



# The Work of the Holy Spirit

The aim of the *All in the Family* series is to explore the breadth of belief and practice that exists amongst FIEC churches on matters that our Doctrinal Basis doesn't touch on and yet are important in church life.

For each subject we ask a variety of church leaders to respond to the same questions, with an emphasis on seeing how belief shapes practice in a local church.

In this collection on the work of the Holy Spirit, we have one cessationist paper and then three pastors whose understanding sits on the spectrum of continuationist views.

- *cessationism – Bill James*
- *continuationism – John James*
- *continuationism – John Risbridger*
- *continuationism – Greg Haslam*

These papers can also be found online at: [fiec.org.uk/resources/series/all-in-the-family](http://fiec.org.uk/resources/series/all-in-the-family)

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## Paper #1: Bill James

**About the author:** *Bill James has been pastor of Emmanuel Evangelical Church, Leamington Spa, since 1991. He is chair of the Carey Ministers' Conference. Prior to entering ministry Bill trained as a chemical engineer and worked in industry for six years, followed by three years at Toronto Baptist Seminary. He is married to Sharon and they have two children.*

**Viewpoint:** *Cessationist*

**Church:** *Emmanuel Evangelical Church, Leamington Spa, was constituted in 1986. Our elders and deacons subscribe to the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, and this is the teaching standard of the church. We do not practise prophecy or tongues, believing that such gifts ceased with the apostolic age.*

*Our church membership is drawn from a variety of different backgrounds, and some of our students from Warwick University have home churches which would have very different convictions and practice. However, we enjoy unity in the Gospel, and share a common desire to grow in love for Christ and for one another. In dependence on the Spirit, we seek to know God, and to make Him known to others, through the preaching and teaching of His Word.*

## **1) Do you believe that the miraculous gifts were the “signs of the apostles” and therefore confined to the apostolic era? Why?**

We all agree that there was an “apostolic age” which was unique and unrepeatably. The twelve apostles were appointed personally by the Lord Jesus Christ, followed by the extraordinary appointment of Matthias by lot. The qualification for being an apostle was to be a witness of the resurrection (Acts 1:21-22). The apostle Paul makes it clear that he was added to the number as one “abnormally born” (1 Cor 15:7) and that the Lord appeared to him “last of all” on the Road to Damascus. So no further additions can be made to these foundational apostles.

The period of the apostolic age was a time of unique revelation which brought the NT Scriptures into being. Such prophetic revelation is unrepeatably and the canon of Scripture is closed. The apostle Paul expresses this truth that the church is built on the “foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph 2:20). The apostles and prophets are spoken of together as a group whose ministry, being foundational, is not constantly being rebuilt through the life of the church. When Paul was coming to the end of his ministry, he urged Timothy not to look for further prophetic messages, but rather to “guard the good deposit” (2 Tim 1:13-4) of revelation already delivered to the church. Such revelation was given unrepeatably “once for all” (Jude 1:3), in the same way that Christ died “once for all” (Heb 9:26). It is the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, in person and through His apostles, who is the climax of all prophetic revelation (Heb 1:1-3). We now wait to see Him face to face.

Charismatic believers challenge the idea that New Testament prophecy must be regarded as foundational, and limited to the first century. They suggest, for example, that Eph 2:20 is speaking only of the OT prophets, or the “apostolic prophets.” Such arguments have proved difficult to maintain. It seems most unlikely that Paul has entirely different categories in mind when he speaks of prophets in 2:20, and then again in 4:11 (where once again prophets are associated with apostles).

This unique and unrepeatable season of special revelation in the New Testament was attended by miraculous signs. Such signs also accompanied other periods of special revelation in the Bible such as the ministry of the prophet Moses during the time of the Exodus, and the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul speaks of such signs as being the marks of apostolic ministry (2 Cor 12:12). In other words, just as signs and wonders spoke of the unique person and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, so such signs also accompanied the ministry of His apostles, testifying of the authenticity of their message (Heb 2:3-4).

