

A Critical Study of the Doctrine of Impartation in the Church of God Denomination

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Abstract

Research reveals that many of the major Pentecostal denominations, including the Church of God, accept the biblical doctrine of impartation and practice it in their assemblies. However, inconsistency in how ‘impartation’ is to be understood has created a lot of controversy among church leaders. The problem surrounding the doctrine relates to two main areas: (1) the theoretical, which refers to an unbiblical understanding of the doctrine, and (2) the practical, which is the manner in which impartation is practiced in the churches. This article is a summary of the author’s dissertation written under the supervision of Dr Callie Joubert and must be seen as an attempt to formulate a correct theological understanding of the doctrine of impartation that could serve as a model for adoption and implementation by Pentecostalism and, more specifically, the Church of God.

Keywords

Doctrine, gifts of the Spirit, impartation, sovereignty of God

1. Introduction

The biblical doctrine of impartation, and its theological meaning and understanding, has been perceived by many Bible commentators, expositors, and Christians in general as synonymous with Pentecostalism.¹ However, there is some definite inconsistency in how the term ‘impartation’ is understood among Pentecostals, including the Church of God, and has consequently created a lot of controversy among church leaders. The problem surrounding the doctrine relates to two main areas: (1) the theoretical, which refers to an unbiblical understanding of the doctrine, and (2) the practical, which is the manner in which impartation is practiced in the churches. The Greek word for impart is μεταδίδωμι, which means to “give over” or “to give a share.” Some Pentecostals and charismatics incorrectly view μεταδίδωμι to mean the ability to volitionally transfer one’s own anointing and/or spiritual gift or gifts to another person or persons. Also of consequence is the belief among some Pentecostals that they are free to seek impartations from the deceased by visiting their gravesites and the unscriptural bias towards the impartation of extraordinary gifts over and above those gifts considered to be “ordinary.” For example, although much emphasis has been placed on the impartation of “extraordinary” gifts such as the word of wisdom, the working of miracles, or the gift of

¹ Pentecostalism is used here to include, classical Pentecostals, charismatics, and the ‘third wave’ movement. Although they often disagree in theology, most people place these groups under the same umbrella (Grudem 1996; Hanegraaff 2001; MacArthur 1992; McConnell 1995; Yun 2003).

faith (1 Cor 12), Wuest (1973, 21–22) understands the meaning of μεταδίδωμι to include the ordinary gifts that, according to Budiselic (2011, 250) and Stitzinger (2003, 174), refer to those gracious gifts shared in the physical as well as spiritual realm (Rom 12:8), such as the sharing a coat (Luke 3:11), money (Eph 4:28) and sharing the gospel or one's soul (1 Thess 2:8). Yet these ordinary gifts have seemingly been ignored by Pentecostals who are proponents of impartation. This, in turn, has led some to conclude that the definition of impartation has become so hermeneutically skewed and misunderstood that it consequently distorts the nature and intention of God's gifts.

This brief summary is intended to capture the wider results of the researcher's study. As such, it indicates that, although impartation is a valid biblical doctrine, there is no biblical evidence to support the view of some Pentecostals that believers are free to seek impartations from the dead, initiate healings, and blessings at will or volitionally impart their spiritual gifts and anointings to other persons at times and places as they see fit. Rather, Scripture reveals that God imparts his gifts and blessings sovereignly, and that all gifts are spiritual in origin and available for impartation.

To address the research problem, the research project comprises four objectives: to give a historical overview of the doctrine of impartation in the Church of God, to give an analysis of Romans 1:11, to present an overview of the current theological and doctrinal views on impartation, and to give an assessment of the model of impartation in the Church of God. The summary concludes with a discussion on the contemporary significance of impartation.

2. Historical Overview of the Doctrine of Impartation in Pentecostalism and the Church of God

Pentecostalism as a movement identifies its origin with the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. However, if looked at in its modern or, more specifically, its contemporary form, Pentecostalism's roots can be traced to primarily the revivalist era of Methodism (Bare 1993, 32; Kay 2011, 1). One outcome of that era of spiritual renewal was the birth and organizing of the Church of God with its headquarters in Cleveland, Tennessee, in the USA. The roots of the denomination can be traced to the year 1886 and a small group of believers who had grown weary of the creeds and traditions that had stifled spiritual vitality in the churches (Sims 1995, 77); and who, during a prayer service, received the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the speaking in tongues as its sign (Conn 2008, 29; Juillerat 1922, 7–14).

Conn (2008, 47–54) notes that Pentecostalism and, more specifically, the Church of God was immediately endangered by individuals who sought to introduce unscriptural doctrines and impartation practices into the church. As a result, multiple erroneous views were promulgated in relation to the impartation of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and his gifts (Conn 1963, 12; Horton 1986, 200; Hughes 1986, 171; Phillips 2014, 119–136).

