

3). Also, there cannot be apostles today since one of the qualifications for the office was a personal knowledge and sight of the risen Lord Christ (*Acts 1: 21-2*). Accordingly, the Apostle Paul defended his apostleship (*1 Cor. 9: 1*). To argue that this was only true of 'foundation apostles' but not modern apostles is to introduce a perverse distinction without any warrant. While it is true that 'apostle' simply means 'sent one' and that the word has often be used in a looser sense (e.g. *Acts 14: 14; Rom. 16: 7*) of past pioneer missionaries, such have never claimed the authority and powers of those whom our Lord specially chose to lay the foundation of the Christian church.

### **Healing and miracles?**

The question of apostles also relates to the subject of miracles and the gift of healing. Does the above exposition still 'rule in' the possibility of miraculous gifts today (*1 Cor. 12: 10,28*)? The answer must be no. And why? Because these things were 'the signs of an apostle' (*2 Cor. 12: 12*). Such things were the 'signs and wonders' of the apostolic age (*Heb. 2: 4*). They also had a revelatory character: they authenticated the Word of God. This does not deny either that God still heals (*Ps. 103: 3*) or that He can perform miracles (*Lk. 1: 37*). Neither is this to deny James 5:14-16, a passage which is not, incidentally, dealing with miraculous healing. The 'sickness' involved here is not physical disease or injury but a depressed disorder or condition arising from the guilt of sin. And not all physical illness is related to personal sin, nor is it the result of some demonic possession! Besides, if 'healing is in the atonement', there should never be a sick Christian and the Lord's people would never die! The relevant question is: are individuals given the miraculous gift of healing today? To say 'yes' poses serious problems of honesty and credibility. Unlike the undeniable miracles of our Lord and His

apostles, so many modern claims will not stand up to scrutiny! A success rate of 99% is just not high enough. The death of the charismatic leader David Watson surely discredited the modern healing movement for good! Yet despite the sham of modern Wimberite claims, many continue as gullible as ever. Whatever modern so-called apostles may claim, even the apostles of our Lord didn't heal everyone (see *1 Tim. 5: 23; 2 Tim. 4: 20*). Why not? Because it was not intended to be a gift 'on tap' even at that time. And do we read anywhere that Luke 'the beloved physician gave up his job?

### **Conclusion**

One can only conclude that the Charismatic case is founded on a delusion. It is thus a dangerous distraction, calculated to undermine the authentic, historic apostolic faith. Its stress on the experiential at the expense of the doctrinal issues of the faith - an error even more pronounced in the absurd and now-discredited 'Toronto phenomena' - has made many Christians vulnerable to error through the promotion of sentimental vagueness. Not surprisingly it has become a tool to advance ecumenical, liberal, demonic and New Age ideas. The movement is welcomed by the Roman Catholic Church, and some of its leaders have openly spurned the idea of inerrant and all-sufficient Scripture. Thus, all true Bible-believing Christians will avoid it like the plague.

Dr Alan C. Clifford  
Norwich Reformed Church  
[www.geocities.com/nrchurch](http://www.geocities.com/nrchurch)

## **CHARISMATIC CONFUSION CORRECTED**

or, 1 Corinthians 13 reconsidered.

**Please read these notes with your Bible open.**

The following expository notes make no reference to any human authorities, either Charismatic or Anti-charismatic. They are a straightforward account of the Holy Spirit-inspired teaching of the Apostle Paul.

### **The chapter and its setting**

Placed between the problematic chapters 12 and 14, we should note the wider significance of chapter 13. Paul is correcting a number of evils in the Corinthian church, e.g. party-spirit (or sectarianism), pride, immorality, irreverence at the Lord's Supper, heretical denial of the resurrection and the abuse of the 'charismatic' gifts. Over against all these evils, Paul urges the Corinthians to pursue things of abiding spiritual worth and importance: 'And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love' (*13: 13*). Now, the key for curing all their ills in general has reference to the abuse of the spiritual gifts in particular.

In the immediate context, Paul urges the Corinthians to pursue three great permanent or 'abiding' things instead of the three sensational but temporary things they were all too excited about - prophecies, tongues and knowledge (*v. 8*). He clearly envisaged a time when these three would simply cease to function - 'when that which is perfect has come' (*v. 10*). Only then would their grasp of

God's truth be complete (v. 9). Thus, in supplementing the Old Testament Scriptures and the Apostolic preaching, the Holy Spirit would continue to reveal God's mind to the churches by means which still require proper regulated use.