## **2) Does your church pray for sick people to be healed? How is this done? Do you expect healing to take place?**

Yes, we pray for the Lord to heal those who are sick, and sometimes have special times of prayer for those in particular need. We plead with the Lord to have mercy, believing that He is not only able but also kind and gracious in healing our diseases. He sometimes does this in extraordinary, supernatural ways which cannot be explained by medical science. More than once members of our congregation have been described as “miracles” by doctors who had despaired of their lives. However, we also acknowledge the sovereignty of God in these matters, and that it is not always His purpose to heal every believer, just as He did not remove the thorn from Paul’s flesh. In such cases our prayers are answered as the Lord gives grace to the sick to sustain a good testimony to the end, in positive expectation of future glory. It’s important to emphasise godliness in this way rather than to promise deliverance. An expectation that all faithful believers will be healed can be crushing to those who are sick, and is pastorally most unhelpful”

While the Lord does answer our prayers for the healing of believers, this is different to the “signs of the apostles” which have now ceased. Both Jesus and His apostles had unique authority over sickness, which would depart at their touch or their command. No-one today has that same “gift of healing” because no-one today has that unique apostolic ministry.

James 5 is often referred to as an example of prayer for the sick; however, this passage raises a number of difficult questions:

- Why should the sick person call the elders, rather than someone with a gift of healing?
- Why are healing and the forgiveness of sins so closely linked?
- How is it that the healing seems to be “guaranteed”? (Jas 5:15). This raises other questions about what is meant by the “prayer of faith.”

I believe the only satisfactory interpretation understands this sickness to be related to the believer’s sin, and falling out of fellowship with the church. This fits the context of James, and is parallel to a similar situation in 1 Cor 11:30. This would explain the summoning of the elders to seek forgiveness and reconciliation, and the subsequent assurance of physical healing. The “prayer of faith” is offered on the basis of God’s promise to reconciled believers (Matt 18:19-20), and the pouring out of oil speaks of the restoration of the Spirit’s blessing on believers who are now reunited (Ps 133:2).

### 3) What do you understand by the gift of prophecy? Is it practiced in your church? In what way?

Prophecy is consistently described in Scripture as God speaking through human instruments so that their words are His words. For example, just as Aaron is Moses' mouthpiece, speaking what Moses commands, so Moses is God's mouthpiece, speaking His words (Exod 4:16). Again and again in Scripture we see the announcement "Thus says the Lord..." The words of the prophets are the words of God, so that what Isaiah prophesies, the Holy Spirit says (Acts 28:25-27). Because they are the Lord's words they are both infallible and authoritative.

Modern charismatics (such as Wayne Grudem) suggest that there are two types of prophecy in the New Testament, and it is possible for prophecy to be both fallible and non-authoritative. This view seems to me to be illogical. If someone comes to me and announces that they have a message from the Lord, how seriously am I to take that if I know that the content of the message may be both mistaken, and without authority? And how can it be described as a "word from the Lord" if it is unreliable? That seems to be a slur not only on the phenomenon of prophecy, but the Lord Himself.

The prophet Agabus is cited as an example of a fallible prophet. After all, he spoke of Paul being bound by the Jews, when in fact he was bound by the Romans (Acts 21:11). But Agabus is no less accurate than the apostle Peter who declared that the Jews had crucified Christ (Acts 2:36). In both cases it is clear from the context that the primary responsibility lies with the Jews, even if it was the Romans who bound and crucified. The prophecy of Agabus is preceded by the words "The Holy Spirit says" in direct parallel to the "Thus says the Lord" of the Old Testament prophets.

In the New Testament church, before the closing of the canon, there were prophets in the churches. This was of vital help to the believers to guide and direct them in their understanding, and even to lead them in their worship (the reference to prophecy in 1 Cor 12-14 may well include songs of praise like Miriam's prophetic song after the triumph of the Exodus). Prophecy is prized ahead of "teaching" in 1 Cor 12:28, and we should not be surprised by that as prophecy is the inspired words of God.