Although the Church of God was adamant about its beliefs in the reality of the impartation, abuse of the doctrine and unscriptural practices led its leaders to formulate a codified list of “Doctrinal Commitments” to help combat these and, by doing so, to bring greater ecclesiastical and theological stability to the church (Conn 2008, 134–140; Phillips 2014, 363–370). However, while the codified list of beliefs helped to bring doctrinal clarity, it remains a fact that the doctrine of impartation has not been adequately defined or theologically understood within Pentecostalism or the Church of God. This fact is evident in the anomalous ways

denominational leaders, educators, and pastors define impartation, the abuse that is associated with the practice, and the continued emphasis on the impartation of “extraordinary” gifts above those that are seen as “ordinary.” These concerns indicate the need for a doctrinal position on impartation for the Church of God that is biblically grounded and theologically sound.²

3. An Analysis of Romans 1:11 (the Anchor Text)

The aim of the second objective is to conduct an analysis of the anchor text (Rom 1:11). In a word, the hermeneutical understanding of Romans 1:11 has had a decisive influence on the theology of Pentecostalism and the Church of God. It was therefore deemed necessary to determine whether Paul’s promise to impart spiritual gifts to the Roman believers provides biblical support for the Church of God’s doctrine of impartation.

On the one hand, the hermeneutical understanding of Romans 1:11 has led to the belief and teaching that impartations have numerous possibilities: believers can receive impartations of the Holy Spirit, including an anointing for special purposes, spiritual gifts, and unusual blessings. On the other hand, while Paul was convinced that God would use him to impart gifts to the Roman believers, a distortion of Paul’s meaning has led to a misappropriation of the text by Pentecostals (Arrington 2016).

Anomalies, such as the following, demonstrate Pentecostals’ underlying assumptions about impartation. Many believers in

2 Pastors, leaders and educators defined “impartation” to be (1) “the passing on of godly information received,” (2) “the taking of something you have been given by God and bestowing, sharing, or giving it to someone else,” and (3) as “something essentially occurring through direction on the part of God and desire on the part of the recipient for the purpose of equipping people and for the edification of believers” (taken from a survey conducted from 24 June, 2016 to 10 January, 2017).

Pentecostalism get attracted to personalities in the hope of receiving their much-desired gift. Questionable practices, such as prophecy and manipulation of believers through the use of peculiar words or phrases, are used when attempting to impart gifts. Others have visited the gravesites of deceased men and women for impartations from them. Consequently, Pentecostals are potentially deceived by those who believe that gifts or other spiritual blessings can be imparted by or through corpses, volitionally from one person to another, or through various other manipulative practices (Budiselic 2011, 246). Given this situation, a careful exegetical analysis of the anchor text is appropriate.

3.1 The implication of Paul's desire to impart gifts

Paul unmistakably had a strong desire to be in the presence of the Roman believers. While writing, the apostle first states, “[I have been] making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you” (Rom 1:9–10). Briscoe (1982, 32) suggests that by the phrase “some means” Paul “meant [that] he was open to all possibilities.” Next, Paul reveals the reason for his wish to visit them: “that I may impart to you some spiritual gift.” According to Moo (1996, 59), Paul “really advances only one reason, which he delineates in three roughly parallel purposive statements: ‘to share some spiritual gift’ (v. 11); ‘to have a harvest’ (v. 13); [and] ‘to preach the gospel.’” In sum, the implied meaning of Paul’s words for the Roman believers is this: When he arrives they will be imparted with some spiritual gift (Schreiner 1988, 52). The text neither stipulates the gift nor the manner in which the gift will be imparted.

3.2 *The recipients of the impartation*

That Paul intended to impart spiritual gifts is quite clear. However, the question is, who were the intended recipients? Paul's answer is very specific.

3.2.1 They are called

Paul's expression in Romans 1:6, "[a]mong whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ," identifies believers who will receive gifts as the "called." They are "the called who belong to Christ." Yet, κλητός (called) is not used in the epistles to refer to someone who is invited by another. Rather, οί κλητοί (the called) are already believers, "the effectually called; those who are so called by God as to be made obedient to the call" (Hodge 1947, 22; Wuest 1973, 1:18).

3.2.2 They are saints

Paul further identifies the recipients of the gift as saints. He writes: "[t]o all who are in Rome, beloved of God called to be saints" (Rom 1:7). Hodge (1947, 23) points out that κλητός to be ἅγιος (saints) means "they are saints because they are a community separated from the world and consecrated to God."

3.2.3 They are people of faith

Paul also classifies the Roman believers as being people of faith. He does so in Romans 1:8 where he says, "your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." Undoubtedly, their faith had become a regular topic of conversation (Briscoe 1982, 31). Wuest (1973, 19) suggests πίστις (faith) refers to the faith that was characteristic of the Roman Christians' experience and daily living.

