

Try the Spirits: A Reformed Look at Pentecostalism

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Introduction

An examination, from the viewpoint of the Reformed faith, of the religious movement known as Pentecostalism is in order. For Pentecostalism makes inroads into Reformed churches. Some hold that the Reformed faith and Pentecostalism are harmonious; others claim that Pentecostalism is the completion of the Reformation in our time; others openly proclaim that the Pentecostal religion replaces the historic Reformed faith.

To conduct this examination is legitimate. It is common that Pentecostals scare off would-be critics by insinuating that criticism of Pentecostalism is the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. A Reformed man is not intimidated by this scare-tactic. More than once in the history of the Church, false teachers tried to gain entrance into the church by appealing to the Spirit. An outstanding example is the appearance of fanatics at the time of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, who harassed the Lutherans in Wittenberg. These were the "heavenly prophets" and "enthusiasts" who claimed to receive special revelations from the Spirit and to perform miracles. They cowed Melancthon; but they did not cow Luther. When they screamed, "The Spirit, the Spirit," Luther replied, "I slap your spirit on the snout."

The Reformed man and woman know the instruction of the Spirit of Christ in Holy Scripture: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" ([I John 4:1](#)).

The standard of the examination of the spirits, including the spirit of Pentecostalism, is Holy Scripture, the inspired Word of God. In the light of Scripture the question must be this: does this spirit, this religious movement, confess Jesus Christ ([I John 4:2,3](#)); does it abide "in the doctrine of Christ" ([II John 9](#))? For the Holy Spirit confesses Jesus Christ and brings the doctrine of Christ.

Our examination of Pentecostalism must include a consideration of its criticism of the Christian life of Reformed believers. For Pentecostalism belittles the life of "mere believers."

The effect of Pentecostalism is that believers wonder whether their life is what it should be—a normal Christian life. Believers are even made to doubt whether they are saved Christians at all. In the final analysis, Pentecostalism's appeal to religious people is its boast of a higher, fuller, deeper, richer Christian life. Pentecostalism exults in a Christian life that is all power, all excitement, all joy, all victory.

Let no one suppose that, because we speak of a *Reformed* examination of Pentecostalism, the concern of the examination is limited to those who are members of a Reformed church. The Reformed faith represents Protestantism—biblical

Christianity. As will be evident, the standard by which the Reformed faith conducts the examination is Holy Scripture—the rule of faith and life for every professing Christian. Under the clear light of Holy Scripture, Pentecostalism displays features that mark it unmistakably as a form of an age-old, and quite familiar, threat to Christianity.

Chapter 1

The Reformed Answer to Pentecostalism's Basic Biblical Appeals

By Pentecostalism, we understand the religious movement that teaches a second, distinct work of grace in the child of God which is referred to as the "baptism with the Holy Spirit." At some moment after regeneration (or, conversion), the believer receives the Holy Spirit, usually as a marvellous, emotional experience, in such a way that now, for the first time, he has a wonderful feeling of joy; possesses power for dynamic Christian life and service; and exercises an extraordinary gift of the Spirit, namely, speaking in tongues. Even though the believer received Christ, the forgiveness of sins, and sanctification before this, it is not until the baptism with the Spirit lifts him to a much higher spiritual level that he is enabled to live the full, joyful, powerful, real Christian life.

It is this doctrine that constitutes the very heart of Pentecostalism. Other features of Pentecostalism may attract the attention of the onlooker, e.g., tongues, miracles, and the exuberance of the meetings; but the movement stands or falls with its novel doctrine of salvation—its second baptism. The fundamental criticism that the Reformed faith makes of this religion is that it is heretical in its doctrine of salvation. The Pentecostals identify this "Holy Spirit baptism" with the coming of the Spirit on the 120 believers on the day of Pentecost. From this comes the name of the movement: Pentecostalism.

Since the Spirit is supposed to give extraordinary gifts to those who are thus baptized, the movement is also called the "charismatic movement." In the Greek of the New Testament, the word meaning "gifts" is *'charismata'* (cf. [1 Cor. 12:4](#)). The gifts which Pentecostalism makes much of are tongues; interpretation of tongues; prophecy; miracles; and the power to cast out devils. The main gift is tongues-speaking. Therefore, the movement is sometimes called the "tongues movement."

Neo-Pentecostalism is the name given to this movement as it is practiced within the established Protestant churches and within the Roman Catholic church. There have been Pentecost churches since the early 1900s, e.g., the Assemblies of God. In the early 1960s, men in the established Protestant churches began advocating Pentecostal beliefs and practices within their churches. The leader is generally recognized to be the Episcopalian, Dennis Bennett. By this time, there is hardly a denomination that does not tolerate, or approve, practicing Pentecostals among its membership.

Pentecostalism claims that its doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit as a second work of grace and its teaching of the presence in the church of the extraordinary gifts

of the Spirit are biblical. It finds in [Acts 2](#), as well as in [Acts 8, 10](#), and 19, that there was a distinct reception of the Holy Spirit by believers subsequent to their conversion, a reception of the Spirit that gave the believers great power and that bestowed upon them special gifts. It points us to [1 Corinthians 12](#) as proof that the gifts of the Spirit to the New Testament church include healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, tongues, and the like.

What is the Reformed answer to these appeals to the Bible in support of the Pentecostal teachings of the baptism with the Spirit and the extraordinary gifts?

Baptism with the Spirit

There is a baptism with the Holy Spirit. It is an essential part of salvation. This is plain from John the Baptist's description of the saving work of Jesus: "he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" ([Matt. 3:11](#); cf. also [Mark 1:18](#); [Luke 3:16](#); and [John 1:33](#)). But it is not a second work of the Spirit subsequent to regeneration and the gift of faith. Nor is it limited to some Christians only, those who have fulfilled certain conditions and made themselves worthy of this higher stage of salvation. Christ's baptism with the Spirit is His one, saving work by His Spirit in every elect child of God. It is his regeneration, the new birth from heaven ([John 3:1-8](#)). It is his cleansing from sin and consecration to God by the pouring out of the Spirit into his heart. Of this spiritual reality, John's baptism with water was a sign. The sacrament of baptism in the Church is a sign of the baptism with the Spirit, as [Titus 3:5-6](#) teaches: "according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour."

There is only one baptism in the Church of Jesus Christ: the baptism with the Holy Spirit signified by the sprinkling with water in the Name of the Triune God. This is the apostle's teaching in [Ephesians 4:5](#): "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." Pentecostalism has two baptisms: a first, lower baptism—salvation from sin (of which the sign is water); and a second, higher baptism—the baptism with the Holy Spirit. In this way, Pentecostalism divides Christ, salvation, and the church.

Christ's baptism of every one of His people with the Holy Spirit depends solely upon His work of meriting this gift for them by His death. It does not depend upon works that the people must perform. Therefore, every elect child of God not only may receive it, but also does receive it. "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost," John promised.

To be sure, baptism with the Spirit is the reception of great power by every one so baptized, as Christ instructed His disciples in [Acts 1:8](#): "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you ..." But Scripture must teach us what this power consists of and how it is exercised. As concerns the Church, it is the power of witnessing to Christ: "... and ye shall be witnesses unto me ..." ([Acts 1:8](#)). The mark of a Spirit-baptized church, therefore, is the faithful proclamation of Christ.

