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GORDON FEE AND THE CHALLENGE TO PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS: 30 YEARS LATER

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When one thinks of Gordon Fee, hermeneutics may come to mind as easily as New Testament studies *per se*, for throughout his career he has engaged the problems of interpretation and exegesis as readily as he has specific issues of biblical theology. For Pentecostals, most significant have been his efforts to spark discussion on the hermeneutics behind two of Pentecostalism's most cherished doctrines; subsequence and initial evidence. 2002 marks the 30th anniversary of this debate, essentially begun by Fee with a 1972¹ presentation on historical precedent. This paper seeks to first examine Fee's contribution to the discussion, and then survey the Pentecostal response.

When assessing Fee's understanding of a given subject, we must first delve into the hermeneutical guidelines he has set for himself. It will become apparent that with Fee, it is somewhat impossible to separate his theology from his hermeneutics, for in each instance, his theological stance has come from following his own interpretive principles.

General Hermeneutical Principles of Gordon Fee

Gordon Fee has been influenced by many of the recent trends in hermeneutics, from the work of Ricouer² to Thiselton³. While preferring the approach of the older historical-critical method, and the focus on authorial intent by Hirsch⁴, his work nonetheless shows an awareness of the variety of modern approaches to hermeneutics, such as the emphasis on relevance in the New Hermeneutic. His willingness and ability to apply these hermeneutical approaches to Pentecostalism has been a hallmark of his work. He declares that "one does nothing more important in the formal training for Christian ministry than to wrestle with hermeneutics: the meaning and application of Scripture."⁵

The Inherent Ambiguity of Scripture - A Hermeneutical Challenge

Fee maintains that the specific hermeneutical issues faced by evangelicalism lie within its doctrine of Inspiration. He notes that the evangelical commitment to see Scripture as *both* divine and human creates its own set of tensions. The intersection of the divine with the human produces far more ambiguities than some feel comfortable with.

The buck stops there, at the text and its intent, as to what is infallible. God did not choose to give us a series of timeless, non-culture-bound theological propositions to be believed and imperatives to be obeyed. Rather he chose to speak His eternal Word *this* way, in historically particular circumstances and in every kind of literary genre. God Himself, by the very way he gave us this Word, locked in the ambiguity.⁶

In the debate between the natural unity and diversity of the text, Fee opts for what he terms the "radical middle". Our doctrine of Inspiration suggests that Scripture inherently contains ambiguity, accommodation, and diversity, each to varying degrees. Since God chose to give us His Word in this manner, our task is to hold each end of the spectrum - historical particularity and eternity - with equal vigor. While we cannot generate the absolute certainly so sought by the fundamentalists, we can nonetheless move towards a higher level of commonality. The way towards this higher level is found at the crucial point of authorial intentionality - both human and divine. The task of the exegete and theologian is to discover and hear the Word in terms of God's original intent. Only then may we begin to ascertain its meaning for our own historical setting.⁷

The Crucial Issue - Authorial Intentionality

Fee details why authorial intent is such a crucial issue, though it causes him the greatest problems when dealing with Pentecostal distinctives, and generates the most tension among evangelicals. An insistence on authorial intentionality provides several benefits. It serves as a corrective, limiting the possible meanings a text might be given.⁸

Authorial intent gives us a way forward to construct our theologies in a truly biblical fashion. It will teach us that apparent contradictions in the text need not always be resolved or harmonized, but may stand together in healthy tension. Unity is found in the diversity.⁹

Intentionality & Particularity/Eternality

Fee does not refrain from tackling perhaps the most difficult hermeneutical issue of all. The question is: Since God spoke His Word in historically particular circumstances, *how much of the particularity itself* is a part of the *eternal Word*? If the texts call us to practice hospitality, do we agree that washing feet (the particular) is a part of the eternal (showing hospitality)? It is obvious from the outset that this question is one of the harder for which to proscribe systematic solutions.

When faced with passages in Acts where the eternity of the particulars is difficult to determine, Fee holds to what he believes is the purpose and overall point of the passage. Many hermeneutical difficulties lie in the manner with which one acknowledges - or fails to acknowledge - the immense role that tradition in terms of denominational heritage, and presuppositions, play in the interpretation of Scripture.¹⁰ Fee believes the selectivity of hermeneutics is for the most part related to tradition, not to exegesis. Tradition may lead us to ask specific questions of the text, which are not otherwise legitimate. These questions then lead us towards the kind of hermeneutical posture to which we are predisposed. For example, to go to the text of Acts asking, "What is the evidence of Spirit-baptism?" may be asking a question of the text that it was not written to answer. The answer found, of course, can scarcely be the proper one.¹¹

Summary

Fee opts for the radical middle in the hermeneutical challenge associated with an inherent ambiguity of Scripture. This middle ground is the determination of authorial

intent - both human and Divine. With this is his insistence on a Spirit-centered approach to New Testament imperatives, and a constant awareness of the impact of tradition upon one's hermeneutics. These three principles are the foundation for Fee's reflection on Pentecostal hermeneutics and theology.