3.3 *The means of imparting spiritual gifts*

Although Paul informs his readers that when he visits them, he will impart to them spiritual gifts, he does not say through which means that would happen. The expression μεταδίδωμι (impart) means to “give over, to transmit” or “to give a share” (Vine 1952, 149). Both the Roman believer and contemporary reader can, therefore, only assume how the gifts will be imparted after a consideration of various possibilities gleaned from the letter or elsewhere in Scripture.

First, Paul may have referred to the laying on of hands. However, he does not. As Robinson (2008, 266) suggests, “since the imparting of a spiritual gift through handlaying and prophecy is noted in 1 Tim 4:14, that handlaying was intended cannot be ruled out, nor substantiated either.” Straube is more convinced of this method (2010, 209). He points out that the word χάρισμα (charisma), which means “divine gratuity or a spiritual endowment,” together with the root χάρις (grace) (Rom 1:11; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6), suggests that “the laying on of hands was instrumental in the impartation of spiritual gifts” (p. 209).

Second, Paul may have intended to impart the gifts through his preaching or exhortation. According to Cranfield (1975, 79), at first sight, the natural inclination is to conclude that the χάρισμα πνευματικὸν³ (spiritual gift) is what Paul presents in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Stott (1994, 56) regards Cranfield’s (1975, 79) view as problematic and states that “there seems to be a fatal objection to this, however; namely that in those other passages the gifts are bestowed by the sovereign decision of God.” Hence, Paul appears to speak in a more general sense which perhaps could mean

3 The Greek text used in this summary is taken from *The Expositor’s Greek New Testament* by James Denney.

that he will impart whatever the believers are to receive through his own teaching or exhortation when he arrives (Stott 1994, 56; cf. MacArthur 1994, 42–43).

There is a third possibility. Denney (1900, 588) believes that Paul intended to impart his spiritual gift through the reading of the epistle. Fee (1994, 486–489) reflects a similar thought. He proposes that “the Spirit gift” in the context of the letter means that the apostle most likely wanted to share his understanding of the gospel. Longenecker (2016, 117) takes the same view.

Of all these perspectives on how Paul could have imparted the χάρισμα πνευματικόν (spiritual gift), the most favorable seems to be the laying on of hands. This view appears the most reasonable understanding of Romans 1:11, because it is an inductive inference based on teachings and practices elsewhere in Scripture (Acts 8:14–17; 19:1–6; 1 Tim 4:14 and 2 Tim 1:6).

3.4 The gifts to be imparted

Paul explicitly expresses his reason for wanting to visit the Roman believers: ἵνα μεταδῶ ὑμῖν τι χάρισμα πνευματικόν (that I may impart to you some spiritual gift). It is arguably the case that the apostle created interest in what those gifts might be. The verb μεταδίδωμι (impart) was certainly not foreign to Paul. The usage appears in several of his letters (Rom 12:8; Eph 4:28; 1 Thess 2:8). According to Longenecker (2016, 114–115), Paul used the noun χάρισμα (gift) in reference to: (1) gifts of righteousness and eternal life (Rom 5:15; 6:23), (2) special gifts given to people individually and corporately for the building of the kingdom (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:4–9, 30–31), (3) gifts of celibacy and marriage (1 Cor 7:7), (4) gifts of wisdom and understanding (Col 1:9), and (5) the gift of an office in the church mediated by the laying on of hands (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). However, according to Longenecker (2016, 115)

and Moo (1996, 59), in Paul's letters Romans 1:11 is the only occasion where the noun χάρισμα and the adjective πνευματικόν are brought together into the one expression of "spiritual gift." It explains why the combination of χάρισμα πνευματικόν with the addition of the neuter indefinite pronoun τι (some) resulted in various interpretations, which will be presented next.

3.4.1 Official office in the church

Parratt (1967, 79) proposes that the χάρισμα Paul wanted to impart was most likely an office in the church that would be mediated through the laying on of hands. Impartations of confirmation or acknowledgement of authority of an office is consistent with that of Moses and Joshua and the deacons in Acts 6:6.

