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When God Says No	Herbert F. Belle
Spiritual Gifts and Maturity	Earl A. Martin
Responses to Charismata	Norman L. Parks
How to Succeed	Pat Boone
From the Editor	Hoy Ledbetter
Index to Volume Three	Don Reece

WHEN GOD SAYS NO

HERBERT F. BELLE

The most prolific of all the early apostles of Jesus Christ was a man possessed throughout his years by a physical affliction. He referred to it as a "thorn in the flesh." Some of our most eminent scholars believed Paul suffered from epilepsy. Others have insisted that the malady was a persistent malaria; while still others have spoken of arthritis. In any case, the apostle apparently experienced a nagging physical weakness and not unnaturally was troubled by it. After all, he was serving the risen Lord, and it seemed only reasonable to him that the Lord should remove his infirmity. As Paul said to his friends at Corinth, "I asked the Lord three times that he remove my affliction from me." Nevertheless, he carried the burden to his death. That much the record makes clear.

Paul was no religious neophyte. He was a spiritual giant. He wrote the major portion of the New Testament, founded numerous congregations, laid the foundations for Christian doctrine, endured persecution and incarceration, and risked death a dozen times for the sake of his God. Despite all that, however, the Lord said no each time Paul asked to be relieved of his burden. Lesser men would have believed it not fair, or assumed they required a different technique to persuade the reluctance of God. Not so with Paul. Apparently he ended up taking his limitation in stride, for he said, "Most gladly will I glory in my infirmities in order that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

It is true that God says no to many petitions of his children, no matter how ardently they are expressed. I recall the plea Jesus raised up while in Gethsemane: "Take this cup from me!" In the hour of mental anguish and near death, Jesus besought God to save him. But God said, "No." Sometimes, after the fashion of Martin Luther, we shout with rage, "God, are you dead?" Frustrated, we often turn our backs upon God, and belief becomes difficult to uphold. From the darkness of our souls we cry, "If prayer does not accomplish what we want done, why pray, why believe?" As a mother said to her minister, "I have been praying incessantly for God to heal my son. If he does not do something soon, I will lose my faith in him." Seemingly, unbelief is mostly a matter of psychological frustration.

When God said no to Paul, he concluded that his affliction could well minister to his spirit, for he said, "... lest I be a proud man above measure." Paul was an upright, brilliant individual, influential in the counsels of the church. Prior to his confrontation with Christ, he had been self-reliant, an unbending Pharisee, one whose pride had blocked spiritual insight and whose egoism had jaundiced his perception of God's role in his life. By his own admission, Paul's "thorn in the flesh" served as a consistent reminder of his spiritual need. Consider that Paul could not cure his affliction; nor could Luke, the physician who traveled so much of the time with him.

And so Paul accepted the fact that he would have to bear the "thorn" and depend upon the power of Christ to see him through. His "thorn" made him acutely aware of his need for a strength beyond his own. Without the power of Christ he could not manage the limitation, and he knew it. Paul experienced what Jesus meant when he said, "Without me, you can do nothing." On his own, he was whipped. With Christ at work within him, he was "more than conqueror." He learned that the self-reliant approach to life sooner or later falters, particularly when God says no in response to a prayer born in the midst of one of life's extremities.

When a person rides the crest of the wave, when health is sound and sustenance is spread upon the table and all seems well with his world, the temptation to neglect prayer is ever present. He acknowledges prayer only as a device available to those who cannot manage life by themselves. Proudly he tells himself that he has what it takes to make a go of life, and inevitably he assumes that God can do nothing for him that he can't do for himself. He can run his own business, support his family, and get by very nicely without bothering God. Let the weak "lean on the everlasting arms"—he will consume aspirin if and when the headache arrives.

I think of a man who was racing down a country lane, running desperately to catch a train. He almost made it, but not quite. Panting at the station gate, he glanced miserably at the station master, who remarked most unhelpfully, "Sir, you didn't start soon enough."

That's the way it is with many of us. We get along relatively well until we meet something we can't manage alone, and then we discover (often too late) that we are unpre-

pared to deal with the unexpected, particularly if it is of a tragic nature. We didn't start soon enough to make ready for the unmanageable, and we are left quite miserably on the station platform watching life's train go on without us.

"It isn't fair," we suggest, as if God, whom we had stored in our hip pocket, had not kept us in mind. Of course, he had us in mind all along, but we failed to tune in on the love that never lets go. Alas, we thought we could get along all right on our own. And then a sickness, or a shattering sorrow, or a desperate failure came along, and we learned the sobering truth that we always need God—and never more than when we think we are strong enough by ourselves.

God's no to Paul's plea was not a mere no. God never says no to our prayers after the fashion of a tired parent who does not wish to be bothered any more. There is always a yes linked to the no—a road that is open alongside the one that is closed. Paul found it so, for God's no concluded with God's affirmation: "My grace is sufficient for you, my strength is realized in your weakness." Paul's thorn was not removed from him in response to his prayer, but he did receive a compensating spiritual gift—the power to hold on and to labor on in the midst of his weakness. Healing there was not, but help there was.