Hermeneutics and Pentecostal Theology

With Fee's hermeneutical principles in hand, we are now prepared to examine his theology on Spirit-baptism, particularly as it relates to his own denomination, the Assemblies of God. For though Fee claims to be Pentecostal in every regard, he nonetheless takes considerable exception to the stated form of two of their key (some would argue distinctive) doctrines: the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a subsequent act following conversion; and the declaration that the evidence of such baptism is speaking in tongues.¹²

Hermeneutics and Historical Precedent

Pentecostals admit to basing their theology of subsequence and initial evidence on historical precedent as found in Acts. With specific regard to Pentecostal theology, we must take the genre of the book seriously. Acts is historical narrative, and it was within this arena that much of the scholarly debate with Pentecostalism first took place. Many have argued that one must distinguish between *didactic* and *historical* portions of Scripture, and that the didactic portions have primary importance for the formation of Christian doctrine.¹³ It has been declared that what is clearly descriptive history in Acts must not be translated into normative experiences for the ongoing church.¹⁴ Fee does not deny that theology abounds in Luke's work. Rather, he simply pleads for one to remember that Luke cast his theology in historical narrative, and for anyone concerned

with good hermeneutics, this must be taken seriously.¹⁵ The key to determining what may be didactic within a framework of historical narrative is, for Fee, the role of authorial intent.

Although Luke's "broader intent" may be a moot point for some, it is a defensible hypothesis that he was trying to show how the church emerged as a chiefly Gentile, worldwide phenomenon from its origins as a Jerusalem-based, Judaism-oriented sect of Jewish believers, and how the Holy Spirit was ultimately responsible for this phenomenon of universal salvation based on grace alone.¹⁶

Three Key Principles

Fee outlines three specific principles regarding hermeneutics and historical narrative. 1) Authorial intent is the chief factor in determining normative values from narratives. 2) That which is incidental to the primary intent of a narrative cannot have the same didactic value as the intended teaching, though it may provide insight into the author's theology. 3) For historical precedent to have normative value, it must be demonstrated that such was the specific intent of the author. If the author intended to establish precedent, then such should be regarded as normative.¹⁷ As anyone familiar with Pentecostal hermeneutics and theology will quickly realize, the preceding "guidelines" commence the challenge of the Pentecostal position for subsequence and initial evidence, for both are based on the assumption that Luke intended to teach these doctrines from the related narratives in Acts. Pentecostals have responded forcefully, yet creatively, to Fee's guidelines. Their response is discussed in detail below.

Categories of Christian Theology

In general, Fee believes Christian theology may be divided into three (or four)¹⁸ categories: 1) Christian theology (what Christians believe); 2) Christian ethics (how Christians ought to behave); and 3) Christian experience or practice (what Christians do in terms of religious practices). These must be further defined in terms of primary and

secondary importance, depending on whether they are derived from imperatives, or incidentally by analogy or precedent.¹⁹ Astutely, he notes that almost everything Christians derive from Scripture by way of precedent is in the third category, Christian experience or practice, and always at the secondary level. This is not to say that secondary statements are unimportant; we simply cannot treat them as identical to primary statements based upon clear imperatives.²⁰

Fee wades further into the debate with his fellow Pentecostals:

The doctrine of a baptism in the Holy Spirit as subsequent to conversion and accompanied by tongues seems to belong to the secondary level of doctrinal statements in my third category. That believers are to be (or keep being) filled with the Spirit, that they are to walk and live in the Spirit is at the primary level and normative. When and how one enters the dimension of Christian experience, although not unimportant, is not of the same "normative" quality, because the "when and how" is based solely on precedent and/or analogy.²¹

Specific Principles Regarding Historical Precedent

With these general observations and principles in view, he offers the following specific principles for the use of historical precedent.²²

1) The use of historical precedent as an analogy by which to establish a norm is never valid in itself. Such a process (drawing universal norms from particular events) produces a *non sequitur* and is therefore irrelevant.

2) Although it may not have been the author's primary purpose, historical narratives do have illustrative and, sometimes, "pattern" value. It should be noted, however, that especially in cases where the precedent justifies a present action, that the precedent does not establish a norm for specific action. A caveat is in order here: for a biblical precedent to justify a present action, the principle of the action must be taught elsewhere, where it is the primary intent so to teach.

3) In matters of Christian experience, and even more so of Christian practice, biblical precedents may be regarded as repeatable patterns - even if they are not to be regarded as normative.²³

Fee directly engages Pentecostal distinctives and historical precedent. He maintains that one is unable to prove authorial intent in the "patterns" of Pentecost,

Samaria, Paul, and Ephesus. It is simply not possible to show that Luke *intended* to teach an experience of the Spirit as subsequent to conversion.²⁴ For Luke, the real evidence of Christian experience was the reception of the Spirit. What he is teaching in this narrative is the validation by the Jerusalem leaders of the spread of Christianity beyond Jerusalem.²⁵

The Essence of Pentecostalism

Upon discovering that Gordon Fee does not subscribe to either subsequence or initial evidence as stated by his denomination,²⁶ the twin doctrines cherished by many Pentecostals as the true doctrinal essence of the movement, one may be drawn to inquire as to exactly *how* Dr. Fee still considers himself a Pentecostal? The answer lies essentially in Fee's definition of the essence of Pentecostalism and the Pentecostal experience.²⁷ His attempt to articulate his understanding of what it means to be Pentecostal demonstrates his own strong commitment to Pentecostalism:

In thus arguing, as a New Testament scholar, against some cherished Pentecostal interpretations, I have in no sense abandoned what is essential to Pentecostalism. I have only tried to point out some inherent flaws in some of our historic understanding of texts. The essential matter, after all, is neither subsequence, nor tongues, but the Spirit himself as a dynamic, empowering presence; and there seems to me to be little question that our way of initiation in that - through an experience of Spirit-baptism - has biblical validity. Whether all *must* go that route seem to me to be more moot; but in any case, the Pentecostal experience itself can be defended on exegetical grounds as a thoroughly biblical phenomenon.²⁸

Summary

Based on Fee's principles, Pentecostals may say the following about their experience. In the New Testament, the presence of the Spirit was the chief element in Christian conversion and in the Christian life. In Acts, as well as in Paul's churches, the Spirit's presence involved a charismatic dimension normally associated with the reception

of the Spirit. Although speaking in tongues may *not* have been normative, it *was* normally expected to accompany Spirit-baptism in the early church. Modern believers, many of whom have not experienced a charismatic dimension to their conversion, may still (on the basis of the New Testament pattern), experience such a dimension of Christian life. This includes speaking in tongues, for it was the repeated expression of the dynamic dimension of the coming of the Spirit. If the Pentecostal may not say one *must* speak in tongues, the Pentecostal may surely say, why *not* speak in tongues? It does have repeated biblical precedent, it did have evidential value at Cornelius' household (Acts 10:45-46), and - in spite of much that has been written to the contrary - it does have value both for the edification of the believer (I Cor 14:2-4) and, with interpretation, for the edification of the church (I Cor 14:5, 26-28).²⁹

The unfortunate omission of this valid, biblical dimension of Christian life from the life of the church is the backdrop against which we must understand the Pentecostal movement, deeply unsatisfied with life in Christ without life in the Spirit. Though their timing may have been off, what they sought to recapture for the church was not.

That this experience was for them usually a separate experience in the Holy Spirit and subsequent to their conversion is in itself probably irrelevant. Given their place in the history of the church, how else might it have happened? Thus the Pentecostal should probably not make a virtue out of necessity. At the same time, neither should others deny the validity of such experience on biblical grounds, unless, as some do, they wish to deny the reality of such an empowering dimension of life in the Spirit altogether. But such a denial, I would argue, is actually an exegeting *not* of the biblical texts but of one's own experience in this later point in church history and a making of that experience normative. I for one like the biblical norm better; at this point the Pentecostals have the New Testament clearly on their side.³⁰

The Pentecostal Response

As might be expected, Pentecostal scholars have responded definitively to the hermeneutical and theological challenges put forward by Fee. While many Pentecostals have written on the topic, only three scholars have taken Fee's challenge seriously and provided appropriate responses: William Menzies, long-time Pentecostal scholar and Professor; Roger Stronstad, Academic Dean at Western Pentecostal Bible College (Clayburn, B.C.); and Robert P. Menzies, Professor at the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (Baguio, Philippines). In each section, Fee is given opportunity to respond to his critics.³¹ Three issues in particular have been raised: 1) authorial intent and the essence of Pentecostalism; 2) Fee's categories of Christian theology; and 3) historical precedent.

Authorial Intent and the Essence of Pentecostalism

That Luke had specific theological intentions when writing his narratives is highly likely. Determining what his intent might have been remains one of the biggest issues separating Fee and other Pentecostal scholars. Fee's contention is that genre seriously affects biblical interpretation, and further, when narratives are used to derive theology, specific authorial intent must be shown. He does not therefore allow the critical passages of Acts to be used to establish normative patterns. Pentecostals recognize this, and get straight to the point:

If one can demonstrate that Luke did not intend to convey a theological message by his narratives, he has at that point effectively undercut the possibility of a clear Pentecostal theology. Pentecostal theology is dependent on a hermeneutical methodology which takes seriously the theological intention of Luke. Acts must be more than an interesting glimpse into the life of the early church. It must be more than mere historical resource. Since the only access we have to Spirit-baptism initiation experiences are mediated to us through the descriptive mode, and that limited to Acts, we are heavily indebted to Luke-as-theologian.³²

Fee's hermeneutics raise several important questions. Who determines authorial intent: Pentecostals or non-Pentecostals? Who determines what is primary and what is secondary? Who is authorized to adjudicate between Pentecostals and their opponents as to whether or not Luke may teach 20th century Christians about their experience of the Holy Spirit? Many Pentecostals believe Fee's hermeneutics muzzle the important passages of Acts, leaving him in no position to answer the above questions. Though Fee's work challenges the tendency to allegorize, moralize, and/or spiritualize historical narratives, as a whole it must be rejected.³³

In focusing on Luke's theological intent, Fee consistently employs a basic presupposition: in the New Testament, the presence of the Spirit was the chief element in Christian conversion. Whereas others addressed Fee on his hermeneutical principles *per se*, Robert Menzies challenges the notion that Luke shares Paul's pneumatological emphasis in his writings on the Spirit's function. If Luke's basic intent in relating the activities of the Spirit is charismatic and not soteriological, the Pentecostal case concerning authorial intent in historical narratives is much stronger.

Fee's work played an important role in the theological development of Pentecostalism since the 1970's. He clearly argued that Pentecostalism could no longer rely on 19th century interpretive methods. But Menzies maintains that this message is no longer relevant. Pentecostals have replaced their outdated hermeneutics with approaches that speak the modern hermeneutical language. Fee's critique of Pentecostal hermeneutics, updated in 1991, now fails to address today's crucial question: "Does Luke, in a manner similar to Paul, present the Spirit as the source of new covenant existence?"³⁴ For Menzies the answer is "No."