3.4.2 Ordinary and extraordinary gifts

Paul's terminology, μεταδῶ τι χάρισμα πνευματικόν (impart some spiritual gift), has been defined by Pentecostals so as to include extraordinary and ordinary gifts. By definition, ordinary gifts include abilities such as teaching, giving, pastoring, and helping (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11) that manifest within the natural interaction between believers as an expression of God's providence to and through one another. Extraordinary gifts, such as healing, prophesy, faith, and the working of miracles (1 Cor 12:7–11) pertain to gifts in which God's power is applied to change the natural order (Stitzinger 2003, 161). Although Paul does not delineate the terms "ordinary" and "extraordinary" in Romans 1:11, he does differentiate between the gifts in the overall presentation of his literary message (Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:1–11; Eph 4:7–12). In short, Wuest (1973, 21–22) and Hodge (1947, 25–26) believe that μεταδίδωμι refers to such ordinary blessings as the gift of salvation

and grace, in addition to extraordinary gifts such as healing, prophecy, the word of wisdom and tongues. Although Morris (1988, 60) feels that the indefinite expression *τι χάρισμα* favors ordinary gifts, he admits that the idea presented in the noun *χάρισμα* is normally used for the special gifts imparted by the Holy Spirit (i.e., gifts of healing, miracles, faith, speaking in tongues, prophecy). Thus, *χάρισμα* as it is used in Romans 1:11 can refer to any grace or endowment from God.

With the use of *χάρισμα πνευματικόν* (spiritual gift) in Romans 1:11, Paul may have intended to impart some extraordinary gift that he himself had. On the other hand, he may have intended to visit with the hope that his arrival would be accompanied by a manifestation of the Spirit that would result in an impartation of gifts (Budiselic 2011, 254). The definition of *μεταδίδωμι* along with Paul's disclaimer (1 Cor 12:7–11) that the Spirit is the one who distributes the gifts seems to favor the latter option. Hence, Paul's use of *χάρισμα πνευματικόν* coupled with *μεταδίδωμι* creates a viable argument for Pentecostals and Church of God leaders who practice the impartation of spiritual gifts.

3.4.3 Indefinite gifts

The third possibility is that Paul would have imparted indefinite gifts to the Roman believers. Moo (1996, 60), Longenecker (2016, 116), and Stott (1994, 57) suggest that there may be a good reason why Paul is tentative with his *μεταδίδωμι τι χάρισμα πνευματικόν* (impart some spiritual gift). The reason is because the apostle, although he wanted to impart gifts to the Roman believers, could not have specified the particular gifts to be imparted until he saw what their needs were. Or, as Budiselic (2011, 253) suggests, the expression *τι* (some) “probably points to the fact that Paul does not define the gift(s) of the Spirit he wants to impart to them, but he is

open for the possibility that some of the gifts of the Spirit will accompany his coming to Rome.”

3.5 The purpose for the impartation

Although there may be ambiguity with regard to the method and nature of Paul’s impartation, the apostle is forthright about his purpose: he wanted to impart gifts to the Roman believers εἰς ὑμᾶς τὸ στηριχθῆναι (so that you may be established). Godet (1977, 87) points out that the words “strengthen” or “establish” were not intended to mean that Paul is coming to “confirm” them, but rather to assist the believers in remaining firmly in that which they had already received.

3.6 The anchor text and the Church of God

The Church of God is resolute that the gifts Paul promised in Romans 1:11 to impart (μεταδίδωμι) to the Roman believers are experiential gifts, that they have historical value but also present reality. However, while this passage supports the Church of God’s belief in the doctrine of impartation, the analysis of the anchor text only reveals that Paul intended to impart a “spiritual gift” to the Roman believers who were “called” and committed “saints” of God. Although Church of God leaders may follow the path of interpreting Romans 1:11 through an experiential hermeneutic, Paul in no way asserts that the extraordinary gifts of tongues and prophecy are to be given preferential treatment above the ordinary gifts of giving and exhortation. The use of μεταδίδωμι in supportive passages such as Luke 3:11, Romans 12:8, 1 Thessalonians 2:8, and Ephesians 4:28 contradicts this notion. Furthermore, the analysis was in no way able to confirm that Paul stated or implied that believers can receive impartations through visiting

the graves of the deceased or that leaders can volitionally convey their gifts and anointings to others as they see fit.

4. Current Theological and Doctrinal Views on Impartation

The aim of the third objective is to present a brief summary of a select number of current theological and doctrinal views on impartation that are influencing the body of Christ, the fulcrum of the Church of God, and Pentecostal theology.

4.1 Eddie Rogers

Eddie Rogers is the founder of Revival in Power Ministry and the former apostolic leader of The Revival Center in Bremen, Georgia. For him, impartations are primarily given to persons who follow “their perspective spiritual fathers ... [who are also] teachers and mentors” (Rogers 2006, 13–14). He cites as examples Joshua, who received an impartation from Moses, and Timothy who received one from the Apostle Paul. According to Rogers (2006, 19–20), impartations are received on the human level. That means that the more time people spend with the impartor, the more they replicate his or her ideas and gestures. Rogers also teaches that impartations involve prophecy (1 Tim 4:14) and that “spiritual fathers” can impart gifts to their “spiritual sons and daughters” through the laying on of hands (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; 2006, 36). However, Rogers is incorrect in arguing that “without sons and daughters pursuing the relationship, the impartation dies with the fathers” (2006, 62–63). He is also biblically incorrect to teach that impartations are received through the giving of tithes and offerings to those in the five-fold ministry. This is most questionable, if not also heretical.