As concerns the individual child of God, the nature of the power of the baptism with the Spirit is indicated by John the Baptist when he says that we are baptized "with the Holy Ghost *and fire*." We receive the Spirit as a fire; He dwells and works in us

as a fire. Fire purifies by utterly burning away the dross that defiles the precious metal. The Holy Spirit, similarly, burns away our sin, so that we may be consecrated to God in the obedience of love. The power of the baptism with the Spirit is the awesome power of sanctification. Exactly this was the prophecy of the baptism with the Spirit in the Old Testament. In the day when the "branch of the LORD" is beautiful and glorious, the remnant of grace "shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning" ([Isaiah 4:2-4](#)).

The mark of a Spirit-baptized Christian, therefore, is sorrow over sin (repentance) and obedience to God's law (holiness).

Have you been born again (and you certainly have, if you believe on Jesus Christ)? Are you sorry for your sinfulness and your sins? Is there a beginning in your life, small as it may be, of obedience to all of the commandments of God's law? Then you have been baptized with the Holy Spirit; and the sacrament is a sign and seal to you of your baptism with the Spirit, as long as you live. Let no one deceive you, that you must still look for another, better baptism.

How is it then to be explained that in the book of Acts there obviously were two, distinct works of the Holy Spirit upon some of God's people? The disciples of Jesus—Peter, John, and others—were reborn, saved men prior to the day of Pentecost. This, of course, was due to the gracious operation of the Spirit upon their hearts. Yet, on the day of Pentecost these men "were all filled with the Holy Ghost" ([Acts 2:4](#)). The Spirit was poured out upon them ([Acts 2:16-18](#)). They were then "baptized with the Holy Ghost" ([Acts 1:5](#)).

Pentecostalism appeals to this history in Acts as proof for its contention that there must be two, distinct works of grace in the life of every Christian: regeneration (or, conversion) and the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The experience of the disciples, and others, in the book of Acts is regarded as normative for every child of God. Pentecostalism insists that Pentecost be repeated, over and over, for every member of the church. One of the leading Pentecostal writers, Donald Gee, speaks of "*apersonal Pentecost*" for every Christian (*A New Discovery*).

This betrays a complete misunderstanding of the great event of Pentecost. It is as foolish to demand a personal Pentecost as it would be to demand a personal incarnation of Jesus, or a personal death of Jesus, or a personal resurrection of Jesus.

Pentecost was the exalted Christ's gift of the Holy Spirit to His church. The Spirit was given in rich, full measure—He was "poured out." He was given as the One who brings to the church the first fruits of the finished work of Jesus Christ, the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection, i.e., Christ's salvation. In the gift of the Spirit, the gospel-promise of the Old Testament was fulfilled to the church ([Acts 2:38,39](#); [Gal. 3:14](#)), because the Son of God gave to God's people full salvation—forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He baptized the church with the Holy Spirit ([Acts 1:5](#)). Being

mightier than John the Baptist, He flooded the church with the reality, whereas John could only give the sign ([Matt. 3:11](#)).

That grand Sunday marked the passing of the old age and the coming of the new; it is the boundary between the old dispensation and the new. The distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament is a matter of the fullness of the Holy Spirit; and the fullness of the Holy Spirit is a matter of the full riches of Christ's accomplished salvation. This is the teaching of [John 7:37-39](#): "... for the Holy Ghost was not yet; because that Jesus was not yet glorified." In the time of the Old Testament, prior to Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was not yet. He and His saving work were not absolutely lacking, for He saved God's people under the old covenant, even as He now saves us. But He was not present with the fullness and richness of salvation with which He now dwells in the church. He could not, for Christ had not yet died and risen, actually to acquire that rich and full salvation. As Christmas was the birthday of the Son of God in the flesh, Pentecost was the "birthday" of the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ in the church.

Pentecost, like the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, was a once-for-all-time event. Fifty days after He arose, Jesus sent His Spirit to His church. This is never again repeated, anymore than Jesus' death is repeated. It is nonsense, if not heresy, to preach each Christian's personal Pentecost. This is why it is mistaken, to expect the reappearance of the signs of Pentecost down through the history of the church. The sound as of a mighty rushing wind, the cloven tongues as of fire, and the disciples' speaking with other tongues were the signs, once for all, of the historical event of the outpouring of the Spirit, just as the great earthquake was the sign of the resurrection of Jesus. To be sure, these signs are intended to be my signs in the 20th century, as much as they were intended to be signs for Peter in A.D. 33; but they are mine, not by being repeated in my experience, but by being written down on the pages of Holy Scripture and by being received through faith.

When Pentecostals try to gainsay the once-for-all character of Pentecost, they point to the incidents in the book of Acts which seemingly are repetitions of Pentecost: the Spirit's falling upon the Samaritan converts ([Acts 8:5-24](#)); the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and his household ([Acts 10:44-48](#), [Acts 11:15-18](#)); and the coming of the Spirit on the disciples of John ([Acts 19:1-7](#)). In reality, these incidents are special events, intended by God to demonstrate that the unrepeatable wonder of Pentecost extends to all the church, specifically the half-heathens (Samaritans), the outright heathens (household of Cornelius), and the disciples of John the Baptist. They are extensions of Pentecost to the full church, the furthest outworking of Pentecost.

In light of the significance of Pentecost, we can readily understand that, on the day of Pentecost, men and women who had already been saved received the gift of the Holy Spirit, so that they then enjoyed new riches of salvation and hitherto unknown power. This is not indicative of two works of grace in every Christian; this is not normative for all believers, as if we too must expect, and long, to pass from "mere salvation through faith" to the higher level of feeling and power of a "Spirit baptism." The explanation is found in the unique historical position of the saints who lived through Pentecost. They lived through the transition from the old dispensation to the new dispensation, from the Spirit's not being yet to His being, from Christ's not yet

being glorified to His being glorified. Before that moment, those saints were saved; now, as the new dispensation dawns, they receive the gift of the Spirit in His fullness, i.e., the completed salvation of the glorified Christ. At Pentecost, they advance, not from a first level of grace to a second, higher level of grace, but from the infancy of the church of the Old Covenant to the maturity of the church of the New Covenant ([Gal. 4:1-7](#)).

We recoil from the suggestion that each of us must repeat the experience of Pentecost. In this case, we must go back for awhile into the old dispensation, to live under the law in the types and shadows, so that, at some point, we can pass into the new dispensation. Even if this were possible, we would refuse, having heard the warnings of Galatians and Hebrews.

We New Testament saints receive the Spirit of the glorified Christ, with the full Christ and all His benefits, at once, as soon as He regenerates us, takes up His abode in us, baptizes us into Christ's body, the church, and unites us to Christ by a true and living faith. Certainly, the blessing of Pentecost is ours, every bit as much as it was the blessing of the 120 in the upper room in Jerusalem; certainly, we share in Pentecost, as really and fully as if we had been among those 120 believers. This is as necessary as our sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ. If one does not share in Christ's death and resurrection, or in Pentecost, he simply is not saved. But I do not share in Christ's death by that death's being repeated somehow in my personal history and experience. I share in Christ's death and resurrection by faith: by faith, I am crucified with Christ and rise with Him. Just so, by this same faith I share in Pentecost. The blessing of that great day, now almost 2000 years past, becomes mine personally through the faith, worked in me by the Spirit, that unites me to Christ and to His body, the church, to whom the Spirit was then given and in whom the Spirit dwells forever. This is the teaching of [Galatians 3](#): "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (v. 14).