I would suggest that the pneumatologies of Luke and Paul are different but compatible; and the difference should not be blurred, for both perspectives offer valuable insight into the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit. Clearly Paul has the more developed view, for he sees the full richness of the Spirit's work. . . . Paul attests to both the soteriological and the prophetic (as well as

charismatic) dimensions of the Spirit's work. Luke's perspective is less developed and more limited. He bears witness solely to the prophetic dimension of the Spirit's work, and thus he gives us a glimpse of only a part of Paul's fuller view. Nevertheless, Luke, like Paul, has an important contribution to make. He calls us to recognize that the church, by virtue of its reception of the Pentecostal gift, is a prophetic community empowered for a missionary task. In short, not only are the pneumatological perspectives of Paul and Luke compatible, they are complementary: both represent important contributions to a holistic and harmonious biblical theology of the Spirit.³⁵

For Menzies, Luke's intent is clearly subordinate to the question raised above. If his description of a 'distinctive' pneumatology for Luke is correct, then Luke's intent to teach a Spirit-baptism as distinct from conversion is, he believes, easily demonstrated. "One need only establish that Luke's narrative was designed to encourage every Christian to receive the Pentecostal gift. And, since Luke highlights Pentecost as a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy concerning an outpouring of the Spirit upon 'all flesh' (Acts 2:17-21), this appears to be self-evident."³⁶

Finally, Fee has been charged with 'selling out' the essentials of Pentecostalism. After all, one who subscribes neither to the stated doctrines of subsequence nor initial evidence, and yet claims to be a Pentecostal, will face some disbelief. Some suggest Fee has simply reached for a hermeneutic acceptable to the evangelical world. His reluctance to employ the concept of *normative* when describing charismatic phenomena associated with Spirit baptism leaves one with an 'impoverished' Pentecostal theology. "The use of *normal* in this connection is indeed compatible with the views of some contemporary evangelicals, but it is too weak to be made into a doctrine. Repeatability is hardly a preachable item."³⁷

The obvious result of this reductionism is a willingness to permit *repeatability* of patterns, but not *normativity*. Hence, speaking in tongues associated with Spirit baptism may be *normal*, and even desirable, possibly, but it cannot be proclaimed as a *normative* model. Hence one is sorely pressed on exegetical grounds . . . if this be true, to establish a clear doctrine of either subsequence or tongues as accompanying Spirit baptism. This reductionist point of view . . . is somewhat short of a thoroughgoing Pentecostal theology [and] is apparently a position held today by a number of evangelicals.³⁸

Fee's belief that his proposals should not impact the essentials of Pentecostalism has also come under fire. To some, Fee's message is theologically indistinguishable from that of James Dunn³⁹. His repudiation of Pentecostal theology leaves him with nothing new to offer to the theological world, and challenges the Pentecostal understanding of their own Spirit-baptism experience at its deepest level. Fee agrees with most non-Pentecostals in affirming that Spirit-baptism is equated with conversion, although he does insist that the charismatic, empowering dimension is lacking, and should be restored. For Robert Menzies, this still undercuts crucial aspects of Pentecostal theology:

When the Pentecostal gift is confused with conversion, [the] missiological (and I would add, Lukan) focus is lost.

The bottom line is this: If Fee is right, Pentecostals can no longer proclaim an enabling of the Spirit which is distinct from conversion and available to every believer, at least not with the same sense of expectation, nor can Pentecostals maintain that the principal purpose of this gift is to grant power for the task of mission. To sum up, the doctrine of subsequence articulates a conviction crucial for Pentecostal theology and practice: Spirit-baptism, in the Pentecostal sense, is distinct from . . . conversion. This conviction, I would add, is integral to Pentecostalism's continued sense of expectation and effectiveness in mission.⁴⁰

*Fee's Response*⁴¹

Fee has responded with some clarification. He concurs on the charismatic nature of Luke's writings, and that his primary concern was charismatic and not soteriological. It is not 'theology' in the larger sense that concerns him when discussing Acts, but the concept of 'didactic' as it is related to the question of establishing Christian norms. He believes that part of the problem lies in his usage of 'norms' and 'normative.' By 'normal', Fee understands that this is the way it was in the early church. The dynamic, empowering dimension of life in the Spirit was a normal, expected, recurring experience. Precisely because it was so 'normal', it was presupposed; there was no compulsion to talk about it at every turn. By 'normative', however, he means something that must be

adhered to by all Christians at all times and in all places, if they are truly obedient to God's word. It becomes a matter of obedience, no questions asked.⁴²

He acknowledges the concern that this transition, however, from 'normative' to 'normal' waters down the Pentecostal position. Fee disagrees with the assertion that "Repeatability is hardly a preachable item."⁴³ He points to the millions of believers worldwide who have and are experiencing the Pentecostal reality of dynamic life in the Spirit, many of whom have never heard of subsequence or initial evidence.⁴⁴ He concludes:

Precisely because I understand this dimension of life in the Spirit to be the New Testament norm, I think it is repeatable, and should be so, as the norm of the later church. Where I would tend to disagree with my tradition in the articulation of this norm is when they use language that seem more obligatory to me than I find in the New Testament documents themselves.⁴⁵

Categories of Christian Theology

Roger Stronstad, in particular, has taken issue with Fee's three-fold classification of doctrinal statements: 1) Christian theology (what Christians believe); 2) Christian ethics (how Christians ought to behave); 3) Christian experience or practice (what Christians do in terms of religious practices). He believes that Fee is guilty of "a confusion of categories" when he places the experience of Spirit baptism, and the Pentecostal explanation of it, into the third category. According to Stronstad, Spirit-baptism is not something Christians 'do'; rather, it is an experience. The third category ought to be spiritual experience, with a fourth category needed for Christian practice. The essence of this argument is the hope that the hermeneutics appropriate for Christian practice somehow do not apply to Christian experience. By challenging the placement of Spirit-baptism into Fee's third category, Stronstad hopes to by-pass the more difficult of his hermeneutical guidelines. Thus Fee's entire hermeneutical scheme, suggested for the

category of Christian practice, may not apply to the Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit-baptism.