4.2 Phillip Rich

Phillip Rich (2007, 2) defines μεταδίδωμι as: “to give over—to share based on connection and association.” Taking that meaning as his working definition, Rich (2007, 13) teaches that persons can impart their personal anointing or “giftings” to others and that impartations are primarily given or received through associating with or entering into a covenant relationship with those who are in the five-fold ministry. He uses as his warrant Ephesians 4:11–12 and 1 John 2:27. He also cites Matthew 13:13–15 and John 4:1–30 and argues that impartations are received through “perception” and “reception.” In other words, before a believer can receive an impartation from a person in the five-fold ministry, he or she must know what gifts are being manifested in and through that so-called leader. Rich’s views are highly problematic since none of the passages he references supports his claims. Rather, Ephesians 4:11–12 and 1 John 2:27 clearly indicate that God is the imparter of anointings and gifts. Furthermore, perception of gifts in a leader is not a scriptural criteria for receiving an impartation, nor is the imparting of gifts and anointing restricted to those in the five-fold ministry (cf. Acts 9:10–18; 1 Cor 12:1–11).

4.3 Ervin Budiselić

Ervin Budiselić serves as the Academic Dean for the Biblical Institute in Zagreb, Croatia. The institute was founded by the Council of Churches of Christ in Croatia and has a cooperative agreement with the Evangelical Pentecostal Church and the Church of God in Croatia. Budiselić (2011, 246) opines that Christians are being taught by Pentecostal leaders that if they can visit the right places, go to the right conferences, get the right persons to pray for them, or visit the right graveyards, they can receive an impartation

of “God’s anointing, spiritual gifts and other blessings.” Budiselíc (2011, 246) shares his concern that those who teach that spiritual gifts can be imparted from one person to another are misinterpreting the Scriptures. He argues that the term μεταδίδωμι is misconstrued and passages such as Romans 1:11 and 1 Timothy 4:14 are being misinterpreted by practitioners to support their own subjective theoretical position and to formulate a new concept of impartation. Or, as Joubert and Maartens (2017, 105) have shown, Scriptures are decontextualized and recontextualized to support erroneous decisions and ecclesiastical practices when they do not.⁴ Budiselíc (2011, 251) rightly contends that the presentation of χάρισμα in 1 Timothy 4:14 implies spiritual gifts or grace gifts. But the addition of πνευματικόν with χάρισμα in Romans 1:11 means “gifts of the Spirit” and those are not imparted volitionally by the laying on of hands “because one does not possess such gifts” (Budiselíc 2011, 251).

4.4 Paul Goulet

Paul Goulet is senior pastor of the International Church of Las Vegas and became acquainted with the power of impartation after being prayed for by Argentinean pastor, Claudio Freidzon. μεταδίδωμι is defined by Goulet (n.d., 31; 2007, xx) as “to give over, or to share,” to “confer, bestow, hand over, put, place, and inherit.” For him, according to Philippians 2:17, impartation is about being filled with the Holy Spirit so that those receiving the impartation of the Holy Spirit might pour it into the life of someone else (Goulet 2007, xiii). Goulet cites the example of Elijah and Elisha and contends that one-way impartations can be received by searching for

4 See Joubert and Maartens (2017, 105–132) for a better view of this practice and misuse of Scripture.

persons who already have the gifts that are desired. Furthermore, Goulet (n.d., 125–144) stresses that believers, like Jesus, should seek multiple impartations. However, several of Goulet’s views fail to pass the test of good hermeneutics. For instance, Philippians 2:17 does not state or imply that imparted believers can “pour” their impartations into other believers, nor is there a single scriptural passage that gives the slightest indication that Jesus needed or received multiple impartations of the Spirit.

4.5 Michael Chung

Chung’s (2019) theology on the doctrine of impartation is presented in a dissertation entitled “Paul’s Understanding of Spiritual Formation: Christian Formation and Impartation.” He believes, that “the most dominant foundational meaning of *metadi*, *dwmi* [*sic*] is for one entity to share something with another” (172; emphasis in the original). However, rather than focusing on the impartation of ordinary and/or extraordinary gifts per se, Chung chooses to concentrate on the Apostle Paul’s use of impartation as a means to help converts reach spiritual maturity (17–18). Using Romans 1:11 and 1 Thessalonians 2:8–10 as his warrant, he argues that Paul, in partnership with “the divine agency,” was able to impart into his converts and help perfect their faith (170–172).⁵ In this way, Paul imparted to his converts through methods such as his letters, personal mentorship, and the use of three dimensions Chung (2009, 245–292) calls: cognitive, relational, and affective. In other words, Paul taught his converts knowledge, he lived among them, but above all, he loved them (315–319).