Does this mean, then, that I don't believe the Lord speaks at all today? Not at all! I fear that very often the cessationist position is caricatured to make it seem as if we scarcely believe in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. While I reject the charismatic view of prophecy, I believe that the Holy Spirit speaks powerfully today through His Word, and also guides, directs and prompts His people in every age. Such guidance and direction might take a number of forms. For example:

- How often have preachers been approached after the sermon by believers who say "I thought you were speaking directly to me", or "How did you know of my situation?" Sometimes this happens in remarkable ways. It is said that on one occasion when C H Spurgeon was preaching he spoke of a man present in the congregation who had been working on the Lord's Day for the sake of a few pennies. Spurgeon's words proved to be remarkably accurate. Yet when preachers make such applications (or indeed even throw-

away remarks) they have no idea of the significance of their words. As far as the preacher is concerned he is just preaching! Yet as we expound God's word the Holy Spirit is at work, both directing our thoughts and our words, and using them in the hearts and minds of our hearers in ways which we might never fully understand until glory. This is not the "gift of prophecy" which is conscious or under the control of the preacher, but it is the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit at work through his ministry.

- How often has a fellow believer spoken to us about something, and the words have gone to our hearts? Perhaps this brother or sister had a special burden to speak to us on the subject; yet they had no idea of the impact or significance of their words. This is the guidance and direction of the Spirit.
- How often have we woken in the middle of the night, or at other times, being burdened to pray for a specific individual or situation? We only discover later the significance of that moment.

We could multiply examples. Some charismatic believers would then claim: So there is prophecy going on in your church! Perhaps our differences are only a matter of semantics after all? But I believe that to use the label "prophecy" in such cases is not only to demean God's prophetic word (infallible and authoritative), but also to limit the ministry of the Spirit in the lives of believers. We should ALL (whether we are considered "prophets" or not), at ALL times seek to be servants of the Lord, speaking His words, and doing His will (1 Pet 4:11).

Whenever a believer shares their wisdom with me, or gives me advice, I do not take it less seriously because it is not called "prophecy". Rather I understand all such counsel to be fallible and without authority, but perhaps pointing me back to the Lord. I believe that the Holy Spirit may be using my brother or sister's words to edify or direct me.

#### **4) What do you understand by the gift of "tongues"? Is it manifested today? If so how and when?**

The gift of tongues first appears in the New Testament on the Day of Pentecost. The impact is sensational, as the crowd marvels that they are able to hear the "wonders of God in our own tongues" (Acts 2:11). In other words, the Spirit has been poured out and prophetic words are being spoken (Acts 2:18), but in a range of different languages. Not only is this helpful to the multi-ethnic congregation, but it is a glorious announcement that now God does not just speak in Hebrew or Aramaic, but He speaks to all nations in their own languages, and the message of Christ is for all peoples.

The gift of tongues then appears again at the conversion of Cornelius, and Peter reports these events as a repeat of what happened at Pentecost (Acts 11:15). It is therefore reasonable to assume that when Paul speaks of believers speaking in tongues in the churches, he is referring to the same phenomenon. When such languages are interpreted (translated) they are words of prophecy (1 Cor 14:5). The problem is that if there is no interpretation (i.e. translation), such tongues are

incomprehensible to the other believers, and therefore unedifying. Indeed, Paul describes the use of tongues where there is no interpretation as a mark not of God's blessing but of judgment. In 1 Cor 14:21 he quotes the prophet Isaiah who refers to God's people being taken away into exile, only to be surrounded by a babble of voices they cannot understand. That is not what should be happening in the church!

Because the gift of tongues is simply prophecy in another language, this gift ceased at the end of the apostolic age for the reasons explained above. The question is then asked: what is going on in charismatic churches today when the "gift of tongues" is exercised? I believe that the best explanation is that believers are expressing their devotion to Christ in inarticulate ways. Linguistic studies have been carried out on tongues speaking in different countries, and it is found that believers always use the same vocal forms when they speak in "tongues" as they do when they speak their own native language. In other words, German "tongues" are slightly different to English "tongues". More specifically, tongue speakers tend to use the same range of verbal forms as their teacher who guided them into this practice in the first place<sup>1</sup>. That is difficult to explain if this is a supernaturally generated language. So, while I do not doubt the sincerity or spiritual devotion of such believers, nor their testimonies of encouragement through exercising this "gift", I doubt that what is going on is the same as the gift of tongues described in the New Testament.