As a spiritual experience it is akin to, say, the spiritual experience of being born again. Both the experiences of Spirit-baptism and of being born again are experiences in which God causes something to happen to the person. In neither case is it something that Christians do. . . . Consequently, the principles which apply to [the category of]. . . Christian practice, are irrelevant for this new category, spiritual experience.⁴⁶

Fee's Response

Fee's use of three and not four categories, was "more descriptive than definite." While Stronstad correctly observed that there is a fundamental difference in spiritual experience and Christian practice, Fee acknowledges he put them together because he perceived the hermeneutical issues to be very similar for each category. Whether or not this is actually true remains open for further examination and dialogue. Fee admits that he might well be wrong in that assumption. His main concern was not to establish a hermeneutical axiom, but to make the hermeneutical observation that most differences among Christians occur in this third (and fourth) category.⁴⁷ Neither Fee nor Stronstad have actually examined what differences, if any, occur hermeneutically between the two categories.

The Merits of Historical Precedent

Fee maintains that Pentecostals employ the key passages in Acts on the basis of historical precedent alone. For historical precedent to function with didactic merit, Fee argues it must be taught elsewhere in scripture. Herein lies the sore spot between most

Pentecostal scholars and Fee. No other part of scripture teaches subsequence or initial evidence. Thus, for Pentecostals, Fee has undercut their theology at the root.

Ultimately, this methodology means that Jesus, or Paul, or Peter, or John, may instruct the contemporary Christian, but that Luke, because he chose to write historical narrative, neither intended to instruct the church nor will be allowed to instruct the contemporary church, whatever his intention might or might not have been.

It is a monumental irony that Luke, the author of 25 percent of the New Testament, is allowed no independent status among the recognized teachers in the New Testament by Reformed hermeneutics and so-called scientific exegesis.⁴⁸

Robert Menzies accurately captures the essence of Fee's dilemma concerning how the normative aspects of Luke's narrative may be clearly identified. "Unless we are prepared to choose church leaders by the casting of lots, or are willing to encourage church members to sell all of their possessions, we cannot simply assume that a particular historical narrative provides the basis for normative theology."⁴⁹ Fee's concern is thus legitimate. His solution is to tie historical precedent to authorial intent. On the basis of this, Fee has rejected the Pentecostal formulation of their theology, though he maintains the validity of their experience. The younger Menzies agrees with Fee on this point and has instead focused his attention on the charismatic theology of Luke, with the promotion of the charismatic thus intrinsically implied in any discussion of Lukan intent.

Others take a different approach, suggesting that the hermeneutical 'rules' laid out by Fee border on the arbitrary and that care must be exercised to avoid limiting the theological enterprise.⁵⁰ Stronstad argues that Fee's three principles for the use of historical precedent are "fundamentally flawed." In particular, he takes issue with the first of the principles⁵¹, and gives three examples from Acts illustrating the use of historical precedent by the early church for a variety of purposes, including the establishment of norms.

The first biblical example is at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He anticipates the skepticism of the people when He visits Nazareth, and declares that "No prophet is welcome in his hometown." (Luke 4:24). He then appeals to Elijah (Luke 4:25-26) and Elisha (Luke 4:27), both of whom turned away from their own community to minister to others. Thus, on the basis of the historical precedent of Elijah and Elisha, Jesus left Nazareth and went down to Capernaum (Luke 4:30). Luke also reports Jesus' use of historical precedent when the disciples are charged with Sabbath violations, namely, the picking and eating of wheat on the Sabbath (Luke 6:2). Jesus defends His disciples on the precedent set by David when he and his companions were hungry and ate the consecrated bread, lawful only for the priests (Luke 6:4). Historical precedent is used at the so-called Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, when the Apostles were deciding the fate of Gentile Christians. On the basis of Peter's vision concerning the Gentiles, the Apostles decide that God's purpose is met in making the Gentiles His people. Further, their decision to refrain from insisting upon Gentile circumcision, establishes a normative doctrine in the church.⁵²

Despite his arguments against the validity of Fee's dictums, Stronstad recognizes his predicament:

The impasse in this debate is that whereas it is possible to expose the flaws in Fee's hermeneutic of historical precedent, it is impossible to prove that there is a biblical precedent for historical precedent. In other words, although it is possible to demonstrate that there are examples in the Book of Acts where the church used historical precedent to establish a norm, it is impossible to prove that Luke intended for his readers to interpret his narratives by the same principle. It is impossible to prove this because Luke never tells his readers to do this.⁵³

Stronstad concludes that the validity of the use of biblical precedent must either commend itself as self-evident, or it does not. Pentecostals operate on a hermeneutic which affirms that normative beliefs and practices may properly be derived from narratives on the basis of historical precedent. Though often criticized for this approach,

other New Testament scholars tacitly agree.⁵⁴ The real issue for Stronstad then, is not whether Pentecostals are justified in using historical precedent hermeneutically, but whether they have done so correctly.