The Gift of Tongues

The other of the two outstanding features of Pentecostalism is its doctrine, and alleged practice, concerning extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, especially tongues. For this too, it claims to find support in Scripture, particularly [I Corinthians 12-14](#). What is the Reformed answer to this teaching and its appeal to the Bible?

There was, in the time of the apostles, a gift of tongues, whether this gift be explained as the ability to speak foreign languages without having learned them, or as the ability to speak totally new, unknown languages. [I Corinthians 14](#) indicates that at least one aspect of the gift of tongues in those days was the ability to speak in an altogether new, unknown language. No one, including the speaker, understood what was said (vv. 2, 14). Interpretation of the tongue was, like the tongue itself a gift of the Spirit (v.13. cf. [I Cor. 12:10](#)). The speaker in tongues did not speak to men, but to God (v.2). The benefit of it was not the edification of others, but his own edification (v. 4). "In the spirit," the tongues-speaker "speaketh mysteries" (v. 2).

There were also other extraordinary gifts of the Spirit in those days: the gift of receiving special revelations from God; the gift of casting out devils; the gift of taking up serpents; the gift of drinking deadly things without hurt; the gift of healing the sick

by laying on of hands; and the gift of raising the dead (cf. [Mark 16:17-18](#); [I Cor. 12:1-11](#)).

Among these gifts, the ability to speak in tongues was a gift of lesser importance. In the list of gifts in [I Corinthians 12:28-31](#), tongues and interpretation of tongues come at the end and are not among the "best gifts" which the Corinthians should covet. [I Corinthians 14:39](#) merely instructs the Corinthians not to forbid tongues, whereas it exhorts them to covet prophecy. Throughout [I Corinthians 14](#), the apostle minimizes the importance of tongues in comparison with prophecy, while exposing the many abuses of the gift of tongues among the Corinthians. Also, tongues was a gift that was not possessed by all the Corinthians, or expected to be possessed by all ([I Cor. 12:20](#)). It is passing strange, to say the very least, that Pentecostalism, with all its bluster of restoring New Testament Christianity, makes tongues the gift of the Spirit, *par excellence*, ascribing to it, both in theory and in practice, a pre-eminence that it did not have even in the days of the apostles, and that Pentecostalism holds that every Christian should possess this gift, as if Paul had never written, "Do all speak with tongues?".

Pentecostalism's argument for miracles today is simple: Scripture teaches that the miraculous was part of the life and ministry of the church during the time of the apostles; therefore, the gift of performing miracles should be found in the church today.

Ignored by Pentecostalism is Scripture's teaching that miracles were "signs of an apostle." The power of doing miracles was attached to the apostolic office and had as its purpose the authenticating of the apostles as special servants of Christ and the confirming of their doctrine as the gospel of God. This does not imply that only the apostles could perform miracles; in fact, other saints also possessed the gift of the working of miracles. But it does mean that the miraculous was apostolic: it derived from the apostolic office present in the church at that time, and it served to attest the apostles and their doctrine. Miracles were the credentials of the apostles.

The necessity of miracles during the apostolic age is to be found in the unique labor of the apostles. They laid the foundation of the New Testament Church of Christ. Paul writes, in [Ephesians 2:20](#), that the Gentile believers, with the saints of Israel, "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets." The apostles are the foundation of the Church, even as Christ is "the chief corner stone." They are the foundation by virtue of the Word which they proclaim and write. Similarly, in [I Corinthians 3:10](#), Paul claims to have laid the foundation of the Church at Corinth, whereas others then build upon this foundation: "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon ...

That miracles, including the miracle of tongues, were part of the apostolic office is taught in [II Corinthians 12:12](#): "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." Paul is defending his apostleship in view of the attack on that apostleship at Corinth. He laments, in verse 11, that he was not commended of the Corinthians, even though "in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles." The Corinthians should have recognized and honoured Paul's apostleship, for Christ gave clear proof of it in the miracles that He

worked through Paul. Miracles are described as signs, wonders, and mighty deeds. They are called "... signs of an apostle." Literally, we read: "the signs of the apostle." Miracles indicate the presence and power of apostleship. They belong to the apostolic office.

[Hebrews 2:3-4](#) also connects the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit with the apostolic office. The first three verses of the chapter are warning against neglecting the "so great salvation." One makes himself guilty of this by refusing to give earnest heed to the Word of God. For we have this salvation through the Word: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?" The great salvation is spoken; we have it by hearing. The passage establishes the primacy of the preaching of the Word as the means of salvation. Even in the apostolic age, not miracles, not extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, but the proclamation of the Word was the main thing. Miracles were secondary; they were strictly subservient to the apostolic doctrine.

But the passage also clearly teaches that miracles belonged to the apostolic office and ministry. The author has said that the New Testament saints, the Hebrew Christians in particular, have the Word of God that brings them salvation. They must give heed to this Word; and they must not let it slip: "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." How do we come to have the Word of God? It was first spoken by the Lord Jesus Himself. Then it was confirmed unto us by "them that heard Him." These are the apostles. Concerning these apostles, verse 4 states: "God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will." The reference is to miracles, described, as in [II Corinthians 12:12](#), as "signs and wonders and miracles" (this last, "miracles," being the same word as that translated "mighty deeds" in [II Corinthians 12:12](#)). Strikingly, this passage also speaks of "gifts of the Holy Ghost." The word, "gifts," could better be translated as "distributions." The distributions of the Holy Ghost are the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit found in the Church at the time of the apostles. Among them were the gift of "kinds of tongues" and the gift of "the interpretation of tongues," as [I Corinthians 12:10](#) shows. Miracles and extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were God's witness to those who heard Christ, i.e., the apostles. The purpose of this witness was the apostles' confirming of Christ's Word to us, i.e., to attest the apostolic doctrine as the very Word of God. Miracles and the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit are not for all time, but were for the apostolic age; they were attached by the Divine will to the office of the apostle in order that they might confirm the Word which the apostles brought.

The same thing is taught in [Mark 16:20](#): "And they (the apostles, to whom the risen Christ had given the commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel—D.J.E.) went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." The signs, or miracles, were the Lord's powerful confirmation to the Word preached by the apostles. In like manner, the Lord authenticated the Word brought by His apostle, Paul, and his colleague, Barnabas: "Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands" ([Acts 14:3](#)).

Now the apostolic office was not a permanent office in the Church, but a temporary office. The qualifications of an apostle show this. An apostle was required to have seen the risen Jesus, so that he could preach a resurrection of which he had himself been an eyewitness ([1 Cor. 9:1](#)). He had to be called and commissioned by the risen Lord directly ([John 20:21](#), [Acts 26:15-18](#)), which included that he received the gospel from Jesus Himself ([Gal. 1:11-12](#)).

The specific task of the apostle also indicates the temporary nature of the office. This task was the laying of the foundation of the church. One does not forever lay the foundation of a building. There comes a time when the foundation is laid. Then those whose work is foundation-laying are removed; and others, pastors and teachers, whose calling it is to build on the foundation, are given the church.