No doubt, with the poet of old, Paul exclaimed, "My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my life and my portion forever." His thorn became the vehicle through which the love of God touched the human race. The lesson Paul teaches with regard to prayer is one which all of us ought to learn. Prayer, he infers, is not a means of informing God of something he does not already know, nor ought it to be used as a

pleading with God to change his no to yes. Prayer is not a means of overcoming God's reluctance. Rather it is the laying hold of God's willingness. Paul ceased his attempts to override through prayer God's no and took hold of God's yes. He opened his soul before God in order to heed what God willed to do. In response to his prayer ("God, remove this thorn from me!"), Paul received, not a curse, but rather creative courage. To him came the answer: "My strength is sufficient for your weakness."

The problem we face in our prayer-life is lodged in our failure to grasp God's willingness in the wake of our frustration over his reluctance to do what we want done. The most beautiful persons I know are those who dare to believe that God can take the leftovers of their broken bodies or disappointed hopes and use them gloriously. I recall an acquaintance of mine, a school teacher who was forced to leave her classroom because of an incurable illness, but who for ten long years sat in her home while hundreds of former students trudged to her side to leave their troubles there. She was a radiant, cheerful person whom God empowered to lift the burdens of others and to inspire a confidence in God's ability to help them. God said no to her plea for a physical cure. She, therefore, laid hold of God's willingness to use her person as a bulwark upon whom the souls of others could lean.

There is something else that Paul learned when God said no to his prayer for the removal of his thorn. He put it like this: "When I am weak, then I am strong." His physical limitation became the source of his spiritual strength, God.

A few years ago Roy Robinson, a Christian brother and preacher, spoke to the congregation in Dayton, Ohio. His body was

frail and emaciated, weakened from the ravages of asthma, and he gave the impression as he moved to the rostrum that every movement was a painful effort. But when he spoke, he was very much alive—as if some hidden flame was burning bright within him, working through his frail tortured body to stir the assembly. In his weakness he became strong in the strength of his God.

If we are to experience the strength of God in our weakness, we must remember that his strength is the fruit of roots planted deep in his love and goodness. Just as we cannot pick strawberries from bramble bushes, neither can we pick power from pessimism or radiance from resentment. When God says no to our prayer, we are to remember that what we need may not be what we desire, but rather God himself, his strength for our weakness, his aid in our disappointment. Hopefully, we may learn one day that the more we lay hold of God's willingness, the less we are disturbed by his reluctance; the more we claim his strength, the less we are worried by our weakness.

It must be said that to take hold of God's strength is no casual doing—no Sunday excursion when there is nothing else to interfere. To tap the resources of God, to tune in on his willingness, requires the practice of prayer daily. "Pray without ceasing," said Paul. And another adds a postscript: "If the vision tarry, wait for it." It is shameful that our prayers are mostly afterthoughts, not the mood of each hour of the day. And what's more, we possess little desire to be patient in prayer. John Wesley once said, "The difference between God and me is that I am in a hurry and God is not." We want answers to our prayers at once and, failing that, we just quit praying.

There is a hint of our attitude in a com-

ment made by a young person who was helping plan a youth lectureship. He said, "Let's make the prayers snappy and get on with the program." So it is with the prayer life of many of us. We want to get on with our program, with no time to wait for God's program to take hold of us. We want what we want now, not tomorrow or the next day—which is to say we want to manage God's willingness and his timetable. If he doesn't dance to our tune, we cease praying, and refuse to believe in him any longer . . . and that's that! Well, Paul knew better. Prior to launching his missionary labor, he spent a whole year in prayer and contempla-

tion. He prayed while he traveled on the roads, while waiting in prisons, while sailing aboard ship, while pausing in the home of his friend. In the company of God he found strength to manage his thorn, and with the strength of God girding his weakness he could do all things. So he prayed without ceasing and thereby became the master of every circumstance he faced.

My friends in Christ, hear this: if you will keep company each day with your God, he will empower you to manage your ills, whatever they be, and keep you sweet and strong. Again I say, "God's strength is fully known in weakness." Praise the Lord! □

SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND MATURITY

EARL A. MARTIN

I welcomed with curiosity John McRay's new addition to the church's Catalog of Apologies for not manifesting spiritual gifts. There are at least half a dozen such explanations of the powerlessness of the church of Christ on the market now, and the frustrated churchman can take comfort in knowing that his anemic condition is scripturally sound. John McRay's explanation is a timely and worthy one: timely, because the old rationalizations have grown stale and woefully inadequate; worthy, because it makes a little more sense and is a little more Bible-based than the others. But I believe that it, too, is inadequate.