## **5) What are the clearest evidences of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of your church?**

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to bring glory to Christ. When the Gospel is preached and those who are spiritually dead are awakened to new life and conversion, that is an unmistakable mark of His activity (1Thess 1:4-6). It has been wonderful to see some come to faith at Emmanuel, and others grow in love for Christ and for one another.

I recently had a message from a student who had been with us at Emmanuel for 3 years before graduating and starting work in London. She wanted to express her appreciation for her time at the church and said "what I have learnt most from is seeing people living out their faith in self-sacrificial service, love, and care for others and their constant desire to become more like Christ and proclaim him in their actions as well as their words." That is the Holy Spirit's work!

I am grateful for the enormous privilege of serving the Lord in a church where the Holy Spirit is clearly at work. I have the sense when I stand up to preach that there is something going on (or, rather, someone at work) over whom I have no control. Spiritual growth and progress is made quite apart from my own efforts, and sometimes I fear in spite of them. The work of the church is supernatural.

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<sup>1</sup> Felicitas D Goodman, *Speaking in Tongues: A Cross-Cultural Study of Glossolalia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), quoted in D A Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Michigan: Baker, 1987).

## 6) What would you say to Christians who believe that in theory all the gifts are available today and yet do not expect to see them manifested in their church?

I think this question is intended for those of charismatic persuasion!

## 7) How do you handle differences of opinion on spiritual gifts within church leadership, within church membership and in your relationship with other churches?

We don't have significant differences on these issues in our church leadership; indeed it would create tensions if we appointed elders who disagreed about whether tongues and prophecy should be exercised in the church today. However, we do have church members who take a different view.

Generally speaking, and especially within our local church, such differences are not a problem. Charismatic church members graciously understand our position, even if they cannot accept it for themselves. And when I explain that I do believe in the continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit through His Word, and in guiding and directing believers, they see that our differences are sometimes simply a matter of semantics.

There can be difficulties in working with evangelical charismatic churches if their view of evangelism is inextricably linked to signs and wonders. Or there are practical tensions if they are constantly looking for direction, and making decisions, by seeking "words from the Lord". It seems to me that even the apostle Paul generally took decisions according to his own spiritual wisdom, without any special revelation. Sanctified common sense is a gift of the Spirit too! (Rom 1:13, Phil 2:25, 1 Cor 16:4).

However, the general rule is to seek to work together wherever there is agreement on the Gospel.

### *Recommended Reading*

- Richard Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1979)
- O. Palmer-Robertson, *The Final Word: A Biblical Response to the case for Tongues and Prophecy Today* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993)

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## Paper #2: John James

**About the author:** *In 2010 John became pastor of Helier Chapel in Birmingham. He oversees the Midlands Ministry Training Course and is a trustee of 2020 Birmingham, a coalition of churches seeking to see church planting and revitalization flourish throughout the city. Prior to entering ministry full-time, John worked at the University of Birmingham, performed as a romantic*

*troubadour, and trained for ministry at Oak Hill College. He is married to Sarah and they have three children.*

**Viewpoint:** *Continuationist*

**Church:** *Helier Chapel is a small, diverse, family of believers in Northfield, Birmingham. We meet in the heart of a housing estate that is ranked within the top 8% most deprived communities in England. Our desire is to be a church for our community, bringing the good news of Jesus to the people of Northfield.*

*In 2010 we began a process of revitalisation together, seeking to re-establish a flourishing gospel ministry that makes disciples, and over the past four years we have seen God work in some wonderful ways, to that end. The revitalisation process will formally reach its conclusion when we adopt our new name, Crossway Church, this Easter!*

## **1) Do you believe that the miraculous gifts were the “signs of the apostles” and therefore confined to the apostolic era? Why?**

It is important to be clear on the distinct roles gifts and signs play in the Bible. Jesus performed miraculous “signs” to accompany his message, which revealed his identity and mission and displayed his glory (John 2:11). It is also clear that miraculous gifts accompanied the apostles as “signs” which testified to the veracity of the good news they proclaimed (Heb 2:4). However, it is not the case that *all* miraculous gifts *must be* signs of the apostles. The New Testament does not indicate that the miraculous gifting of disciples of Jesus by the Holy Spirit, for the edification of the Church, is confined only to the apostolic eyewitnesses.