But if the office of apostle has disappeared, so also must the miraculous have disappeared ("the signs of an apostle!"), for the miraculous was part of that office and served that ministry.

By the same token, those who insist on miracles today must produce apostles also. Let the Pentecostals put forward their apostles! It is noteworthy that the Irvingite movement, a precursor of Pentecostalism in England in the 1800s, named after its leader, Edward Irving, did appoint twelve apostles. In doing so, the movement was consistent. It is also worthy of note that, although it hesitates to call them apostles, Pentecostalism today is ascribing to its leaders powers that only apostles possess: a personal, absolute authority over the church, or fellowship; new revelations of His will for the church from God; extra-Biblical teachings which are binding upon the saints.

Church history witnesses to the truth of Scripture's teaching that miracles and extraordinary gifts were temporary. Miracles ceased in the Church about A.D. 100, roughly at the time of the death of the last apostle. For a time after this, only the heretical and schismatic sects claimed the power of doing miracles, e.g., the Montanists (a second century sect named after its leader, Montanus). As time passed, the power of doing miracles began again to be claimed and stressed within the catholic church; but, significantly, this went hand in hand with the church's departure from the truth of the gospel. The Roman Catholic Church, of course, has always claimed the power of performing miracles and has always bewitched her people with these wonders.

The purified church of the Reformation expressly disavowed all miracles. The Reformation was confronted with miracles on two fronts: Rome and the Anabaptist groups with their mystical "religion of the Spirit." Both Rome and the mystics appealed to their miracles as proof that they were the true religion and taunted the Reformation with its lack of miracles. Intuitively striking to the very heart of the issue—and this is the heart of the issue also today as regards Pentecostalism, Luther called the people of God to believe, live by, and stick to the bare Word of God, even though heretics were producing a veritable snowstorm of miracles in order to seduce them from the truth. John Calvin gave a more detailed explanation of the Reformed position:

In demanding miracles from us, they act dishonestly; for we have not coined some new gospel, but retained the very one the truth of which is confirmed by all the

miracles which Christ and the apostles ever wrought. But they have a peculiarity which we have not—they can confirm their faith by constant miracles down to the present day! Nay rather, they allege miracles which might produce wavering in minds otherwise well disposed; they are so frivolous and ridiculous, so vain and false. But were they even exceedingly wonderful, they could have no effect against the truth of God, whose name ought to be hallowed always, and everywhere, whether by miracles, or by the natural course of events. The deception would perhaps be more specious if Scripture did not admonish us of the legitimate end and use of miracles. Mark tells us ([Mark 16:20](#)) that the signs which followed the preaching of the apostles were wrought in confirmation of it; so Luke also relates that the Lord "gave testimony to the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done" by the hands of the apostles ([Acts 14:3](#)) ... And it becomes us to remember that Satan has his miracles, which, although they are tricks rather than true wonders, are still such as to delude the ignorant and unwary. (*Institutes*, Prefatory Address to the King of France)

The wonders of Pentecostalism, like the miracles of Rome, are fraudulent. They are part and parcel of the only miracles that Scripture prophesies for the last days: the signs and wonders of the false christs and false prophets who would deceive the very elect, if it were possible ([Matt. 24:24](#)); the power and signs and lying wonders of the man of sin who will deceive those who do not receive the love of the truth ([II Thess. 2:9-12](#)).

Beware! Do not be hoodwinked by the modern-day miracle mongers!

The Reformed Church has no need of miracles. Her faith is the doctrine of the apostles, who received it from Jesus. This doctrine has already been confirmed by many miracles. It needs no further attestation. The only gospel that requires new miracles is a new gospel. But this does not imply that the Reformed religion is a religion without miracles. Pentecostalism would like to leave this impression: it is a gospel with miracles—the full gospel, whereas the Reformed faith is a gospel lacking miracles and, therefore, less than a full gospel.

First, the Reformed believer sees the almighty power of God in all of creation and in every aspect of earthly life. The daily rising of the sun, the annual quickening of nature in springtime, the blooming of a single rose, the conception of a baby, the upheaval of an earthquake, the rise and fall of nations, health and life, and a piece of bread on my table—all are the almighty, everywhere present, incomprehensible working of the power of God. The Christ of our faith is the sovereign Lord who is presently upholding and governing all things by the Word of His power in a most marvellous manner ([Heb. 1:3](#)).

Second, we Reformed people claim as our own every miracle that is recorded on the pages of Scripture. The notion that one does not have miracles unless miracles are done by him, or before his eyes, is foolish. The miracle of the creation of the world, the miracle of the flood, the miracle of the fire of Jehovah devouring Elijah's sacrifice, the miracle of the incarnation, the miracle of Peter's raising of Dorcas, and all the others are my miracles, as truly as if I experienced them, not only because they were deliverances of the church of which I am a member, but also because they astound me, make me adore God, and strengthen my faith in His Word, as much as if I saw

them done with my very own eyes. Reformed believers have an abundance of wonders in the Bible; any additional miracle, prior to the coming of the Lord Jesus, would be superfluous.

Third, the Word proclaimed by the Reformed church constantly accomplishes many, great miracles. It raises the spiritually dead; it opens the eyes of the spiritually blind; it makes the spiritually lame to leap as a hart; it pulls down the fortresses of Satan in human hearts and lives ([Isaiah 35](#); [II Cor. 10:3-6](#)). By the power of the Holy Spirit, the truth effects the miracle of salvation: faith, repentance, forgiveness, and holiness. These are astounding wonders, far greater, should we be inclined to make the comparison, than miracles of physical healing, to say nothing of the trivial, nonsensical "miracles" so often boasted of by Pentecostalism. The spiritual wonders of the gospel, in fact, are the reality of which the physical healing by Jesus and His apostles was a sign.

No, the Reformed Church is not a church devoid of miracles.

But our main purpose has been to answer Pentecostalism's arguments from Scripture for its doctrine of Holy Spirit baptism and for its practice of miracles, especially tongues. This has been done. In answering its appeals to Scripture, we have shown from Scripture that Pentecostalism is heretical in its doctrine of salvation (Holy Spirit baptism) and fraudulent in its miracles.

The Reformed faith judges Pentecostalism to be a different religion from that of Luther, Calvin, and the Reformed creeds—a fundamental departure from the faith once delivered to the saints.

Chapter 2

The Reformed Testing of Pentecostalism's Spirit

Pentecostalism replaces the Word of God in the church and in the life of the member of the church with experience, i.e., human feeling. This is one of its basic errors. Essentially, it is an attack on the Word, whether it replaces the Word completely, or whether it shoves the Word into the background, or whether it places experience alongside the Word. The movement runs down doctrine and speaks disparagingly of orthodoxy. Albert B. Simpson, the well-known Pentecostal preacher, expressed the Pentecostal attitude toward sound doctrine, when he called his Holy Spirit baptism, "the funeral of my dogmatics." Wherever it appears, Pentecostalism does away with the creeds. One of the "gifts" which it has restored is that of special revelations given directly from God to certain "prophets." This is the denial of the sole authority and full sufficiency of Scripture—a deathblow to *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone). Hearing and believing the Word is no longer the central thing, but the experience of the Spirit baptism.

This replacement of the Word with experience identifies Pentecostalism as a revival of the ancient heresy of mysticism: salvation as immediate contact with God. Pentecostalism's favourite words are "experience," "power," "ecstasy," and the like.