5 Chung (2009, 85) uses “divine agency” to mean the work of God or the Holy Spirit.

4.6 Randy Clark

Randy Clark is founder of Global Awakening, a teaching, healing, and impartation ministry in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. Clark (2013, 16) defines “impartation” as the “transference of the anointing” which may include “a gift or gifts of the Spirit, a filling of the Holy Spirit (especially for power) or the baptism in the Holy Spirit.” He asserts that impartations are conveyed primarily through the laying on of hands and “waiting on God,” and cites Numbers 11:16–18, 2 Kings 2:9–14 and Hebrews 6:1–2 for support. Clark acknowledges that impartations are commonly conveyed in the NT through the act of ordination and the laying on of hands (Acts 13:1–3; 1 Tim 4:14). He also contends that the laying on of hands was commonly used to convey impartations such as healing, the baptism in the Holy Spirit and gifts of the Spirit (19–26; cf. Clark 2015, 17–40). Another way Clark emphasizes that impartations are transferred or conveyed to a believer is through “blessing” them with “spoken words” in the manner that Jesus blessed the adults and children in Matthew 19:13–15 and Mark 10:16 (cf. Garborg 2003, 22–24). However, an analysis of his claims shows that he often decontextualizes scriptural passages to support his own and preferred views on impartation.

5. An Assessment of the Model of Impartation in the Church of God

Thus far an attempt has been made to explore the doctrine and practice of impartation from a historical, theological, and literary perspective. The anchor text, Romans 1:11, has also been given considerable attention. However, to assess the Church of God’s doctrine of impartation, an inductive study and synthesis of informing and developing biblical texts was conducted further critically. Although space does not permit a detailed

discussion of those texts, it was determined that Paul based his model of impartation upon his experiential knowledge and biblical precedent (Rom 4:3; 1 Cor 15:4). Thus, attention is next focused on the fourth objective, namely, to assess the model of impartation in the Church of God in order to determine how it compares to Paul's model and the consistencies and inconsistencies that may exist in practice.

The theological synthesis of Romans 1:11 and a selection of other texts provide several concepts that, together, comprise the biblical model of impartation. It is therefore vital to discuss whether or not this model is biblically consistent with the practice of impartation in the Church of God. At the outset it should be stated that the same informing and developing theology based on the biblical accounts of impartation in the OT and NT that set the context for Paul's practice of impartation is also the one that influenced the practice of impartation within the Church of God.

The analysis found that there is consistency between the theological model of Paul and that of the Church of God in relation to the spiritual gifts that may be imparted to believers. Paul's list of πνευματικά (1 Cor 12:1–11), χαρίσματα (Rom 12:6–8), and δόματα (Eph 4:8–11) are gifts believed to be apropos for effective ministry in the church (Gause 1986, 170–171). Hence, Richie's (2020, 106) claim that "spiritual gifts should operate in the assembly with both freedom and order."

However, at least two inconsistencies exist between Paul's model and that of the Church of God. First, unlike Paul, a much greater emphasis is placed upon the impartation of extraordinary gifts over that of ordinary gifts. This inconsistency is reflected in literary form as well as in church meetings. It suffices to say, in worship services there are multiple opportunities for the impartation of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, healing, and miracles, as opposed to gifts such as giving, exhortation, and mercy.

In order to remain scriptural in practice, the Church of God must have a biblical and theoretical model that provides equal opportunity for the impartation of both ordinary and extraordinary gifts and other spiritual blessings.

Second, inconsistency is found in the erroneous view that spiritual gifts are the permanent possession of believers and can therefore be imparted to other believers at will and how and when they see fit. Several authors noted the error and offered a biblical rebuttal to that belief and practice (Bay and Martinez n.d.; Conn 1986, 55–56; Hughes 1986, 174). What they emphasize is that Ephesians 4:7–11 and 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11 teach that spiritual gifts are the φανέρωσις τοῦ πνεύματος (manifestation of the Spirit) and sovereignly distributed by God.⁶

What the Church of God believes about the methods of impartation is also consistent with the theological model represented in Scripture. Leaders resolutely affirm and teach that God sovereignly imparts gifts and blessings without intermediary human action (Tipei 2009, 183), and that spoken words are a means of imparting blessings and healing (Hill 2016; Tipei 2009, 18–20, 176–178). However, there is strong resistance to the unscriptural idea that believers create blessings or healings through their own creative ability through the use of certain words or phrases. No evidence was found in the theological synthesis to support this view. In contrast, believers activate God's power through invoking the name of Jesus

6 Conn (1996, 105) and Lowery (2004, 187–189) contend that spiritual gifts are not permanently invested in believers but are given to the church and therefore cannot be imparted from one person to another. In contrast, while Arrington (2003, 243–244) believes that “for individuals to receive gifts means that the Holy Spirit bestows gifts on the church,” possession of gifts cannot mean that believers can say “I own, I control, I operate, I manipulate” my gift whenever he or she so wishes.

in conjunction with proclamations of Scripture or words spoken that are consistent with the clear teachings of Scripture.