McRay has admirably presented the unity problem of the early church. One cannot

deny that reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles was a crucial concern in the church's infancy. And certainly spiritual gifts functioned to bring about this unity. But to say that this was the primary function of spiritual gifts is, I believe, unwarranted.

While I agree with McRay that spiritual gifts were relevant to the unity problem of the early church, I believe that there was much more to it than that. Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will bear witness for me . . ." Here, as Christ promised the Holy Spirit (with manifestations of spiritual gifts; indeed, I find it difficult to separate the Giver from the gifts) to his apostles, he stated the primary function of spiritual gifts

—to give power to their witness. Can anyone deny that the apostles were marvelously and miraculously transformed after they were filled with the Holy Spirit? The contrast in Peter is almost comical; and the difference between the denial and Pentecost was the presence of the Holy Spirit in Peter's life. Internally transformed, the apostles became bold witnesses of Jesus to the world. The day of Pentecost, the book of Acts, and the epistles tell of the wonderful and powerful way Jesus' disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, presented him to the unbelieving world. So the purpose of this initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit with manifestations of spiritual gifts was to transform the lives of the apostles and give power to their witness.

Then consider Cornelius. The immediate impact of his "Pentecostal experience" upon the Jewish Christians was undoubtedly to convince them that "God had granted life-giving repentance to the Gentiles also" (Acts 11:18). But what effect did this experience have upon Cornelius? Can one assume that he, too, was given the presence and power of the Holy Spirit with manifestations of spiritual gifts? And was his experience just a sign, or the claiming of the promise of the Holy Spirit that Peter said was promised to "everyone whom the Lord our God may call" (Acts 2:39)? In other words, was the Pentecostal promise made to a representative "all flesh," or to *all flesh*?

At any rate, it was clear that both Jew and Gentile were eligible for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now what was to be the primary function of the continuing work of the Holy Spirit through spiritual gifts? To perfect the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles? No, I think not. But to bring spiritual maturity to the believers and make them power-

ful witnesses. The emphasis in the rest of the book of Acts is not in proving that the Gentiles were O.K., too, but in demonstrating the power of God, through the Holy Spirit, to save and to heal.

The discussions of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14 and Ephesians 4 emphasize unity, to be sure, but not so much Jew with Gentile as *member with member*. And the maturity to which Paul is urging these Christians is not simply mutual acceptance of each other, but complete spiritual maturity, "fully grow(n) up into Christ" (Eph. 4:15). Here again spiritual gifts were to work from the inside out—from the individual member, to the body, to the world: "But each of us has been given his gift, his due portion of Christ's bounty . . . to equip God's people for work in his service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:7, 12).

What is "the perfect" in 1 Corinthians 13:10, then? McRay says it is the "maturity or fulness (perfection!) of the church in terms of its inclusion of the Gentiles" (*Integrity*, Feb. 1972, p. 124). This, in my opinion, is an odd and short-sighted definition of perfection or maturity. And it is difficult to understand how this kind of "maturity" would bring full growth, face-to-face vision, and full knowledge (1 Cor. 13:10-13) to the reconciled Jews and Gentiles. If maturity is "measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ (Eph. 4:13)," I'm quite sure that reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles did not bring the early church to this measure of maturity. Indeed, the essence of life on this earth is "seeing in a mirror darkly" and "knowing in part." But when we see HIM "face to face" then we shall "know as we are fully known." Hallelujah! Paul wrote to the Philippians: "Of one thing I am certain: the One who started the good work in

you will bring it to completion by the Day of Christ Jesus" (1:6). And again, "I have not yet reached perfection, but I press on . . . towards the goal to win the prize which is God's call to the life above, in Christ Jesus" (3:12-14).

What is "the perfect" then? It is the "mature manhood, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ (Eph. 4:13)," which none of us shall reach until the Day of the Lord. And spiritual gifts were given to bring about this maturity. As long as Christians are growing they need spiritual food. And spiritual gifts were given for this purpose, not for a curious experiment to keep them occupied until they get themselves together, but for good, "to equip God's people for work in his service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12).

So in the context of 1 Corinthians 13, what is Paul saying? He seems to be saying this: "You were given spiritual gifts for a purpose (12:7), to build up the church (14:26). So don't exercise these spiritual gifts selfishly or jealously (12:14-26), but in love (12:31ff), for, after all, love is eternal (13:8). We won't need spiritual gifts to bring us to maturity in heaven, for then we shall be fully mature (13:8-12). But in the meantime, exercise spiritual gifts in the right way and for the purpose they were given, by putting love first (14:1)."

At this point some may jump out of their seats and exclaim, "But this would mean that spiritual gifts are still available today! And we all know that this isn't true." To which I reply, "Who says so?" I believe our brethren have engaged in some faulty inductive reasoning to construct the half-dozen theories of why spiritual gifts are no longer available today. The reasoning goes like

this: "Now I'm a good, God-fearing church member in good standing, and I haven't received any spiritual gifts that I know of; furthermore, I'm not aware of any churches of Christ manifesting any spiritual gifts; therefore spiritual gifts must not be available anymore. Now, let's see . . . Yes! Here's a scripture that agrees with me. It says here that when 'that which is perfect comes' then spiritual gifts will be done away with. And, obviously, 'the perfect' here refers to the Bible (or when the church becomes firmly established or the unity of Jews and Gentiles or . . .)."