This is its Spirit baptism; this is the nature of the Pentecostal meeting; this is its appeal to religious people; this is why women have a leading place in the movement.

That Pentecostalism is mysticism, indeed mysticism run amok, is readily illustrated from Pentecostal sources. *The Full Gospel Business Men's Voice* (a Pentecostal magazine) of June, 1960 gives a description of his baptism with the Holy Spirit by a minister who, disturbed by his "lack of power," had sought the baptism in fire:

Directly, there came into my hands a strange feeling, and it came on down to the middle of my arms and began to surge! It was like a thousand—like ten thousand—then a million volts of electricity. It began to shake my hands and to pull my hands. I could hear, as it were, a zooming sound of the power. It pulled my hands higher and held them there as though God took them in His. There came a voice in my soul that said, "Lay these hands on the sick and I will heal them!" ... but I didn't have the baptism ... In an air-conditioned room, with my hands lifted...and my heart reaching up for my God, there came the hot, molten lava of His love. It poured in like a stream from Heaven and I was lifted up out of myself. I spoke in a language I could not understand for about two hours. My body perspired as though I was in a steambath: the Baptism of Fire! (quoted in Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, p. 127)

Surely, this would have embarrassed Jacob Boehme, mystic that he was.

John Sherrill, a prominent Pentecostal, writes of seeing Jesus as a bright white light in his hospital room (cf. his *They Speak with Other Tongues*). Donald Gee, another leading Pentecostal, describes the Pentecostal baptism this way: "We are taken into God, and the soul will receive a consuming desire to ever more be utterly and entirely lost in Him"—the typical language of mysticism (cf. *A New Discovery*, p. 23).

A second fundamental error of Pentecostalism is its giving the Holy Spirit center-stage, while relegating Jesus to the wings, if not pushing Him offstage, entirely. It is forced to deny this, just as Rome is forced to deny that the cult of Mary actually replaces Jesus, but the fact remains. The truth of this charge is obvious on the very face of the movement. The Spirit gets the attention in Pentecostalism. The work of the Spirit, not that of the Son, is celebrated and exalted. The very name by which this movement calls itself gives it away: Pentecostalism—a name that has to do with the Spirit. Scripture, however, gives the people of God the name, Christian—a name that has to do with the Son, Jesus.

This disparagement of Jesus in favour of the Spirit is rooted deeply in basic Pentecostal doctrine. Pentecostalism teaches that the child of God must go beyond Christ to the higher level of the Spirit, must advance beyond "merely" receiving Christ by faith to receiving the Spirit by the Holy Spirit baptism.

Pentecostalism insults Christ.

Whatever spirit replaces Christ, disparages Christ, or goes beyond Christ is not the Spirit of Christ, but one of the spirits of antichrist, for the Spirit of Christ *reveals Christ, bestows Christ, calls attention to the work of Christ, and glorifies Christ*. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the

Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" ([John 15:26](#)). "He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you" ([John 16:14](#)).

A third, related error is Pentecostalism's minimizing of faith. Flying straight in the face of the testimony of the Bible that in Jesus Christ nothing else avails anything at all, "but faith which worketh by love" ([Gal. 5:6](#)), Pentecostalism insists that faith in Christ is not enough—not nearly enough. Something additional is required, which avails very much indeed, namely, Holy Spirit baptism. Ignoring completely Scripture's gracious praise of the believer as the one who shall not be confounded and who belongs to the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, and the people of God's possession ([1 Pet. 2:9](#)), Pentecostalism slights those who "merely" believe, extolling instead those baptized in the Spirit. With the belittling of faith goes a stress on all kinds of human works. Pentecostalism puts a premium on certain works that are alleged to be conditions for receiving the baptism with the Spirit: praying intensely, cleansing one's heart from all sin, yielding oneself completely, and the like. Most highly prized, of course, is the human work of speaking in tongues. Believing on the Son of God must take a back seat to this!

It is not surprising, then, that Pentecostalism practically ignores the one fundamental blessing of salvation for the child of God, the blessing received through faith: the forgiveness of sins. In the place of the gospel's "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven" ([Rom. 4:7ff](#); [Psalm 32:1](#)), Pentecostalism pronounces its "Blessed are they who enjoy the ecstasy and power of the Holy Spirit baptism."

Whatever belittles faith, whatever adds to faith, whatever goes beyond faith is of the devil, is another gospel; and whoever falls away to this heresy is fallen from grace. The first verses of [Galatians 5](#) sound the clear, sharp warning that there may be nothing in addition to, much less beyond, faith. To add something to faith, for the reception of salvation, is utterly to forfeit Christ: In this case, "Christ shall profit you nothing" (v. 2); "ye are fallen from grace" (v. 4).

Sola fide! Faith alone! All of salvation is by faith only! "For by grace are ye saved through faith... not of works, lest any man should boast" ([Eph. 2:8-9](#)). Our salvation begins, continues, and is perfected by faith alone.

Pentecostalism is proud. It is arrogant in its attitude toward the church of the past. Until about A.D. 1900, there was no such thing as the Pentecostal baptism with the Spirit within the church. Athanasius and Augustine did not have it. Luther and Calvin did not have it. The Reformed saints of the Netherlands who died by the scores of thousands under the Roman Catholic persecution in the 16th century did not have it. On the contrary, they explicitly repudiated it. Augustine expresses the mind of the church of the past:

In the earliest time the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed: and they spake with tongues, which they had not learned, "as the Spirit gave them utterance." These were signs adapted to the time. For there behooved to be that betokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues, and to shew that the Gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth. That thing was done for a betokening and it passed

away. ("Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John," *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VII).

What does Pentecostalism say about this? "Up till now the church has been a very poor and lifeless church. The full gospel, the full salvation, and the full Christian life start with us."

Put all of Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism on a pile, and the whole heap is not worthy to untie the shoelace of one Luther, or of one Calvin, or of one Reformed saint who believes the gospel of Scripture, trusts in Christ for his righteousness, fears the Lord, keeps the commandments, brings up his family in the truth, and worships God in spirit and in truth.

Pentecostalism is also arrogant in its attitude toward the "mere" believer. The Pentecostal is the elite in the church, the super-saint; all others are "merely" converted Christians. This arrogance is not so much a matter of the personal sin of the Pentecostal as it is of Pentecostal doctrine. Pentecostalism teaches two baptisms in the church: the inferior baptism of the washing away of sins (of which the sign is the application of water) and the superior baptism with the Holy Spirit (of which the initial sign is tongues). All Christians receive the former; but only some receive the latter—the super saints. In its fundamental doctrine, therefore, Pentecostalism is schismatic. It does not endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, as Christ's apostle beseeches in [Ephesians 4:3](#), but rends it. Unity in the congregation is rooted in "one baptism", according to verse 5 of [Ephesians 4](#). To posit two baptisms is as destructive of unity as would be the positing of two faiths, or two Lords, or two Gods. Spiritual pride in every form is divisive; humility nourishes oneness. Elders only deceive themselves when they tolerate Pentecostalism within the congregation, but warn it to "keep the peace."