Fee's Response

Fee responds by confessing that in all of the criticism directed towards his articulation of things, he has failed to find another hermeneutical approach that "took me by the hand and showed me how one goes about doing this - that is, establishing something normative on the basis of historical precedent alone."⁵⁵ Regarding the criticism of his first principle, he notes that the key word for him in that principle is "analogy." His only point was that anything based on analogies is sure to fail hermeneutically when establishing norms, for they open up too many possibilities.⁵⁶ As for Stronstad's pointed questions concerning exactly who had the authority to decide authorial intent, Fee has two suggestions. First, scholars must work to discover whether Luke actually *had* a doctrinal/theological imperative in his narratives, with regard to repeating the specifics. Second, with the evident diversity of patterns with Acts itself, how does one determine which are normative? If Luke's concern and intent was to provide patterns for the establishment of normative doctrine, Fee wonders, how do we explain his failure to narrate similar events in the same way? Luke's fondness for great variety as he reports the experience of the early believers leads Fee to conclude that the establishment of normative patterns was not his chief objective.

I would not want to say that Luke did *not* intend us to understand the baptism of the Spirit to be distinct from and subsequent to conversion, intended for empowering, and always evidenced by speaking in tongues; I am simply less convinced than my Pentecostal forebears that Luke did so intend. And chiefly because, even though this pattern can be found in three (probably four, perhaps five) instances, it is clearly not expressly narrated in this way in

every instance. Although I am quite open on this question, I do not find . . . the kinds of criteria that help me to think otherwise.⁵⁷

Fee wholeheartedly agrees that Jesus justified and defended his and other's actions on the basis of historical precedent. He also supports Stronstad's use of his third illustration, the Gentile mission in Acts. For Fee, however, there is a difference between defending one's actions, and establishing a norm. It is certain that Jesus defended the right of His disciples to pluck grain on the Sabbath from historical precedent. But did He thereby establish a norm, for all generations following? Jesus did move from his hometown to another location on the basis of the historical actions of two Old Testament prophets. Did He thus establish a norm, that we must do the same? In both cases, the answer is undoubtedly negative.⁵⁸

All of this to say, then, that I am an advocate of the "biblical precedent for historical precedent"; I always have been, and undoubtedly always will be. My roots are deep within restorationism, after all. But on the issue of "biblical precedent as historical precedent for establishing what is normative" - as I understand that word - I need more dialogue with the larger Pentecostal community, not with the aim of scoring points in the debate, but with the aim of helping me to understand so that I would be able to articulate such as perspective with personal integrity within my own present historical context.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Fee's contributions to hermeneutics, both for Pentecostalism and the Christian world in general, are significant. Rarely does one read material so concerned to integrate the practical with the theoretical, the 'exegesis' with the 'spirituality.' For Fee, the inherent tension in Scripture can be alleviated only through the discovery of authorial intent. This focus, however, seriously challenges the traditional Pentecostal practice of relying on perceived patterns in Luke's narratives. In addition, Fee's non-typical views

concerning the core of Pentecostalism have been highly objectionable to those holding to subsequence and initial evidence as the essence of the movement.

For Pentecostals, the opportunity to interact theologically with Fee's proposals over the past 30 years has been a goldmine of self-discovery and provoked a new awareness of their own hermeneutical issues. Pentecostals have responded forcefully to Fee's challenge. They have taken considerable exception to Fee's understanding of authorial intent and historical precedence. In each case, they have argued with some success for their own view of these issues, employing far more sophisticated and scholarly arguments to their cause than had been the case with their forefathers. Though many of these issues will be resolved largely on the basis on theological presupposition, the fact this debate has occurred is significant in demonstrating Pentecostalism's increased academic interests, and the coming of age of Pentecostal hermeneutics and theology. For this, Pentecostalism owes a debt of gratitude to the work of Gordon Fee.

¹ "The Hermeneutics of Historical Precedent" was originally written for the 1972 annual meeting of the Society of Pentecostal Studies. It was later published in Russell P. Spittler, ed. *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976.)

² Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, English trans. (Fort Worth, Tx.: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

³ Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Bible Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997); and *The Two Horizons* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1980).

⁴ E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 33. In quotations of Fee, all italics are by Fee. See also George Eldon Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

⁸ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 43. As an example, he cites B.B. Warfield's interpretation of "the perfect" in I Corinthians 13:10 as referring to the canon of the New Testament. Since neither Paul nor his

audience could have possibly understood the text in this way, it cannot be considered the 'meaning' of this text.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ One need only refer to Rudolph Bultmann's now-famous essay on whether it is possible to do presuppositionless exegesis, and his resounding "No" to that question. See "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?" In *Existence and Faith, Shorter Writings of Rudolph Bultmann* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1960), 289-96.

¹¹ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 75.

¹² For those who may not recall the official wording of the AG position, it is stated as follows in Articles 7 & 8 of the "Statement of Fundamental Truths," *Minutes of the Thirty-Fifth General Council of the Assemblies of God* (Miami Beach, Fla., August 12-16, 1973), 102:

7. The Baptism of the Holy Ghost

All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all in the early Christian church . . . This experience is distinct from and subsequent to the experience of the new birth (Acts 8:12-17; 10:44-46; 11:14-16; 15:7-9). . .

