

# THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

The Apostle Paul begins his famous section on the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12 by saying: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.” The issue of the gifts of the spirit, or miraculous gifts, has caused much debate and infighting within the Church. The purpose of this position paper is to clarify the stance of Sojourn Church in regards to the gifts of the Spirit.



# The Gifts of the Spirit

Justin Pearson, February 2013

When it comes to spiritual gifts, and the so-called miraculous or sign gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12-14, we are not a cessationist church. Cessationism is the belief that the sign gifts mentioned in Scripture (e.g. tongues, healing, prophecy, interpretation of tongues, etc.) have ceased to exist in all forms today. However, while we are not cessationist in our view and understanding of spiritual gifts, we are also not Pentecostal, which is most often associated with physical manifestations of the work of the Spirit, second experiences of baptism of the Spirit, sign gifts accompanying levels of faith or evidence of spiritual maturity and/or salvation, and the full use and practice of all gifts listed in Scripture.

For Sojourn Church, the most succinct way of describing our position regarding the miraculous sign gifts is that we are open but cautious. For the remainder of this short paper, we will outline in more detail what this means and how it plays out in the function and practices of Sojourn Church.

## **Baptism and Filling of the Spirit**

Before getting into the specifics of what our position means, we want to be clear on a few other important matters as it relates to the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer. These thoughts

will be intentionally kept brief and can be expounded on if there are questions.

First, we believe there is one baptism of the Spirit and no second baptism of the Spirit. First Corinthians 12:13 along with Ephesians 4:5 affirm our understanding. The baptism of the Spirit happens at the point of conversion for all believers and is primarily about regeneration and the inclusion in the body of Christ through our union with Christ. As the word baptism indicates, it is an immersion into the spiritual life that comes in and through repentance and faith in Christ. Nowhere does Scripture indicate that there is a second experience or baptism of the Spirit that comes after conversion. The support given for this from the book of Acts is erroneous, as these instances of the work of the Spirit are descriptive, not prescriptive for believers or the church.

Subsequently, speaking in tongues is not evidence of a second experience or baptism of the Spirit, nor is it evidence of conversion or special faith in the life of a believer. As with all gifts, speaking in tongues is one of many gifts that will be had by some, but not by all (1 Cor 12:4-31).

We also do not believe the Scripture indicates that believers are to seek the Spirit in a new, different, or better way after conversion. While believers are to be filled with the Spirit as Paul indicates (Eph 5:18), it is not in a fanciful manner. Paul is not focusing on



experiential spirituality, but on Spirit-led living that evidences fruit of the Spirit instead of the flesh (cf. Gal 5:16-25).

### **What does it mean to be open but cautious?**

To be open but cautious to certain spiritual gifts means a few things. First, as indicated above, we believe that Scripture does not indicate that the gifts have ceased. There is no biblical evidence that can be used to formulate a sufficient argument supporting the cessation of sign gifts. First Corinthians 13:8-12, often used to support the ceasing of gifts, is referring to the ceasing of gifts when Christ returns and the fullness of the Kingdom comes in the New Heavens and New Earth. Second, we believe that while the biblical evidence does not indicate the cessation of these gifts, it is also does not indicate the extent to which these gifts will manifest in the church in subsequent generations and times. Third, because these gifts are specifically mentioned and discussed in Scripture and because there is no evidence to indicate cessation and also no clear indication of future use, we believe that these gifts are still in existence, that God can and does use them in the church, but they do not appear to be normative occurrences in all places that the church exists nor should we necessarily expect them to be normative.

While it is arguable that the miraculous has happened throughout time, it is clear from history and Scripture that there have been unique times that the miraculous seemed to occur more. Some of these periods are the time of Moses, the ministry of Elijah, the time of the earthly ministry of Jesus, and the era of the Apostles. The primary purpose of the miracles performed in each of these periods was to be a sign to indicate and validate the minister and the

message. What this is not saying, as some cessationists would indicate, is that this is the only purpose of the operation of the miraculous gifts. What this does indicate is that the operation of the gifts and of miracles is not always the same or should be expected to be the same. A possible clue to that end is the fact that Paul and the other New Testament authors do not give much, and in some cases any, serious time to writing to the church about these gifts.