The explanation of this pride is that Pentecostalism is a religion of man. It centers on man's feelings and on man's possession of power. It assigns to man the decisive duty of performing the works that are conditions for the perfecting of salvation in the Holy Spirit baptism. It allows man to receive extra-biblical revelations and to bind the congregation by them. It empowers a man to exercise a sovereign headship over a congregation, or over a fellowship of congregations, and to regulate the life of the people according to his will. The spirit honoured by Pentecostalism is not the Spirit who glorifies Christ ([John 16:14](#)), applies Christ's redemption (*Heidelberg Catechism*, A. 53: "He [i.e., the Holy Spirit] is also given me, to make me ... partaker of Christ and all His benefits"), guides into the truth that Christ has spoken in the inspired Scriptures ([John 16:13](#)), and gives Himself to all of Christ's people through faith ([Gal. 3:14](#)). This One is the Spirit who magnifies God. But the spirit of Pentecostalism calls attention to itself, bestows its own benefits of salvation, speaks of itself, and operates apart from the hearing of faith. This one is a spirit that caters to man.

Pentecostalism is not God-centred. For this reason, it can attack God's Word (Scripture), disparage God's Saviour (Christ), minimize God's way of salvation (faith), and ignore God's fundamental blessing of salvation (justification). Basic to its being a gospel according to man ([Gal. 1:11](#)) is an error which, although often overlooked, even in criticisms of Pentecostalism, characterizes Pentecostalism wherever it is

found. This is the error of free will, i.e., the doctrine that salvation depends upon the will of the sinner, rather than upon the sovereign, gracious will of God ([Rom. 9:16](#)). The roots of Pentecostalism are not in Calvin, Dordt, and Westminster, but in Arminius, Wesley, Finney, and revivalism.

This helps to explain both the popularity of Pentecostalism and its ecumenicity. Pentecostalism is ecumenical. It is obviously, admittedly, and aggressively ecumenical. It operates in all churches, with total disregard for confessional and doctrinal differences. It unites Protestants and Roman Catholics. All are made one by Pentecostalism—those who practice idolatry in the mass, as well as those whose confession is that this practice is accursed; those who depend for righteousness upon their own merits, as well as those whose confession is that we are to trust only in the alien righteousness of Christ; those who boast of salvation by their own free will, as well as those whose confession is that the "free will gospel" is the error of Pelagius out of hell. So far from being abashed by their doctrinally indifferent "Spirit", and then being roused to suspicion concerning a "Spirit" thus disdainful of the truth, Pentecostal leaders herald their religion as the means of church union. The ecumenical nature of Pentecostalism was evident at the "1977 Conference on Charismatic Renewal in the Christian Churches" held in Kansas City. The conference was co-sponsored by Baptists, Pentecostals, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Mennonites, Messianic Jews, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and United Methodists. Members from many other denominations participated.

One of the main speakers, the Episcopalian, Dennis Bennett, said that "he sees three streams of Christianity that are beginning to flow together: the Catholic stream with its emphasis on history and the continuity of the faith, the evangelical stream with its emphasis on loyalty to Scripture and the importance of personal commitment to Christ, and the Pentecostal stream with its emphasis on the immediate experience of God by the power of the Holy Spirit."

The keynote speaker, the Roman Catholic, Kevin Ranaghan, "asserted that divisions among the various Christian churches have been a 'serious scandal' in the world. 'For the world to believe depends on our becoming one,' he said. It is the will of God, he emphasized, 'that we be one.'" He expressed his belief that there is a "real possibility of moving together toward some lasting form of Christian unity." (Cf. *Christianity Today*, August 12, 1977, pp. 36-37).

Because of its fundamental errors regarding the Word, Christ, and faith; because of its pride; because of its false ecumenicity—an ecumenicity apart from the truth; because of its heretical doctrine of salvation—the teaching of Holy Spirit baptism; and because of its fraudulent miracles, Pentecostalism must be rejected. It must be rejected by Christian discipline. Here, some are weak. They know the errors of Pentecostalism. They see it as radically different from the faith of the Reformation. They even speak out in criticism of the movement. But at the same time they speak of their "Pentecostal brothers and sisters" and tolerate Pentecostalism in their churches.

The Pentecostal must be disciplined. He must be disciplined for his own good, that God may give him repentance unto the acknowledging of the truth. He must be disciplined for the church's good, that the other members may learn to fear and that

the leaven of Pentecostalism may not spread through the church. For the Pentecostal remains within the church, in order to gain adherents to his religion. "I would they were even cut off which trouble you" ([Gal. 5:12](#)). "A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself" ([Titus 3:10-11](#)).

Chapter 3

The Reformed View of the Christian Life

Does not Pentecostalism, despite its serious errors, have something to contribute to the churches of the Reformation, something, in fact, that these churches very much need? Should not Reformed believers learn something from Pentecostalism, something that they are otherwise quite ignorant of? Do not Reformed churches and their members lack something which God Himself is now supplying through the Pentecostal, or charismatic, movement? Having given His church the former rain moderately, is not God now fulfilling Joel's prophecy of a "latter rain" ([Joel 2:23](#))?

This notion is widely accepted in Reformed circles. That which Pentecostalism is supposed to contribute to the church and the member is a vibrant Christian life. A Reformed church and a Reformed saint have sound doctrine, it is said; but they are deficient in the area of Christian life. To the congregation, Pentecostalism will contribute a real unity of the members; a love that cares for, and shares with, the other members; the energetic use of his gifts by every member; and a spontaneous, lively, exuberant worship. To the individual member, it will supply spiritual experience, joy, zeal, and power. Reformed Christianity has the Word (doctrine); Pentecostalism will add the Spirit. Thus, Pentecostalism is introduced, and welcomed, into Reformed churches.

The notion is false. The Reformed church has always sought the unity of the people of God; urged the mutual love of her members; and done justice to the use of his gifts by every member. It was not Pentecostalism that moved the Reformed church to confess the communion of saints, in Q. 55 of her *Heidelberg Catechism*, in these words:

First, that all and everyone, who believes, being members of Christ, are in common, partakers of him, and of all his riches and gifts; secondly, that every one must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members.

Nor was it Pentecostalism that was responsible for the Reformed church's charging her members to live the Christian life by loving their neighbours as she does in Lord's Days 39-44 of this same *Catechism*. Let Pentecostalism improve, if it can, on the Reformed Faith's application of the Fifth Commandment to the believer as the requirement that "I show all honour, love and fidelity, to my father and mother, and all in authority over me ... and also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities ... "(Q. 104); of the Sixth Commandment, as the requirement that we "love our neighbour as ourselves ... show patience, peace, meekness, mercy, and all kindness

towards him, and prevent his hurt as much as in us lies..."(Q. 107); of the Seventh Commandment, as the teaching that "we must... live chastely and temperately, whether in holy wedlock, or in single life" (Q. 108); of the Eighth Commandment, as the requirement that "I promote the advantage of my neighbour in every instance I can or may, and deal with him as I desire to be dealt with by others" (Q. 111); and of the Ninth Commandment, as the requirement that "I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honour and good character of my neighbour" (Q. 112).