8. The Evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Ghost

The baptism of believers in the Holy Ghost is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance (Acts 2:4). The speaking in tongues in this instance is the same in essence as the gift of tongues (I Cor. 12:4-10,28), but different in purpose and use.

¹³ For example, Donald Guthrie declares, "We may observe at once that this evidence from the book of Acts does not provide us with any reflection on the theology of the Spirit. It is wholly concerned with his activity. . . . The theological exposition of the doctrine of the Spirit did not fit into Luke's purpose in Acts, but comes to fuller expression in the epistles." Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1981), 548.

¹⁴ See, for example, Clark Pinnock and Grant Osborne, "A Truce Proposal for the Tongues Controversy," *Christianity Today* 16 (Oct. 8, 1971), 6-9; John R.W. Stott, *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1964), 8; and Anthony Hoekema, *Holy Spirit Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 23-24.

¹⁵ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 90. Pentecostal scholars are quick to point out that there is renewed recognition of Luke as a theologian. I. Howard Marshall's, *Luke: Historian and Theologian, Contemporary Evangelical Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970; revised ed., Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1998) has been called "An important shift in evangelical thinking." See R.P. Menzies, "The Distinctive Character of Luke's Pneumatology," *Paraclete* 25:4 (1991), 20. Also significant is *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I.H. Marshall and D. Peterson (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998). Marshall writes, "Luke was entitled to his own views, and the fact that they differ in some respects from those of Paul should not be held against him at this point. On the contrary, he is a theologian in his own right, and must be treated as such." *Historian and Theologian*, 75. W.W. Gasque, in his masterful *A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1975; reprint 1989), includes two chapters on Luke the Theologian, pp. 136-163 and 251-305.

¹⁶ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 91.

¹⁷ Ibid., 92.

¹⁸ This was one of the few changes from *Gospel and Spirit* to *How to Read the Bible*, published several years later. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read the Bible for all It's Worth*. 2nd. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993). Its impetus came from a specific challenge by R. Stronstad that the last category must be divided into two. More detail on this below.

¹⁹ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 93. See also *How to Read*, 106-108, for the same material rephrased for the layperson. By way of example, in the first category, we might consider the deity of Christ primary; how the two natures concur in unity is secondary. That Scripture is the inspired word of God is primary; the precise nature of inspiration is secondary. With respect to Christian ethics, general maxims such as love for one's enemy, and unlimited forgiveness are primary; concrete principles and application for specific situations are secondary.

²⁰ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 93.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

²² It is important that these be listed out just as Fee wrote them, for it is on these principles that he has drawn much of the fire from his Pentecostal colleagues. Often the issue concerns the actual wording used. For the sake of later clarification, we offer these principles verbatim.

²³ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 94-96. The repeatable character of certain practices or patterns should be guided by the following considerations: a) The strongest possible case can be made when only one pattern is found, and when the pattern is repeated within the New Testament itself. b) When there is an ambiguity of patterns, or when a pattern occurs but once, it is repeatable for later Christians only if it appears to have divine approbation or is in harmony with what is taught elsewhere in Scripture. c) What is culturally conditioned is either not repeatable at all, or must be translated into the new or differing culture.

²⁴ On the other hand, one might respond with the equally correct assertion that is also impossible to prove that Luke *did not* intend to teach subsequence from these patterns. The difficulty with demanding proof of authorial intent is that it attempts to place the burden of proof on one viewpoint and not the other.

²⁵ This is widely agreed upon as Luke's intent for this narrative. With Fee on this are George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 383-4; L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina Series Vol.5 ed. D. Harrington (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 150-153; Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 164; F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 182-3; John R.W. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church and the World: The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 187; and I.Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 157-158.

²⁶ The question of whether tongues is the initial evidence of Spirit-reception Fee dismisses as a "moot point," and thus discusses it very little. Because tongues is seen as a repeated pattern in Acts, many Pentecostals have argued that it is *the* pattern. Fee disagrees. "To insist that it is the only valid sign seems to place too much weight on the historical precedent of three (perhaps four) instances in Acts." Fee does not thereby downplay the role of tongues. In "Tongues - Least of the Gifts? Some Exegetical Observations on I Corinthians 12-14," *Pneuma* 2:2 (1980), 3-14, he argues forcefully that Paul values tongues highly for personal edification. His most recent comment on the issue, in *God's Empowering Presence*, maintains this viewpoint, suggesting that personal edification is in no manner wrong, and is in fact viewed very favourably by Paul, an avid tongues-speaker himself. See *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), pp. 890 & 218-219.

²⁷ In personal conversation with Dr. Fee by the author, this question was posed. Some, such as William Menzies, view the tying together of tongues as the initial evidence of Spirit-baptism as a

subsequent event, as the essence of Pentecostalism; see "The Methodology of Pentecostal Theology", in *Essays on Apostolic Themes: Studies in Honour of Howard M. Ervin*, ed. Paul Elbert (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1985), 1-3. Fee was asked how he could still consider himself a Pentecostal, when he disagreed with statements 7&8 (above) of their fundamental truths. He replied that he told the Assemblies of God, "I cannot support the language used to articulate this, but I support what you *mean* by what you have written." At issue is the language used. To this author, he offered the following: "I do not throw out initial evidence, I throw out the language, because it is not biblical, and therefore irrelevant. From a reading of Luke and Paul I would expect people to speak in tongues when they are empowered by the Spirit. The reception of the Spirit is most commonly evidenced by speaking in tongues. It is very normal. I expect people to be empowered by the Spirit for witness. For most people this will be a subsequent experience, because they will have become Christians without realizing that this is for them." Gordon Fee, interview by author. December 5, 1997.