May I suggest that if we are going to analyze the matter inductively, there are two ways to look at it: (1) we don't have spiritual gifts because they are no longer available, or (2) we don't have them because we have not asked for them. The first reason is more comfortable; hence our preference for it. It takes the pressure off us. We don't have to worry about making fools of ourselves. After all, it's God's fault we don't have spiritual gifts; he doesn't give them any more. To the contrary, I believe that we "have not because we ask not" (Jas. 4:2). Jesus said, "Is there a father among you who will offer his son a snake when he asks for fish, or a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you, then, bad as you are, know how to give your children what is good for them, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" (Luke 11:11-13.)

It seems to me that the burden of proof lies on those who would deny that spiritual gifts are for today. Spiritual gifts were central to the early church's worship and ministry, and unless there is evidence to the contrary, one must assume that spiritual gifts were to continue operating in the Christian community.

I believe that scriptural evidence denying the availability of spiritual gifts today is contrived at best. Note the problems of this position:

1. Its scriptural validity hangs by a slender thread to a particular interpretation of one or two passages. For such a big transition to occur in God's plan for the church, surprisingly little scriptural attention is given to it.

2. While our filmstrips teach that there are three periods in the history of God's dealing with man, in order to hold on to our theological position we are forced to subtly teach that there are really four periods: the Patriarchial, Mosaic, Early Christian, and Late Christian periods. This clever trick in itself has several implications, among them:

a. By so separating ourselves from the early Christians, we have created a convenient disposal for any inconvenient biblical teaching not suited to our modern, sophisticated tastes: spiritual gifts, demons, foot-washing, etc.

b. This means we are not the Bible fundamentalists we think we are! We have picked through the Bible like a box of Russell Stover candy, selecting only the pieces we like.

3. If we believe that spiritual gifts are no longer available today, we have to form some opinion of our contemporaries who claim charismatic experiences. These people are either (1) manufacturing these experiences under pretense or delusion, or (2) the experiences are real but from Satan, or (3) they are real, live Holy Spirit experiences. Faced with these alternatives, we would be wise to hear the advice of Gamaliel: "Be cautious in deciding what to do with these men. . . . For if this idea of theirs or its execution is of human origin, it will collapse; but if it is from God, you will never be able to put

them down, and you risk finding yourselves at war with God" (Acts 5:35-39).

4. Also we have to come to grips with what the Bible teaches about manifestations of Satanic power. Paul said, "Our fight is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers, against the authorities and potentes of this dark world, against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens" (Eph. 6:12). Did Satanic manifestations just go away when the Holy Spirit gifts did? My eyes and ears tell me they have not gone away. Witness the terrible revival of Satanic cults and interest in witchcraft, magic, spiritualism, and astrology. For many people, these are not idle amusements. Powerful things are happening! Am I to believe, then, that God has deserted me in battle, that he has left me inadequately equipped for warfare? No, I cannot believe this. Spiritual gifts were given "to equip God's people for work in his service," and the Giver would give these gifts to all who ask. Peter said, "For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God may call" (Acts 2:39). In the Great Commission Jesus said, "Faith will bring with it these miracles . . ." (Mk. 16:17f). And again Jesus said, "He who has faith in me will do what I am doing; and he will do greater things still, because I am going to the Father. . . . If you ask anything in my name I will do it" (John 14:12-14).

5. Then we hear it said, "But spiritual gifts were intended to 'confirm the word' (Mk. 16:20), and, since we have the Bible, we don't need this any more." In other words, we are to say to this world, "Believe in the God of the Bible—who doesn't do things like that any more." And they say to us, "How do we know he ever did?" You

can't say to a disbeliever, "Believe the Bible." He is a disbeliever precisely because he doesn't believe the Bible! So we still need confirmation. It is not sufficient to talk about the presence of the Holy Spirit *abstract* and the power of the Holy Spirit *invisible*. We have to talk about the presence and power of the Holy Spirit *manifest*. And this was and is the function of spiritual gifts, to bring the Gospel to this world, not in mere words, but in power (1 Thess. 1:5).

In summary, it is my opinion that the ar-

guments against the availability of spiritual gifts today do not hold water. I believe that spiritual gifts were given to the church—past and present—to build up the body of Christ and to equip God's people for work in his service. The church needs this as much now as ever. It seems to me that if we spent as much effort seeking the power of God through the Holy Spirit as we do avoiding it, we would be considerably better off in terms of the spiritual impact our little denomination makes on this world. □

RESPONSES TO CHARISMATA

NORMAN L. PARKS

In an institutionalized church which has been increasingly secularized (acculturated) and politicized (power-structured), the recent appearance of claimed "charismatic" gifts has had an unsettling impact. The response of the legalistic power structure predictably has been excommunication—a logical step for the guardians of orthodoxy who confine the Holy Spirit to the printed word.

