of thanksgiving? They don't know what you're saying.

Love took the centre place in Paul's instruction to the Corinthian Church in the previous chapter. In this chapter he continued to direct the Church in what he sees as the biblical way to operate the Spiritual Gifts endowed to the body of Christ. He encouraged the believers to pursue love and also to desire spiritual gifts especially the gifts of prophecy. The instruction here is not intended to rank the gifts of prophecy above the speaking in tongues as some have interpreted it. It will be wrong for Paul to do this. It will fly at the face of everything he has taught the

church in chapters 12 and 13 of this epistle.

If the Holy Spirit is the one who bestows the gifts on individuals at will, it will be contrary for Paul to turn round to ask people to desire one gift above the other. So what exactly is this opening verse of chapter 14 saying? The word desire here is in relationship to the benefit to be derived by the assembly where these two gifts are operational. If we go back to the former discussions, the Church in Corinth prided itself in its utterance gifts. People felt so spiritual when they spoke in unknown languages or tongues. This created a sense of pride, which worked against the notion of love which Paul has been advocating throughout.

Even in today's church among the Charismatics and Pentecostals, there are those who believe that they have to speak in tongues first before speaking in the understanding. As I have mentioned earlier, one of the primary purposes of the church is to edify the body of Christ. All our activities must edify one another. Speaking in a foreign language in a service where nobody understands what is being spoken is a waste of time and not biblical. Why speak in an unknown tongue when no one stands to benefit from what is being spoken? God is not the author of confusion. If the tongue is Holy Spirit inspired, then since He is also all-knowing, He would know that there will be no interpretation.

Therefore the question is why would the Holy Spirit inspire somebody to speak something that will benefit the assembly when He knows that the congregation will not understand? The Holy Spirit is intelligent and will not create such confusion. If the Holy Spirit wants to address the whole gathering, then He will speak in

the language that will profit all. Let us suppose the vessel speaking this mystery does not speak the same language that is commonly spoken in the congregation, then I believe the Holy Spirit will use some one else to bring this message in the known language or cause some one to interpret what is spoken so that the whole assembly or the person whom the message is meant for can be edified. Too many people for egoistic reasons are speaking and interpreting their own tongues not because the Holy Spirit has spoken but because they have pride in them. This is why we must judge every Spirit, but then it is difficult if this behaviour is carried out by those in leadership or they endorse those who manifest this sort of behaviour. We should never attempt to perpetuate some behaviour or doctrines we have carried over from people who are not biblically sound just because we have been trained by them or belong to that particular denomination.

So what is the teaching from Paul?

He is not against speaking in tongues but advises against speaking in the congregation, when there is no interpretation and nobody is being blessed by what is being spoken. In this sense he prefers that we prophesy. This is not necessarily about foretelling future events, but the proclamation of the word of God. It is about teaching the truth of God in a known language so that all will be edified. What cannot be understood by the hearers can never edify them. Plain interpretation of scripture in a language that can be understood by all is better than speaking in unknown tongues that cannot be understood by the hearers.

The Apostle is not against speaking or praying in tongues. He acknowledges that the person speaking or praying in an unknown tongue is speaking to God and not for the benefit of men. The person speaks mysteries since men cannot understand him, they cannot benefit and cannot agree or say amen to what is spoken. Paul himself prayed in tongues but mostly in private rather than in public. As an apostle he is truthful to what he has taught the people. He is not teaching one thing and practising something else which was contrary to his teachings. This is consistency.

The Church will be a great place of harmony and unity if all will be consistent to the teachings of scripture rather than following our own private views which are sometimes contrary to the word of God. We should not choose to be foreigners to each other by speaking in unknown tongues; rather we should live as brethren in the same household of faith. Endless speaking in unknown tongues in the assembly is one of those things that caricature Christianity in the eyes of the heathens when they visit our church services. It is only when the word of God is spoken in plain language that the heathens can understand and become convinced and draw closer to God. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. This hearing connotes understanding what the speaker is saying. The understanding has the power to prick ones conscience and lead them to self examination and confession of their faults before the almighty God. Jesus said that the words He speaks are spirit and life. This life comes by appropriating what is spoken and proper appropriation comes through

understanding.

Moderation and orderliness are the principles the apostle has laid down for the assembly of believers. He does not bid people to speak in tongues but charges them to maintain decorum so as to avoid confusion and bringing the name of the Lord into disrepute especially among the heathens among whom they live. This instruction transcends churches of all ages and places not just the one in Corinth. It is a sound biblical advice that should guide all our practices in our various assemblies. There should be no more confusion if we read and take Paul's advice on board.

I hope you will challenge yourself never to do anything when it comes to the manifestation of Spiritual gifts, if it contravenes what is clearly stated in the Bible. You should not allow yourself to be caught up by the spirit of the age but be guided by the Holy Spirit of God with whom you have been sealed to the close of the age. Jesus is coming soon, let every man examine what he is building, how he is building and for whom he is building. Every activity shall be tested and every man's building will be tested. Will you stand the test? Only you know how you are building and for what purpose.

Chapter Fourteen

Conclusion of the matter

The issues raised in this book are very serious no matter from which angle one looks at it. It will be a travesty if one should continue to teach and preach and perpetuate something that God has abolished in His Holy Church. It is equally dangerous for anybody to hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in the church due to unbelief, fear of false doctrine or because the church has just become so lukewarm and stale. They are issues which if not carefully examined will continue to polarise the church of Jesus Christ and render it irrelevant in today's society. The church was born with power to influence and change the world through the power of the indwelling Spirit in her. One needs to tread very carefully. There should be neither winners nor losers as we are not perfect and only see through a glass darkly even though this book holds strongly for the continuity of spiritual gifts in a true living church.

To believe otherwise will be more costly. The

Conclusion of the matter

mandate given to the church was clear from the beginning and the purpose of the church in the plan of God has not changed. There is no shred of evidence in scripture to suggest or conclude that the manifestation of the Holy Spirit has ceased. The church is still imperfect and needs the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to continue to tread in the path of perfection so that when the perfect one appears the church will be ready. Every believer in every local assembly should wake up and become more sensitive to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

The study of Paul's writings makes it abundantly clear that the Corinthian Churches were blessed with every Spiritual Gifts. What was lacking was not power but love and the fruits that come as a result of God's presence in the Church. They were not rebuked for manifesting the gift but the lack of maturity they displayed. So let us not shy away from the wonderful gifts of graces that God has poured out into the Church as the Holy Spirit prompts us to reach out to one another in love, desiring to know God more intimately and letting our lives shine in a dark world because we possess the character of God. After all, we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, so we can make a difference in this dark world. We must open up to Him; we must put away every appearance of deception and manipulation, thus ascribing human acts as the manifestations of the Spirit. He is real and will surely manifest when we are completely sold out to Him and embrace Him in our lives and ministry. Pray for the total restoration of the five fold ministries in

every church gathering and the world will know that there is a God in Heaven.

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