To the Pentecostal's suggestion that we should go to school at the feet of Pentecostalism, to learn about Christian experience, Reformed Christians are inclined to respond as the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind: "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" ([Job 38:2, 4](#)). Bypassing the glorious tradition of the Reformed, Presbyterian, and Puritan preachers and writers, we invite those who make this presumptuous suggestion to read the *Heidelberg Catechism*. For over 400 years, Reformed Christians have been schooled in a catechism that sets forth the entire message of Scripture from the viewpoint of personal comfort; that defines this comfort as belonging to Christ; and that grounds this comfort in an experiential knowledge of sin, an experiential knowledge of redemption, and an experiential knowledge of thankfulness. When they have finished with the *Catechism*, they may pick up the *Canons of Dordt*, to observe the warm, pastoral treatment of the great doctrines that are at once the distinctive truths of the Reformed faith and the heart of the gospel of God's grace. Here, they will find an exposition of predestination, e.g., that is deeply concerned with the assurance of election (I:12); with the effects of the sense of election in the daily humility, adoration, self-purification, and thankful love of the children of God (I:13); and with the spiritual struggles and doubts of those who are the "smoking *flax*" and "bruised reeds" (I:16).

As genuine, biblical Christianity, the Reformed faith has always also honoured the Holy Spirit and His work. It has confessed His Godhead; it has observed His outpouring as the Spirit of Christ on Pentecost; it has ascribed to Him the complete work of the gathering of the church and the saving of every elect sinner, inasmuch that it has denied that even the smallest part of the gathering of the church or the saving of the sinner is the work of man and has asserted that even the Word is powerless without the Spirit. It has extolled the Spirit's works, e.g., regeneration and sanctification; praised His gifts, e.g., faithful witness to the truth; and cultivated His fruit—the love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance of [Galatians 5:22](#). For all this, the Reformed church owes Pentecostalism exactly nothing.

The Reformed Christian does refuse to honour any spirit alongside of Jesus Christ; does refuse to dabble in any salvation additional to the redemption of Christ; does refuse to fly with any spirit above the solid atmosphere of the Word of Christ—Holy Scripture; and does refuse to confess some spirit instead of Jesus. But the Holy Spirit of God does not take it ill of us, that we make this refusal. He Himself demands it of us and works it in us. For He has come to glorify Jesus ([John 16:14](#)); to bestow Jesus' redemption ([John 7:37-39](#)); to work in and through Jesus' Word ([John 6:63](#)); and to confess Jesus Christ ([I John 4:1-3](#)).

Pentecostalism has nothing to contribute to the churches of the Reformation. Reformed believers can learn nothing from it. The Reformed faith needs nothing that Pentecostalism can supply. Pentecostalism must be rejected, in its entirety, as a religion alien to Reformed Christianity. In the bloodstream of a Reformed church, it is a foreign element. If it remains, unpurged, it will be the death of that body, as a Reformed body.

It is disturbing to find Pentecostal literature in the homes of Reformed people, for use as edifying reading—Watchman Nee; David Wilkerson; John Osteen; Arthur Wallis; *The Full Gospel Businessman's Voice*; and others. Even though the material may not be Pentecostal, the devotional reading—and listening!—of some Reformed believers is to be faulted. The fare from which they regularly feed to satisfy the soul's craving for exposition of the Christian life, experience, and practice is the best selling literature of present-day fundamentalism. At best, it is devoid of anything Reformed; at worst, it undermines everything that Reformed believers hold dear, inculcating a superficial, false view of the Christian life and experience. Where, e.g., in the frothy works on the higher, richer, fuller, deeper Christian life, with their flashy covers, that abound in the average Christian book store, do you find anything of the "out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD" of [Psalm 130](#)? Much less is this sorrow over the guilt of sin central to their vaunted higher, richer, fuller, deeper Christian life. Theirs is a higher, richer, fuller, deeper Christian life, therefore, whose heartbeat is not the forgiveness of sins in the redemption of the cross of Christ. The Christian life to which those books call the readers cannot be a life of fearing the Lord, the holy, gracious Judge, by the pardoned sinner ([Psalm 130:4](#)). Instead, they tell us how to be happy. Nor do they set forth the Christian life as obedience—costly obedience—to the Ten Commandments of God's Law. A plague on these books; and a plague on their higher, richer, fuller, deeper Christian life!

It may well be, however, that some of the blame for this bad reading lies at the feet of us preachers, elders, parents, and Christian schoolteachers. Perhaps, we are not recommending to the saints the good, solid devotional works—the sermons, commentaries, and other writings of Luther; of Calvin; and of the older Reformed, Presbyterian, and Puritan authors.

Perhaps, we are not producing books and articles that do justice to the practical and experiential aspects of the Reformed faith—its unique and vital piety. Perhaps, our preaching slights these aspects of the gospel. Then, we defend orthodoxy, without applying it. Or, in reaction to experientialism, we ignore experience; in reaction to subjectivism, we dare not be subjective; in reaction to a clamour for the practical that despises doctrine, we fail to speak the practical things which become sound doctrine ([Titus 2:1](#)). In this case, there is indeed a lack, not in the Reformed Faith, but in our teaching of it; and it should not surprise us, wrong though it is, that the saints seek to satisfy their hunger elsewhere.

The fact that Pentecostalism has nothing to contribute to the Reformed believer does not imply that God does not make use of this movement on behalf of His people. God has always used heresies to drive His church to the Word, so that her knowledge of the truth may be increased and her faithfulness of life may be renewed. God uses Pentecostalism to send us back to Holy Scripture, to search it as regards its teaching concerning the Christian life.

The basic appeal of Pentecostalism is its criticism of the Christian's life and its promise of a higher, richer Christian life. Pentecostalism finds much laxity, unfaithfulness, worldliness, and disobedience. We do well to confess this. God sends the scourge of Pentecostalism for a reason. Many have lost the first love. The love of others waxes cold. Iniquity abounds. For many, worship is lifeless formalism; confession of the truth is a dead tradition; Christian life is an external ritual; and the experience of salvation's peace and joy is non-existent. Always, mysticism arises against the background of a decline in the spiritual life of the church, especially a decline into dead orthodoxy and lively worldliness. In these circumstances, Pentecostalism seduces the people with the allure of real life, dynamic power, and wonderful feeling.

In view of Pentecostalism's criticism of the life, both of the faithful Reformed believer, who has not received Pentecostalism's baptism with the Spirit, and of the lax, unfaithful church member, and in view of its promise to transport the Christian into a higher level of spiritual life and experience, we are compelled to ask, "What is the Christian life and experience? What is the *normal*, Christian life?"

In answering this question, we pay no attention to the claims of religious men and woman. The norm of Christian life and experience is not the neighbour's testimony of her latest ecstatic feeling, but Holy Scripture. In this way, we let God be true, and every man, a liar. The failure to let Scripture, the reliable Word of God, be the standard of the Christian life, and the dependency upon the thoroughly unreliable words of men, is the cause of no end of doubt, whether one is what he ought to be spiritually, and even whether one is a regenerated child of God at all. This gives Pentecostalism the opening that it wants. For knowledge of the Christian life, the rule is: "To the law and to the testimony," shunning the wizards that peep and mutter ([Isaiah 8:19-20](#)).