Fraternal tolerance or open sympathy flourishes among many who belong to the pietistic strain which derived inspiration from the leadership of men like Boll, Harding, and Armstrong. The same may be said of many youth who have been "turned off" by a religious establishment marked by legalism and seeming indifference to appeals for a religion more relevant to current concerns.

Orthodox response to the new movement, which claims to be both experiential and Biblical, has been two-fold: (1) the refinement of theological arguments to the contrary and (2) the development of concrete steps to contain the "heresy." Already at college "lectureships" and "leadership" training convocations early symptoms are identified as uplifted hands, prayer circles, cottage dialogues, dimmed lights, street witnessing, and new-sound songs. It is recommended that no meetings outside the church building be held without official sanction of the "board of elders," that no group convene without an elder present and presiding, that no program be planned without being first submitted to an elder, and that outward symbols like hand-holding, dimmed lights, or upraised arms be publicly barred. Elders

are particularly warned to keep a vigilant eye on youth and to nip developments in the bud, thus making formal excommunication unnecessary.

The pulpit dogma directed against "pentacostalism" is largely simplistic and cap-suled, readily designed for easy assimilation. In this respect, it resembles the now badly frayed *psallo* doctrine, which for decades was held to have disposed of the instrumental music issue with finality and dispatch. It consists of two proof-text arguments, which may be used singly or combined, and which may be identified as the "completed-canon" theory and the "matured-church" theory. Both agree that "charismata" belonged to a brief historical period which might be called apostolic and are as dead as the apostles.

Lockean epistemology is strongly rooted in Church of Christ thought, indebted in part to the remarkable influence of Alexander Campbell. This manifests itself in the widespread view of religion as being largely a man-Book encounter. Religious knowledge is derived empirically, in the same way as any other knowledge. One encounters the Holy Spirit in the pages of the Book. Prior to the completion of the New Testament canon, according to the "completed-canon" theory, this was not the case—hence the role of spiritual gifts. But Paul clearly foretold that such gifts would end when "that which is perfect"—namely, the completed Bible—had come. This being the case, Pat Boone, regardless of his personal experience, is mistakenly or foolishly heretical.

This theory, based on 1 Corinthians 13:10, is pure conjecture and conflicts with the very text used to support it. Whatever perfection (*teleios*) Paul was writing about in this passage had to do with *men*, not a book. Moreover, could any Corinthian

Christian have conceivably understood the writer to refer to new Holy Scriptures, of which this letter was a part, to be assembled into an official canon at some point in the future, after which time spiritual gifts as they experienced them would suddenly cease? Or can we believe that Paul was knowingly or unknowingly prophesying this divine event? Or may we rationally resort to the medieval allegorical exegesis, holding that the statement embodied a lower truth for the instruction of his contemporaries and a higher truth for later generations? To ask these questions is to answer them in the negative.

The "mature church" theory also rests on 1 Corinthians 13:10, but proposes to establish the meaning from a reconstruction of Paul's pattern of thinking derived from the totality of Pauline writing. This is a more ambitious and more sophisticated approach, but may be reduced to its bare minimum of a surgical joining of the Corinthian text to Ephesians 4:13 to prove that the perfection Paul foresaw was the maturation of the church into a completely fused body of Jews and Gentiles. Indeed, it can be merged with the "completed-canon" theory into a grand climactic perfection of the Christian order armed with Holy Writ, united racially, and freed from "charismatic" gifts and the problems they produced.

The basic propositions of the "mature church" theory are: (1) Spiritual gifts had one purpose—to vindicate the fact that the Sacred Way was open equally to all people, Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free, by being poured out freely on all. (2) This evidence of God's intent and approval would ultimately persuade one and all that Christ's ecclesia was not a Jewish sect requiring submission to the Law, but a

universal union through one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. (3) It was Paul's distinctive mission to bring this glorious event about. (4) When this was consummated, the church would have arrived at maturity (perfection), and spiritual gifts, their function fulfilled, would cease, as Paul foretold in 1 Corinthians 13.

There are at least four undemonstrated assumptions of the "mature church" thesis: (1) "Charismatic" gifts served only one purpose (the union of Jews and Gentiles in a universal ecclesia), not a variety of purposes. (2) The maturation (perfection) of the church was collective, institutional, and confined to a single point in time and a single generation, not personal and continuous from generation to generation. (3) The "perfect" in 1 Corinthians 13:10 was limited and achievable here and now, as men struggled past the Slough of Despond and the Castle of Despair, not within the shining walls of the Celestial City which they viewed from Hill Difficult. (4) The magnificent outburst on love in Chapter 13 belongs exclusively to a unit on spiritual gifts in Chapters 12-14, and has no bearing on the problems discussed elsewhere in the letter.

