

Pentecostalism – A Foe of the Reformed Faith

By Rev. Wayne Bekkering

In recent years two strange things have happened in many reformed communities. The first is that Pentecostal Prayer Meetings are being held, and Charismatic groups are sponsoring bible studies and Singing programs. Secondly, and stranger still, is the fact that these activities get the support of many Reformed people, if not their churches as well.

Pentecostalism has a face that is warm and friendly. It offers one a richer, fuller more victorious spiritual life. It comes with Bible in hand, claiming to be “Bible believing”. But if one presses the claim of Pentecostalism with the objective revelation of God’s Word, and the sound and sane witness of the Reformed faith embodied in the “Reformed Confessions” then he will unmask it and find that underneath is an ugly enemy of God’s truth.

Pentecostalism is a great foe of the Reformed faith. The Reformed believer must not be deceived by its pious claims. Pentecostalism is empty and groundless. Human experience and feeling—that is the standard for Pentecostalism. The Reformed believer knows that if he is going to rely on his own experience and feeling then he is going to be very miserable and comfortless.

The Word of God is filled with comfort for the child of God. The Heidelberg Catechism distills out of the Holy Scripture the very heart of christian comfort in Lord’s Day 1: Question 1. What is thy only comfort in life and death? Answer. That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with his precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him. The second question asks: How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest live and die happily? The answer: Three; the first, how great my sins and miseries are; the second, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries; the third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance.

In brief we have here the standard for christian life and experience. My sins, deliverance from my sins, and a walk of gratitude to God for such deliverance. This solid comfort sharply contrasts Pentecostalism’s superficial and subjective claim of a richer spiritual life. It points to the bedrock of comfort, Jesus Christ and His precious blood.

This comfort belongs to the believer through God’s gift of faith. But is faith in Jesus Christ enough in order to have all that we need for the assurance of comfort and victory? What is true faith? The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 7 gives this beautiful answer: True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Spirit works by the gospel, in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.

Faith in Jesus Christ is not enough for Pentecostalism. It needs more. It needs a “second baptism in the Holy Spirit”. This “second baptism in or with the Holy Spirit” supposedly enables one to live a fuller, richer life. He is enabled to speak in tongues, to effect miraculous healings and to experience the spiritual ecstasy of direct contact with God.

Is this what the Reformed believer ought to expect and look for as the fruit of the Spirit? “What doest thou believe concerning the Holy Spirit?”, the Reformed fathers asked in Lord’s Day 20 of the Heidelberg Catechism. The answer is twofold; “First, that he is true and co-eternal God with the Father and the Son; secondly, that he is also given to me, to make me by a true faith, partaker of Christ and all his benefits, that he may comfort me and abide with me forever.”

Notice that the Catechism has nothing of the mystical or experience-oriented idea of the Holy Spirit that Pentecostalism emphasizes, but the solid truth of the Word of God.

Pentecostalism is fundamentally man centered and not God glorifying, and does violence to the doctrine of Holy Scripture. It adds to and takes away from the Word of God. Pentecostalism adds to the Scripture by seeking direct revelation of God apart from the Bible. It is very common to hear the Pentecostals say, "God told me to do this or that; to go here or there." That is patent proof of a false prophet. The writings of the Pentecostal leaders are considered by many Pentecostals to be on a par with the Bible. Pentecostalism takes away from God's Word by denying or ignoring clear Scriptural teaching. God says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." (Eph. 2:8) Pentecostalism says, "You need more." The Scriptures emphasize that salvation is freely of God's grace, but Pentecostalism emphasizes all that man can do and must do. When the truth of Scripture is distorted then God is not honored. "Therefore, we reject with all our hearts, whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have taught us, saying, Try the spirits whether they are of God. Likewise, if there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house." (Belgic Confession, art. 7)

We take the position that Pentecostalism is dishonoring to God, but someone will object that you always hear them saying, "Praise the Lord." Yes, one hears them saying, "Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord" until it makes one sick. Sick, because one soon gets the distinct impression that this senseless repetition is taking God's holy name in vain.

The Pentecostal doctrine of healing is false. Their basis is that all sickness is of the Devil, and, therefore, bad. By this teaching they deny God's sovereign control over all things. They posit a dualism in the universe, i.e., some power outside of God. The truth is that "... all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28) This means that even seemingly bad things work for the good of God's people. God is a gracious Father to His people in Christ Jesus, and provides them with all things necessary for soul and body, and further, He makes whatever evil He sends them, in this valley of tears turn out to their advantage. For He is able to do it, being Almighty God, and willing being a faithful Father. (Lord's Day 9)

The Word of God commands us to try the spirits. "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) This means that the man of God, who knows the Scripture is able to do this. When the Bible is taught and preached purely then the believer is firmly grounded upon the unshakable foundation of the truth. When the spirits come, as they do in our day also, then the Reformed man will be able to prove them by the infallible standard. The man who knows the Reformed faith will not be deceived by Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism has nothing to offer to the Reformed believer that he does not already possess. He walks before God in faith and good works. "But what are good works? Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to his glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations or the institutions of men." (Lord's Day 33)

Pentecostalism does not flourish among those who know the truth, and are firmly grounded in the Reformed faith. Rather Pentecostalism flourishes among those who are ignorant of the truth. Pentecostalism has appeal to those who have itching ears, and will not endure sound doctrine. Pentecostalism sweeps away those who have forsaken the foundation of the truth, and are tossed to and fro, and are carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. (Eph. 4:14)

In our day we see Reformed people being attracted toward the heresy of Pentecostalism and God explains through Hosea, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children." (Hosea 4:6) Lack of the knowledge of the Reformed truth carries away Reformed church members, and their children.

"A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (Jer. 5:30, 31) The

Reformed man looks about, and sees the very foundations of the truth shaking. "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Ps. 11:3)

The calling of every Reformed man and every Reformed church is, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (II Tim. 4:2-4) Does your church preach the Word? Does it preach the true doctrine of the gospel once for all delivered to the saints? Does it preach the doctrine set forth in the Scripture and embodied in the Reformed Confessions? If your answer is "No" then you have a serious responsibility for yourself and your children to seek and find the pure preaching of the Word.

If after you have tried to find the true preaching, but cannot; do not give up in despair. The matter is too important. The spiritual health of your own soul and the souls of your children is at stake.

If you need help in this important matter the churches who send out these pamphlets stand ready to preach the Word wherever God opens the door.