

The Spirit and The Word

By Hendrik Joubert

Preconceived ideas are common causes of misunderstanding and ignorance. In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote: ***Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. (12:1)*** When you consider that Christians at Corinth were exercising the gifts of the Spirit this statement seems somewhat puzzling. How could people who have the gifts Holy Spirit be unaware, or ignorant concerning these gifts? Was the presence of the gifts not a sign of spiritual maturity and a sure sign that a person was saved?

If those who exercised the gifts needed instruction, we most certainly stand to benefit from that teaching. The saying that *hind sight is 20/20 vision* is quite applicable, I believe. Not only do we learn of their practices, we also have the remedial instructions. In **chapters 12, 13 and 14 of 1 Corinthians** we find intensive instructions to people who were misusing, even abusing the gifts due to ignorance.

A thought that immediately comes to mind is the level of control the human being had in the situation. Contrary to the Calvinistic view that the working of the Spirit is irresistible, human control becomes obvious in the instruction. ***...and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets,...* (14:32)** This statement dispels another idea that someone would uncontrollably rant under the influence of the Spirit of God. The reason being: ***...for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.* (14:33)**

The *purpose* of the gifts is clearly explained. In **chapter 12** we learn that they caused the members of the body of Christ to be interdependent so they may work together ***for the common good.* (12:7)** This fact is dealt with extensively in **chapter 12:4-31**. We learn that ***God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked,***²⁵ ***so that there be no division in the body, but that each member may have the same care for one another.* (12:24b-25)**

The division that exists in the religious world today is often inadvertently blamed on the Spirit of God. Different individuals claiming direct guidance are not able to agree with one another. If they were both guided by the Holy Spirit, how is this possible – considering how ***God composed the body...so that there be no division in the body?* (12:24b-25)** *Each interprets the Bible differently?* Notice that we are not talking about Biblical interpretation, but direct guidance by the Holy Spirit. The instruction supposedly comes directly from the Holy Spirit.

Notice part of the opening statement to this letter: ***Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.* (1:10)** No provision was made for personal interpretation, which inevitably leads to division. Interpretation is a useful and convenient tool to employ when one's practices are in violation of the Scriptures.

Now notice the problem specifically stated: ***Now I mean this, that each of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."***¹³ ***Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*** The body of Christ may not be divided into denominations (parts) among, and by men. Especially not in the name of the Holy Spirit of God.

How are we to know what is true or false? Another quite striking statement by Paul, once again taking into consideration that he was addressing the letter to those who were exercising the gifts, is the following: ***Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written so that no one of you become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.* (4:6)** They were to learn from the apostles not to exceed what is written, or as some translations read, to ***think of men above that which is written.***

It is in **chapter 13** that he explains that love is superior to the gifts in the sense that the gifts were temporary in nature, to last only until the New Covenant was completely revealed, while love would continue to outlast even hope and faith. He explains that through the gifts only parts of what would become a complete or perfect revelation was being revealed. Once the revelation was complete, Christians would have to rely upon that complete revelation, and that we have in the revealed New Testament of Jesus Christ.

Notice the following statement by Peter concerning the writings of Paul: ***...and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you,¹⁶ as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures to their own destruction.*** (2 Peter 3:15-16)

Against this background we understand why there is such ignorance and variance of doctrines attributed to the Holy Spirit in our day. Men are trying to use the Holy Spirit to give credence to their own desires and doctrines. It is Jude who appealed to Christians ***to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.*** (Jude 3) We have that complete and perfect revelation in the New Testament. We should learn from Paul and Apollos not to exceed the lasting source – *that which is written* – that which the gifts of the Spirit brought us. (1 Corinthians 4:6)