The Greek term *teleios* (perfect) in 1 Corinthians 13:10 and Ephesians 4:13 does not appear adapted to either of the two theories. In common Greek the term connoted some far-off end. It implied potential toward a goal, a reaching out, and not a fulfillment. The true meaning has found its way into modern English in such terms as "telescope," "telephone," and "teleological reason," all suggesting far distance and ultimate end. Aristotle, the world's first immanentist, believed that every city carried within it the seed of the perfect (*teleios*) polis toward which it developed but never achieved. If

the *teleios* of 1 Corinthians 13:10 demanded fulfillment here and now, Jesus was an impossible Christ. In revealing God's will for man he said, "Be you perfect (*teleios*), even as your father in heaven is perfect (*teleios*)."
Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:19 was that the Gentile Christians might attain the "fullness of God himself," and in Ephesians 4:13 his measure of "mature (*teleios*) manhood" was "nothing less than the full stature of Christ." He reiterates the idea in Philippians 3:15 when he says, in effect, my ambition is the true goal of the spiritually adult: make it yours too. Concerning this goal the great apostle to the Gentiles said of himself, "I count not myself to have attained." Though the church for twenty centuries has had its heroes, the "full stature of Christ" remains the goal of each plodding Christian, and the righteousness which God imputes to each relieves us not one whit from this continuous straining forward.

Equally important to an understanding of 1 Corinthians 13 is the place this chapter occupies in the total letter. For twelve chapters Paul had been struggling with numerous practical problems in the Corinthian church and he had offered solutions to each. Seemingly wearied with item-by-item solutions, he suddenly turned to a universal panacea. The key to the love-chapter lies in the closing verse preceding it: "But I will show you a more excellent way." The more excellent way to end church cliques, abuse of the love feast, women praying in assembly in an indecorous way, man-wife sexual problems, leadership arrogance, gross immorality, and abuse of spiritual gifts was the way of love!

Paul's panegyric on the greatest of all enduring things was in part a personal testimony, including himself in the claim of imperfect knowledge and prophecy: "My

knowledge is now partial; then it will be whole, like God's knowledge of me." If anybody knew that the Jews were not the special favorites of God, it was Paul. If he already had this kind of "perfecting" knowledge, why include himself among those who knew "in part"? Moreover, whatever were the massive number of problems that confronted the Corinthian church, it does not appear that the effort to make Gentiles conform to a Jewish sect was one.

According to the theory under examination, all special gifts ceased with the arrival of the church at maturity, for they were phenomena of the "assembled" church. Presumably "tongues" could not be an ecstatic prayer language between the single individual and his God or a phenomenon in a small group. The same would be true of all other gifts since they served only a public function. This extremely strained assumption appears in conflict with Paul's own assertion. Having stated that the gift of love will "last forever," he declared in 1 Corinthians 14:1: "Put love first; but there are other gifts of the Spirit at which you should aim also . . ." Shall we doom, along with the gift of love, such other gifts as administration, prophecy, pastoring, teaching, evangelizing, and giving merely because at one stage in history the church reached a mature view of race relations? Then we need a restoration of these special gifts for the special benefit of the Southern church to convert it to black-white integration. One answer to this, of course, is that these gifts, excepting tongues, healing, and prophecy, continue in the church as "natural" phenomena, having lost their "charismatic" quality, but it is a contrived answer without a single proof-text.

To deal with "pentecostalism" in the assembly of God, people of the Book are go-

ing to have to do better than the canon and mature church theories. The use of theological scapels to carve out such theories may be interesting, but it leaves untouched the world of human experience with God. A man may be mistaken in his experience, but he can know God in no other way. If God's spirit does bear witness with man's spirit, and when His spirit and man's spirit reach a common wavelength, who is prepared to define the limits of the consequences? Testifying that the highest truth is experiential, R.C. Bell wrote of his venerated teacher, James A. Harding:

I slowly enough imbibed his enthusiasm for God's fatherly care of individual Christians, for Christ's brotherly sympathy and fellowship with them, and for the empowering Holy Spirit's residence in them. In other words, for Brother Harding's conception of Christianity as a "divine-human encounter," in which spiritual communion between God and man was enjoyed.

I gradually came to realize, however, that the spiritual power of the church was contingent upon the actual personal presence and working out of the triune God in and through Christians . . . to save the church from being merely a human organization with a formula to follow, a prayer to recite, and a dull, demagnetized program to render; with professional preachers in her pulpit mechanically saying dead words detached from living realities of which they spoke, dealing with trite moralizings, threadbare platitudes, and heartless preaching about the heart and passion of Christ.