According to Scripture, the Christian life is a life that finds its fullness in Jesus Christ, as this Christ is revealed in the Word. It will not go beyond Christ; it will have nothing apart from Christ, or in addition to Christ—not circumcision, not new revelations, not a higher knowledge, not some spirit. The reason is that the Christian knows, and has found by experience, that Christ is a complete Saviour. In Christ dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and the Christian is complete in Him, i.e., is filled up in Him ([Col. 2:9-10](#)). To be sure, the Christian life is a life of growth, but that growth is a growing up into Christ, not a going beyond Christ: "That we...may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:14-15). Just as is the case with the physical growth to maturity, this spiritual growth is a gradual, often imperceptible, development, not an instantaneous, overnight transformation. It is life-long. It takes place by the Word and prayer.

This sufficient Christ, with all His adequate benefits, is the life of the believer by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in his heart. "I live," exults the believer, "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" ([Gal. 2:20](#)). The fervent prayer of the apostle for all of the members of God's church is "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" ([Eph. 3:17](#)). This takes place in every one of us by our being "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (v. 16).

The Christian life is a life of walking in the Spirit of Christ Whom we all received when we were born again. The believer does not look for, or seek, or tarry for a second baptism; rather, he strives to walk in the Spirit daily, in all of life. This is the instruction concerning the Christian life in [Galatians 5](#). There were problems in Galatia regarding the Christian life, serious problems. There was the threat of the saints' biting and devouring each other—a pathetic lack of love (vv. 13-15). There were other temptations of the flesh and its lusts: adultery; idolatry; drunkenness; and the like (vv. 19-21). There were evidences of vain glory, of the provoking of one another, and of envying one another (v. 26). These were problems for men and women who had been baptized ([Gal. 3:27](#)) and who had received the Holy Spirit ([Gal. 3:2](#)). But the solution was not that they seek a new baptism, or a different administration of the Spirit. On the contrary, they must walk in that Holy Spirit in Whom they lived: "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (v. 16); "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (v. 25).

The Christian life, it is thus pointed out, is active. The activity of the Christian life is, first, a battle—a fierce, unrelenting, life-long battle. The battleground is oneself. The foe is sin. Pentecostalism knows nothing of this battle; the Pentecostal has already won the victory in his baptism with the Spirit. Not only do you hear little or nothing of the forgiveness of sins in Pentecostalism, but you also hear little or nothing of the daily struggle of the saint against indwelling sin. In fact, it is not unheard of that the charismatic preacher ridicules those who are always groaning over their sins, those, that is to say, whose testimony all their lives is, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" ([Rom. 7:24](#)). Nothing more clearly than this exposes Pentecostalism as a religion totally alien to the Reformed Faith. A Reformed Pentecostal is an impossibility, a contradiction in terms. A Pentecostal cannot confess the first part of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. At best, he can only say that he used to know the misery of sin, both guilt and depravity. Ignorant of his misery, neither can he know redemption or the living gratitude that wells up daily in a forgiven heart.

Scripture, however, presents the Christian life as a striving against indwelling sin. This is the teaching of [Galatians 5:17](#): "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

This is the powerful doctrine of [Romans 7](#). The Christian man, or woman, is carnal, sold under sin. Paul himself, man of God and apostle of Christ, was carnal, sold under sin. He found himself so, at the very end of his life, after he had been sanctified by the Spirit and after his sanctification had progressed far (v. 14). Paul was carnal, not because he was unregenerated, not because Christ had not baptized him with the Holy Spirit and fire, not because sin reigned in his life, not because Paul was a careless Christian; but because even though he was born again, evil was present with him—he retained his sinful, totally depraved flesh (v. 21). As a new man in Christ and, we may safely suppose, as one of the holiest of saints, he delighted in the law of God after the inward man (v. 22); had a hatred of sin (v. 15); and possessed a will to do the good (v. 18). But such was the power of sin in him as long as he lived, that "the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do" (v. 19). Therefore, the apostle—and every Christian—knows his misery. He expresses it in the anguished cry, "O wretched man that I am" (v. 24)—the echo in

the New Testament of the "Out of the depths" of [Psalm 130](#). Yet, he neither gives up in the spiritual battle, nor is he ever without the solace of the Savior, Jesus Christ his Lord. Verse 23 insists on the warfare ("I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind ..."); verses 24-25, on the comfort of Christ ("who shall deliver me ...? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord").

Not only is this warfare with sin the activity of the Christian life as regards one's personal life, but it is also the activity of Christian life in the family and in the congregation.

This is a painful, bitter struggle.

For this reason, the Christian can be enticed by the sweet promise that suddenly the battle is over in this life. A pastor can be tempted similarly by such a promise for the congregation. But with the shield of Scripture, he can, and must, resist the temptation.

Do you find this bitter struggle against sin in yourself?

Do not despair!

Do not think that you are not saved or that you are insufficiently saved!

This is it: the normal Christian life!

The result is that we long ardently and wait, not for a second work of grace, but for the second coming of Jesus Christ: "Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly. " We hope eagerly, not for a baptism with the Spirit, but for the resurrection of our bodies: ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" ([Rom. 8:23](#)).

Second, the activity of the Christian life is the doing of good works. But it is not the production of spectacular deeds and glamorous accomplishments, as the charismatics would have us believe. Rather, it is the doing of unnoticed, insignificant works—works that are of no account in the estimation of men. It is the activity of sanctification of life, walking after the Spirit, not after the flesh: not practicing adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like ([Gal. 5:19-21](#)); but living in love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance ([Gal. 5:22-23](#)).

It is the activity of the unnoticed works of keeping the law of God: right worship of God; confessing the truth; remembering the Sabbath; obeying parents; faithfulness in marriage; chastity in single life; Godly rearing of children; diligent labour at one's earthly vocation; payment to Caesar of his taxes; speaking well of one's neighbour, especially the brother and sister in the congregation; and contentment with one's lot, without coveting.

In short, the activity of the Christian life is love—love of the Lord our God and love of the neighbour.

As you do this, do not blow a trumpet before your piety; do it secretly, so that God will reward you.

This is possible by the indwelling Power of Almighty God; but, even then, sin will defile our best works, so that there is only a small beginning of the new obedience and constant need of pardon.

But does not the Christian life have its experience?

As an alternative or addition to faith, experience must be renounced, root and branch. Jesus Christ does not call us to experience, or to feel, but to believe. The way of salvation is faith, not feeling; we are saved by faith, not by experience; we are saved by faith alone, not by faith and experience.

Nevertheless, faith has its experience. It is three-fold: God's child knows the greatness of his sin and misery, his gracious redemption in Christ, and thankfulness for this redemption.

Do you have this experience? Then, you have the normal Christian experience. This is all there is. Whoever lusts for more is an ingrate and aggravates God. He says to God Who gives the knowledge of Himself in His own Son ([John 17:3](#)), "But is there not something more, something better?"

To put it differently, through faith the Holy Spirit gives the peace and joy that come from justification. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1-2).

Since this is the Christian life, the Reformed believer makes a confession that is radically different from that of the Pentecostal. The Pentecostal is always boasting of his great powers and is always rejoicing in his marvellous accomplishments. The Reformed saint humbly confesses his weaknesses and takes pleasure in his infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake. For he has learned to *trust in Divine grace*; desires the power of Christ to rest upon him; and has heard God say, in the gospel, "my strength is made perfect in weakness" ([II Cor. 12:9-10](#)).

He will not glory in himself. To do so, is, to him, abhorrent—a blasphemy. From the bottom of his sin-broken, but justified heart comes the confession, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" ([Gal. 6:14](#)).

This is the sound of the Dove.