The Church of God's doctrine of impartation is also consistent with the model of impartation in Scripture in that gifts and blessings may be imparted to believers through the laying on of hands (Arrington 2008, 300; Tipei 2009, 217; Tomberlin 2010, 225–237). Nevertheless, two inconsistencies require attention. First, it is unscriptural to think that gifts and blessings can be imparted volitionally by believers with the laying on of hands. The informing and developing texts neither state nor imply a theological model to support that belief. Simply put, while God may use believers in the impartation process, He alone is the initiator and impartor of spiritual gifts and blessings (Lombard and Daffe 2008, 197; Triplett 1970, 131). Second, and in contrast with the teachings of Scripture, leaders have a tendency to equate impartations of the Holy Spirit with certain preconceived emotional experiences. Neither the informing nor developing texts present the idea that one must go through some emotional catharsis as a way to confirm an impartation of gifts or blessings (Gause 2009, 124–126; Hughes 1986, 171). There is therefore no scriptural mandate to encourage the repetition of words or the manipulation of others in an attempt to replicate the experience of speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the beliefs of the Church of God are also consistent with impartation through acts of service. Leaders are not reticent to mention the gifts listed by Paul in Romans 12:6–8. Lowery (1997, 142–143) views Paul's list as motivational gifts that should move believers to serve one another better. Arrington (2003, 323) views Paul's list of service gifts as important in Christian service and exceeding accomplishments through natural talents and abilities. However, there is an unwelcome attitude among

Church of God leaders towards the gifts of mercy, exhortation, teaching, and giving that contrasts sharply with what Paul teaches about these gifts. The unfortunate consequence is that believers view these gifts as being so ordinary that some may not even realize that they are gifts of God (Lombard and Daffe 2008, 180).

In short, the impartation of these gifts is vitally important if the Church of God wishes to remain consistent with the scriptural model of impartation and if leaders wish to effectively impart gifts to others through mentorship, material goods, comfort and/or mercy (Luke 3:11; Rom 12:8; Eph 4:28; 1 Thess 2:8). Put differently, greater emphasis on rendering service along that way will allow the church to provide holistic care to the body of Christ.

6. The Contemporary Significance of Impartation

Although it was determined that impartation is a valid practice in both the OT and NT, in order for the doctrine to have contemporary significance and to be practiced in accordance with biblical teaching, several positional thoughts must be given consideration.

6.1 What is spiritual impartation?

The Greek word μεταδίδωμι, as noted earlier, means to “give over” or “to give a share.” For the purpose of the study, it was defined as follows: “Spiritual impartation is the giving to or sharing of God’s grace with the lives of his people by way of blessings, spiritual gifts or material goods in answer to their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs” (cf. Luke 3:11; Rom 1:11; 12:8; 1 Cor 12:1–11; Eph 4:28; 1 Thess 2:8).

6.2 *What are the scriptural guidelines for the practice of impartation?*

A casual reading of what Scripture teaches about spiritual gifts leads to the conclusion that God is a God of procedure and order. Generally speaking, in church meetings, “all things [have to] be done decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40). In other words, the omnipotent Imparter demands that spiritual things be handled with “propriety” and in a “fitting” way (Fee 1987, 713). It therefore raises the question: What are the scriptural guidelines for the practice of impartation?

First, the recipients of impartations are persons who have a relationship with Christ (Acts 2:38; 10:15–17; 19:1–6; Rom 1:11; 12:1–8; 1 Cor 12:1–11; Arrington 2003, 234; Gause 2009, 114, 126). Second, since the term *μεταδίδωμι* is thought to include gifts such as salvation, healing, and mercy, unbelievers may and should be the recipients of these kinds of impartations (Cranfield 1975, 78–79; Hodge 1947, 25–26). Third, it is understood that impartations are not limited to a particular location, means, ritual or regimented form of worship. However, impartations may occur while persons engage in worship or while praying at the altar (Richie 2020, 124; Tomberlin 2010, 18–28). Fourth, believers may also receive impartations through the laying on of hands, and this is arguably the most prominent method through which believers receive impartations (Robinson 2008; Tipei 2009). However, as Fee (1994, 774) points out, the laying on of hands by believers and ministers is secondary to the work of God. Fifth, God’s blessings and gifts are imparted through spoken words. This entails that the sovereign power of God is made effective only when believers make proclamations in the name of, or through the authority of, Jesus (Mark 16:15–18; John 14:12–14; 16:23–24).⁷ Fifth, impartation of ordinary gifts such as mercy and giving are conveyed through acts of service. Put differently, believers are sovereignly imparted with the spiritual gift of giving and

mercy but are at liberty to choose the place, the person and time of its manifestation.