This life-long professor of English was not minimizing the intellectual content of Christianity by affirming that religion in its most fundamental sense is feeling, passion, and aspiration. Who is to say what gifts God's spirit may confer on a loving heart and an ordered life? We who are content with the shore ought at least to refrain from erecting barriers to those who feel the irresistible call to the vast, unexplored hinterland of faith. □

HOW TO SUCCEED

PAT BOONE

NOTE: A few months ago a man wrote Pat Boone requesting a letter of advice for young sales people. We thought his reply, which is reprinted below with his permission, might be helpful to our readers.

You asked that I write a short letter of advice to those who intend to offer their personal services for sale. My advice would be practically worthless, but I would like to pass on the most valuable advice any of us will ever receive. This advice applies equally to the man whose aim is personal gain and to the man who really wants to serve others—or the man whose aims are a mixture of both of these.

The advice comes from Jesus the Son of God. In Mark the 12th chapter Jesus says, "The Lord our God is one Lord;

"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; *this is the first commandment.*

"And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

The point I make is this: many men try to be "good neighbors" and try to serve their fellow man—without obeying the first commandment to begin with! It is impossible to properly serve your fellow man, to truly "love your neighbor as yourself" until you have first surrendered yourself totally to the Lord your God. Be sure you get your priorities straight if your intention is to really offer personal service for the good of

your fellow man. First offer your personal services to the Lord of all, Jehovah God. He then, knowing the desire of your heart, will enable you to serve your fellow man in far richer dimension than you could otherwise have imagined, much less attained to.

If your desire is personal gain, and material goods, here again the advice of Jesus: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; *and all these things shall be added unto you*" (Matthew 6:33). I know that this advice is hard to accept; but it comes from the lips of the Son of God. If a man would do well, truly well, in this life, materially and spiritually, he must hear and obey this advice.

I have experienced the reality of it. I fall in the category of those whose aims are mixed. I have wanted personal security and material things and have wanted to serve my fellow man as well. The more I tried to do it on my own terms and setting my own priorities, the more I found myself settling into a confused quicksand of diminishing returns. There has been initial success which came almost accidentally it seemed, while my real desire was just to be used of God. Then the more I tried to hang on to material things and build upon them, and the less my desire was to serve God, the more the material things began to slide away and the less happiness they brought.

Now my priorities are rearranged; I do seek first and foremost to serve God and I do seek His righteousness. Incredibly, but predictably, the material things are flowing back almost of their own accord, and the opportunities to really serve my fellow man and to love my neighbor as myself are multiplying daily.

Dear friend, this is not my advice, it is the advice of the very Son of God Himself who made us. I have listened to it and tried my best to obey it. I recommend it to you.

From the Editor

IN THIS ISSUE

At the risk of tiring some of our readers whose interests are elsewhere, we are including in this issue two more articles on gifts of the Holy Spirit. Both refer either directly or indirectly to previously published articles by John McRay. Several who have communicated with us are eager for more material on this subject; and we thought it would be better to publish the articles as soon as possible after McRay's. (Incidentally, John recently accepted appointment as Research Associate at the Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem and will be on the staff of the dig at Caesarea beginning in mid-May.)

ABOUT THE WRITERS

Some readers have urged us to include biographical data with each article, while others think such information should not be included, feeling it will prejudice the reader. We will therefore please some, and perhaps disappoint others, by venturing a few comments about the writers in this issue.

Herbert Belle lives in Cincinnati and ministers to the Madisonville Church of Christ. Because of recent personal experiences, I have found his article especially stimulating, and I am sure it speaks to many of us. **Earl Martin** lives in West End, N.J. He attended York and Harding and holds an Ed.M. in Special Education from Rutgers. He teaches in that field and would like to know if there is anywhere in this country a Christian school for special children. **Norman Parks**, a recipient of Academic Freedom and Dis-

tinguished Professor awards, is Professor of Political Science and department head at Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro. He is a trustee of *Mission*. **Pat Boone** is more than a gifted entertainer; he is also "an eloquent man, powerful in his use of the scriptures." We had so many requests for his article "Spirit and Intellect" (January, 1971) that our supply quickly disappeared. He has given us much encouragement, and we consider his friendship a real boon. The letter on the preceding page illustrates how he uses every possible opportunity to tell the Good News.

IN THE JOURNALS

Warren Lewis really rattled the theological china with his article "Every Scripture Breathed of God Is Profitable" in the January issue of *Mission*. Gene Shelburne replied in March, and more responses are scheduled. Lanny Hunter's "The Three Hundred and One Cubit Ark" (December) and Dudley Lynch's "Soldiers of Christ Are Rising" (a critique of schools of preaching, February) are also must reading. Art Miley, president of *Mission's* board of trustees, reports splendid success in reaching new subscribers during the last year. We are happy that such an excellent journal is getting wider circulation.

Leroy Garrett tells "What I Believe About Situation Ethics" in the belated December issue of *Restoration Review*. It is one of the finest statements on the subject I have seen. Garrett preaches what we generally practice, although most of us lack his candor.