### **The Charismatic case**

"Quite so", say our Charismatic friends. "When, at the end of time, the Lord returns and we come to heaven, all will be revealed and the gifts of the Spirit will no longer be necessary. Until then, we must expect the exercise and use of the gifts in their fulness."

### **Objections:**

1. Paul doesn't even mention heaven. If he means 'heaven', it is the only place where he describes it in this way. Also, he speaks of 'the perfect' coming to us, not us coming to heaven.

2. If fullness of knowledge is a feature of heaven (v. 12?), Paul cannot mean knowledge itself when he says 'it will vanish away' (v. 8). The 'it' must mean the gift of 'the word of knowledge' (12: 8). This was a Spirit-inspired item of information about a particular matter.

3. If the 'then' is 'heaven', why does Paul single out these three gifts? Surely all the others will cease to operate at the same time. He must therefore be thinking of a time *before* the end of the age.

4. Had Paul been thinking of heaven, he would have added the 'faith' and 'hope' of v.13 to the three temporary gifts of v.8. And why? In this life, faith is trust in an invisible Lord, but in heaven, faith will give way to sight (2 Cor. 5: 6-8). Likewise hope will give way to fulfillment in heaven (Rom. 8: 24-5). However, until the second coming of the Lord, our constant daily concern must be to grow in grace, i.e. in faith and hope and love. Unlike the

three temporary gifts, these three graces will be our abiding concern.

### **The perfect has come: The Bible**

Paul is therefore speaking of three 'revelatory gifts' which will cease to operate when the 'perfect' comes, while still having a necessary function until that time. What then is 'the perfect'? It has to be that which eventually replaced what was temporary. The gifts were therefore a provisional arrangement which was eventually 'done away' with (v. 10). In short, 'the perfect' can only be the perfect or complete set of New Testament writings. Since the Bible is sufficient in its totality, all of the revelations originally given through the three gifts are now virtually embraced by the written Word of God, the Bible. It should be remembered that Paul did not have the last word where the New Testament was concerned. For example, after his death, John wrote his epistles and the Book of Revelation. Therefore, one would expect the ongoing use of the gifts until such a time. Hence Paul's concern to regulate their use in chapter 14. However, these instructions have no more relevance for us now than the obsolete Old Testament regulations for worship do. But they remain a check on those who, by claiming continuing revelations from God, effectively undermine the sufficiency of Holy Scripture.

### **Tongues: their character and use**

It should also be noted that 'tongues' are simply 'languages' (Acts 2: 8) rather than some irrational, ecstatic 'gibberish' as claimed by some. Like all languages, the miraculously given gift was for communication purposes. Hence 'interpretation' - which always had to accompany the message in 'tongues' - was effectively the gift of 'translation'. Speaking in tongues was therefore not for private devotion. Paul's claim in chapter 14: 18 has to do with his international apostolic ministry not

his private devotions. And his statement in 14: 2 is not about some private devotional use of the gift but its pointless use in public where there is no interpretation. In other words, without interpretation, the speaker is effectively speaking to God alone when the message is intended for others; the blessing is thus limited (v. 4). As far as private prayer is concerned, God is little bothered whether we speak English, Chinese or Swahili since He reads our hearts! For those who insist that 'speaking in tongues' is a necessary proof of being 'baptized in the Spirit', Paul's statement in chapter 12:30 is a perfect answer. The answer to his seven rhetorical questions (vs. 29-30) is obviously 'no' in each case. Paul's desire that the Corinthians pursue love and the gifts is both a statement about priorities and the continuing use of them at that time. Until the canon of Scripture was complete, knowledge of His will and purposes would be incomplete. In her incomplete knowledge of God's revealed will, the church was then like a child (13: 11). Her knowledge was like an indistinct reflection, the mirrors of the time being very imperfect; but having the 'perfect' or complete revelation of God would be like seeing ourselves perfectly as others see or know us. (Note that Paul does not say that we are known by God here.)

### **Apostles and prophets today?**

Just as the Apostle Paul foresaw a limited period for the revelatory gifts, so the era of apostles and prophets was limited. The latter were temporary foundation offices only (Eph. 2: 20; 1 Cor. 13: 8). Since the apostles had a unique authority from Christ, their writings were to be received as authoritative Scripture (John 14: 26; 15: 26; 16: 13; Gal. 1: 8-9; 2 Thess. 2: 6; 2 Pet. 3: 2, 14-18). If the office of apostle was to be perpetuated in all ages, we should then expect more Scripture. But the Bible is complete, being 'once for all delivered' (Jude