6.3 Which biblical impartations are valid for continual practice and how are they to be understood?

Impartations believed to have contemporary significance include the baptism in the Holy Spirit, divine healing, blessings, as well as πνευματικά, χαρίσματα, and δόματα gifts. They should be understood as a way to empower the believer (Acts 1:8), edify the body of Christ (1 Cor 14), confirm the gospel (Mark 16:14–20; Heb 2:1–4) and provide health and good will to both believers and unbelievers (Jas 5:13–16). Moreover, impartations are conveyed freely as a result of God’s grace and consequently cannot be attained through adherence to preconceived styles of worship, rituals or the practice of tithing and giving (Gause 2009, 124–126). Although believers may engage in one or all of these practices, these are not elements of a biblical theology of impartation.

6.4 Steps to discourage the abuse of the doctrine of impartation

One of the problems that caused Pentecostalism to be misunderstood by and misrepresented to non-Pentecostals concerns the abuse of the doctrine of impartation. Aberrant manifestations and theological error have led many outside Pentecostalism to see them as heretics. In order to correct this picture and to ensure that the practice of impartation within the Church of God is congruent with biblical teaching, steps must be taken to

7 In Acts 2:38 “name” signifies the authority and power of Jesus, thus identifying the source of Peter’s power and authority to heal the lame man (Arrington 2008, 97–98, Bruce 1981, 390–391).

discourage abuse of the doctrine of impartation, and especially of faulty teachings inherited from the past. Although a thorough exposition of every theoretical misunderstanding and problematic practice in the assembly would be beyond the scope of this summary, it is nevertheless useful to offer a brief positional statement for practice.

- Impartation of blessings and gifts are a legitimate biblical practice.
- Texts such as Acts 8:14–17 and 19:1–6, Romans 1:11, 1 Corinthians 12:1–11, Ephesians 4:7–13 and James 5:13–15 allow leaders to identify, describe, and explain the gifts that are relevant to believers. Moreover, Matthew 7:11, Acts 5:32 and Romans 12:1–8 explain what is required of the believer in order to receive those impartations.⁸ Furthermore, Mark 16:17–18 and Hebrews 2:4 indicate that believers who are imparted with gifts and blessings will experience the manifestation of those impartations in their lives as a sign of their reception. Hence, a correct theoretical and theological view on impartation that expunges heresy can only become a reality through sound biblical instruction.
- Imparted gifts are not natural human abilities; they are acquired abilities through the power of the Spirit and are to be used for the benefit of the body of Christ. Consequently, believers should desire to know God’s will from Scripture when utilizing their gifts and imparting to others.
- False teaching about impartation must be uprooted. Paul urged Timothy to “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim 4:3–4). In other words, when dealing with questionable doctrinal practices, “The

8 Triplett (1970, 85–87) says “The disuse of the gifts can be traced to our failure in teaching their proper use.” He believes instruction is a must because, “gifts are not playthings for inexperienced children” (ibid.). Constable (2017, 63) stresses that, “Gifts are not toys to play with. They are tools to build with.”

best way to test what is spiritual is to ask if it is scriptural” (Triplett 1970, 86). Just as important is the willingness of leaders to intervene biblically when heretical views on impartation are being propagated or practiced. When open rebuke is not appropriate, then reproof must be dealt with privately and expeditiously (Matt 18:15–17). Correction can also be made in the form of written documents such as doctrinal position papers. Other effective means are disciplinary boards of inquiry that hold leaders accountable for what they teach and their integrity.

- Gifts, especially prophecies with impartation as purpose, ought to be properly judged in the light of the teaching and authority of Scripture. Those that are misused or found wanting need to be rectified. Leaders or other believers who use their gifts to deceive and/or manipulate others in order to benefit themselves should be removed from all leadership positions (cf. Joubert and Maartens 2017, 105–132).

7. Conclusion

The aim of this summary article has been to give a brief synopsis of some of the theoretical and practical misunderstandings related to the doctrine of impartation. The assessment focused primarily on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, healing, and blessings. It was determined that Scripture lends ample evidence that the doctrine of impartation is still valid for Pentecostalism and the Church of God. Hopefully, the information contained herein will provide further theological clarity that will minimize misunderstanding and/or abuse of the doctrine in practice, if not in Pentecostalism as a whole, then at least for leaders of the Church of God.

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