Reuel Lemmons made a good point in his recent editorial about exporting factional disputes to the mission fields ("Butcher Shop," *Firm Foundation*, April 11). What a terrible affliction for any person who has not grown up with these disputes to have to try to understand them! —HGL

INDEX TO VOLUME THREE (1971-1972)

Compiled by Don Reece

ARTICLES

- Belle, Herbert F., When God Says No, 170
Boone, Pat, How to Succeed, 181
Bryant, Charles A., Gentleness, The Forgotten Attribute, 149
Christensen, James L., An Open Letter to Disciples, Independents and Churches of Christ, 132
Cotham, Perry C., I Must Care, 3
The Ethics of Evangelistic Persuasion, 154
Crowder, Numa V., Preachers Quitting—A Step Toward Restoration, 33
Elkins, David, A Tale of Bricks, 117
In Search of the New Left, 58
Haymes, Don, The Eschatological Community, 9
Holden, Allen, Jr., Christ Is Proclaimed in Rock Music, 6
Church-related Schools—Examined and Re-examined, 28
Houtz, L.V., The Streams Are Being Put Together, 111
Hyde, David, Love, 97
Kemp, Pamela, How to Rear a Nonsectarian VIP, 21
Meditation on a Matzo, 148
Ledbetter, Hoy, Are We Silently Killing the Church? 2
Community in Worship, 47
Conformity, 74
Editor's Note, 18
God's Grace Is Good News, 147
He Is Our Peace, 90
The House Church, 164

- Integrity and the Holy Spirit, 26
Some Notes from the Editor, 134
The Search for Precise Terminology, 70
The Truth Squad, 128
You Can Help, 75
Lemley, F.L., Say What You Mean, 65
Slogans and Mottoes, 114
Lemon, Noel E., "Even My Hands and My Head, Lord," 19
Martin, Earl A., Spiritual Gifts and Maturity, 173
McRay, John, Spiritual Gifts Have Ceased, 138
Spiritual Gifts in First Century Worship, 106
That Which Is Perfect (1 Corinthians 13:10), 122
Who Is the Holy Spirit? Part One, The Trinity, 62
Who Is the Holy Spirit? Part Two, Person and Work, 82
Newsom, Lila, Another Look at Church-related Schools, 125
Owen, Jerry, Experiences With Jesus, 32
Parks, Norman L., Responses to Charismata, 177
Reece, Don, Christmas for the Christian—Its Meaning and Challenge, 98
How Sweet the Sound, 35
"Wake the Town and Tell the People," 78
Sanderson, Steven, Be Full of Joy Now, 42
Smith, John, To Whom Shall We Go? 51
Stelding, Charles, Taught by God to Love, 94
Thoroman, Dean, Because I Am Free . . . , 76
Watts, Craig M., Loneliness and Love, 100
The Challenge to Chance It, 45
The Galatian Heresy — Revised and Renewed, 144
Wilson, Mike, Observations on "Church Renewal," 16
Yearwood, Ray, Who Will Put the Streams Together? 52

POETRY

- Reece, Don, Christmas and the New Year—1972, 103
Christmas in Babylon, 102
Christmas in the Ghettoes, 102
Christmas Snow, 102
Hope for the New Year—1972, 103
Symbols, 103
Romero, Judy, I'm Coming, Jesus, 131
Thoroman, Dean, Fences, Boxes, and Jails, 117
Tomlinson, John, Love, 61
Watts, Craig M., Divine Proof, 39
Wheeler, Tom, Yet There Is Life, 23

REVIEWS

- Ledbetter, Hoy, *Thoughts on Unity*, 13
Thoroman, Dean, *Global Village; Maranatha*, 14

SONGS

- Owen, Jean, Sweet Mystery, 96

LETTERS (by subject)

- Church, Silently Killing the:* Ralph Sinclair, 55
Church-related Schools: Don Haymes, 167
Church Renewal: Cecil Corkren, Mrs. E.F. Huff, Philip Bates, Lance Anderson, 15
Conformity: Faye Bell, 119; Name Withheld, 166
Free, Because I Am: Faye Bell, 119
Holy Spirit: Norman L. Parks, Ralph M. Sinclair, Virgil W. Thompson, 71; Jere D. McWinn, Douglas F. Parsons, 119; Harry Pratt, 151; Susan Swensen, 166. See also *Tongues and Baptism*.
Legalism: J. William Hartline, La Rita Miller, 15
Miscellaneous: 39, 55, 119, 135, 151, 166-167
Nonsectarian VIP: Becky Smith, Jerrie Johnson, Van Ledbetter, 55
Preachers Quitting: Preacher's Teenage Daughter, 119
Rock Music: August Spies, Bob Cooke, 54
Tongues and Baptism: Anonymous, 118; Don Reece, 150. See also *Holy Spirit*.

NEWS

- ACC Preacher Workshop, 87
The Hartford Forum, 87