Another support to the reality that the miraculous sign gifts have not completely ceased, but do not occur as frequently or in a widespread manner in the church is to look at church history. This short paper is not the place to analyze all aspects of church history, however, the historical evidence indicates that the gifts were not used or discussed as they were in the Apostolic era. Historical evidence can be helpful, but should be used cautiously. No matter what, it is fairly impossible to deny the fact that miraculous activity of the same quality and extent associated with the era of Christ is not present in the world and church today.

The Book of Acts is itself a history of the start of the New Testament church. There are aspects that are prescriptive, but most is descriptive. We can and should learn from Acts, but not seek to follow all aspects in carbon copy like fashion if that is not the intention of the author. As already stated, the Apostolic time was unique, just as the three years of Jesus' earthly ministry was unique.

As some early church fathers stated, conversion and the transformation of lives by the gospel is the ongoing miracle in the church. What this means is that the most miraculous work of God should be sought after and happening regularly in the church over and



above any other aspect of the miraculous including the operation of certain spiritual gifts. Now, what we are not saying is that the gifts do not exist or should not exist in the church today. We are open to their existence and use, but we are indeed cautious based on the above-mentioned thoughts and also due to the abuse of and misuse of so-called gifts in the church, specifically in the last 100 years.

At this point in our discussion it is important to understand the purpose of the gifts given by God to the church. As a whole, spiritual gifts are given to the body for the purpose of edification of the body (1 Cor 12:7; 14:26). There will be personal benefits and blessing that come with the operation and use of spiritual gifts, but these personal aspects are secondary and not the primary purpose of the gifts. When the gifts and their use is understood in this way we should evaluate all manifestations of any type of spiritual gift in regard to their usefulness to the building up of the church. The people of God are primary, not the individual.

It is also important to note very clearly that the Bible does not portray bodily manifestations as demonstrations of the immediate supernatural power of the Spirit of God (e.g. shaking, falling down, holy laughing, etc.). When these things are taught to be necessary, expected, and sought after the church is on a slippery slope to elevated, experience based spirituality that is devoid of the authority of the Word and the Spirit, who is being credited with such occurrences.

We want to eagerly seek the work of the Spirit in the life of every believer that is a part of Sojourn Church. We want to ask God to do big things in and through the life and ministry of Sojourn

Church. We want to be Spirit-filled, Spirit-led people who walk in faithful and radical obedience to our Lord and God. But we always want to do this with Scripture as our foundation, with Christ as our focus, and the glory of God as our aim.

To that end, should God want to bring the manifestation of the miraculous sign gifts to Sojourn Church we would welcome them and follow the biblical directives for their use, but our focus is not placed on looking for these things, but rather on seeking the guidance and leading of the Spirit to make more and more disciples in and through the ministry of Sojourn Church.

#### **What is the practice of Sojourn Church regarding the gifts?**

We should never seek signs and wonders and miracles in order for God to prove anything to us before we obey. Our obedience is never conditioned on God putting on a show for us. Every aspect of praying and asking God to do big things, whether miraculous or otherwise, should be for his glory and the good of others. God is faithful and true. He is unchanging and eternally consistent. We do not need, nor should we seek, heightened spiritual experience to know God is real, present, and active. To that end, at Sojourn Church we will not seek to practice speaking in tongues and prophecy during our Sunday gatherings or Community Group gatherings. We will not encourage individuals to pursue or seek these gifts, but rather to pursue and seek God through Christ and the guidance, leading, and power of the Spirit. If the elders of Sojourn believe that God is doing something in our midst regarding these gifts, we will take time to pray, seek counsel, and cautiously determine how these things will be practiced in the gatherings of the local church. In regard to healing, the elders of Sojourn Church will



always gladly pray over the sick and infirmed in the church. We will ask in expectant faith that God will bring about healing to any and all individuals according to his will and good pleasure. Praying for the sick by the elders may be done during Sunday gatherings or, upon request, in homes or hospitals.

*We hold these views in humble conviction and believe them to be taught and validated by Scripture. As with any doctrinal point, we have a willingness and openness to continue to grow in our understanding and application regarding spiritual gifts. If you have any questions about anything stated in this document please contact the elders of Sojourn Church.*