²⁸ "The Issue of Subsequence and Separability," in *Gospel and Spirit*, 111.

²⁹ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 98-99. Also helpful are Fee's *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Gordon D. Fee, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 569-713; and *Empowering Presence*, 863-868, 886-890.

³⁰ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 119.

³¹ The exception here will be Robert Menzies, to whom Fee has not responded. When asked about this in an interview with this author, Fee replied that a response would have drawn him much further into the debate, for which he has neither the time nor passion. "By the time Bob published his thesis I had moved on to so many other projects that I simply abandoned the hermeneutical give and take...I had read only enough of Menzies to know that ... under the pressure of time [I wasn't] able to handle it adequately." Gordon D. Fee, interview by author, 27 January 1998, electronic mail.

³² Wm. Menzies, "The Methodology of Pentecostal Theology," 7.

³³ Roger Stronstad, "The Biblical Precedent for Historical Precedent," in *Paraclete* 27:2 (1993), 11.

³⁴ R. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness*, 239. This question is the crux of Menzies' work, and is answered in the negative through 200-plus pages of argument and exegesis. Although the specific proofs supporting the claim are outside the scope of this work, we will nonetheless explore the results and impacts of his thesis. The interested reader may find a brief summary of his research in "The Distinctive Character of Luke's Pneumatology," *Paraclete* 25:3 (1991), 17-30.

³⁵ R. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness*, 241.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 239. For Fee's failure to respond publicly to Robert Menzies, see n. 31 above. In private conversation, Fee offered the following. He agrees that Luke's primary interest is in the Spirit, and His missiological rule. It is less on initiating experiences than on the role of the Spirit in the Church. The soteriological dimension is not his focus. Luke *assumes* the soteriological dimension. Fee does not believe that he reads Luke with Pauline lenses, anymore than he does in I Peter, or John, where both assume the reception of the Spirit is what makes one a Christian. It is a thoroughly N.T. point of view. "I do let Luke speak for himself. He just isn't saying what they are saying he says." Interview by the author, 5 December 1997.

³⁷ Wm. Menzies, "Methodology of Pentecostal Theology," 10. Italics Menzies.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9. Italics Menzies. Timothy Cargal agrees. "In one of the first responses by Pentecostals to these challenges, Fee essentially conceded the case by joining didactic value with authorial intent."

Timothy B. Cargal, "Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostal Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 15:2 (1993), 183.

³⁹ *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970). In one of the first challenges to Pentecostal Theology, James Dunn forcefully challenged the Pentecostal position on subsequence by firmly equating the experience of Spirit-baptism with conversion.

⁴⁰ Wm. Menzies, "Methodology of Pentecostal Theology," 9.

⁴¹ With the republication of the two key articles from 1976 and 1985 in 1991, Fee included a brief postscript in *Gospel and Spirit* containing his response to Wm. Menzies and R. Stronstad.

⁴² Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 102.

⁴³ Wm. Menzies, "Methodology of Pentecostal Theology," 10.

⁴⁴ Gordon Fee, Interview by author, 5 December, 1997.

⁴⁵ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 103.

⁴⁶ Stronstad, "Biblical Precedent," 4-5.

⁴⁷ "Response to Roger Stronstad's 'The Biblical Precedent for Historical Precedent'," In *Paraclete* 27:2 (1993), 12.

⁴⁸ "The Hermeneutics of Lukan Historiography," in *Paraclete* 22:4 (1988), 11.

⁴⁹ R. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness*, 237.

⁵⁰ Wm. Menzies, "Methodology of Pentecostal Theology," 10. Italics Menzies.

⁵¹ "The use of historical precedent as an analogy by which to establish a norm is never valid."

⁵² Stronstad, "Biblical Precedent," 6-7.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁴ He quotes J. Ramsey Michaels, "There is nothing wrong in principle with deriving normative beliefs and practices from narratives." From "Evidences of the Spirit, or the Spirit as Evidence? Some Non-Pentecostal Reflections," In *Initial Evidence*, Gary McGee, ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 203. See also G. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity, 1991), 153; and Marshall, *Historian and Theologian*, 75.

⁵⁵ Fee, "Response to Stronstad," 11-14.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁷ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 103-104.

⁵⁸ "Response to Stronstad," 13-14. Charles Holman, in another response to Stronstad, agrees. Further, he notes that the third example used, of the Gentile mission, is only valid because it meets certain finely stated criteria. He questions what criteria Stronstad would offer to distinguish between historical precedent that is intended to serve as a norm, and that which is not. "It does us no good to perceive Luke as a theologian and then be unable to arrive at criteria by which his historical narrative becomes authoritative

for us in experience and practice." Holman suggests consideration be given to: 1) the broad literary structure of a document; 2) the consistent recurrence of themes; 3) the place of emphasis such themes occupy in the document as a whole; 4) the distinction between subthemes and the more prominent themes and the relation of the two. "A Response to Roger Stronstad," 11-14.

⁵⁹ Fee, "Response to Stronstad," 14.