On the day of Pentecost though it is only the Eleven who speak in other tongues, Peter clearly intends this to be the beginning of the fulfilment of Joel 2, in which men and women, young and old, will *all* prophesy. In Rom 12 Paul addresses the church and lists a number of “gifts” they are likely to have amongst them, including prophecy, and in 1 Cor 12-14 the list includes healing, prophecy and tongues. There is nothing to indicate that these “miraculous” gifts are in a category distinct from the others listed and confined to the apostles. In fact the church in Corinth is clearly exercising a number of these gifts (with prophecy and tongues addressed directly), and Paul does not urge them to stop, or tell them they are mistaken, but instructs them to use them appropriately.

Beyond the lists, many specific spiritual gifts are mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, including those we might term “miraculous.” Paul encourages the church to treat prophecies appropriately (1 Thess 5:19-21), and recalls the prophetic message given to the elders concerning Timothy (1 Tim 4:14). Though Heb 12:13 is probably a spiritual healing of the “lame” who are struggling to “run” the race, James 5:14-16 must be taking as physical healing from sickness.

It can be tempting to divide Spiritual gifts into the “normal” and the “miraculous”, but the New Testament does not seem to do that. In fact, *all* Spiritual gifts are miraculous, and it is as



miraculous for someone to grow in giving generously and teaching faithfully as it is for them to speak prophetically or have a prayer for healing answered.

When a distinction is made between the “normal” and the “miraculous” it is often accompanied by a particular expectation of what then qualifies as the exercising of such a gift. Though someone who is gifted to teach will be trained, make mistakes, develop, rely on others, read commentaries, working hard at their gift while giving all glory to God, we expect “miraculous” gifts to operate differently. Is someone’s healing, after prayer, through the gracious means of the NHS any less a supernatural work of God?

The desire to make “miraculous gifts” synonymous with the “signs of the apostles” is partly because we want to guard against a mistaken “signs and wonders” style charismaticism, but there is clearly a difference in the New Testament between these two categories, and though we should not expect the signs of the apostles to be manifest today, there is no reason at all not to expect God to continue to gift his church miraculously.

## **2) Does your church pray for sick people to be healed? How is this done? Do you expect healing to take place?**

As a church we are happy to pray for sick people to be healed. James 5 is probably a very serious illness (if the elders must go to them) and the “*praying over him and anointing him with oil*” is probably the culturally conditioned aspect of the call. Also, important to see here this is not the special gift of a “healer”, but something the elders are to do. The emphasis here is on the power of prayer. What do we do when we don’t know what to do – we pray!

We have had specific occasions when church members have requested “the elders” come and pray, in this sense. I also often visit sick people and will pray both for their healing and that God will use their illness for his good in their lives.

Although in James it looks like there is a “promise” that God will always heal, the NT as a whole suggests that illness cultivates dependence on him, and that there are times when he does heal and times when he doesn’t.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 is helpful in providing the balance to James 5. Though the “thorn in the flesh” may well be a particular person that is causing Paul difficulty, the fact that he speaks of weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and difficulties suggests that sickness is not always healed, and can be used by God to grow us in dependence on him.

It is striking that we have the example of Epaphroditus, whom God had mercy on, and was brought back from the brink of death (Phil 2:25-30) and Trophimus who is left sick, by Paul, in Miletus (2 Tim 4:20). We must pray for sick people to be healed, give all glory to God when that healing takes place (by whatever means), and yet also prepare people for the reality that God may well not answer the prayer in the way we have requested. We must also pray for sick people to allow God use their sickness for good in their lives.

### 3) What do you understand by the gift of prophecy? Is it practiced in your church? In what way?

#### *a) What do you understand by the gift of prophecy?*

Our clearest insight into what the gift of prophecy is comes in 1 Cor 14. Here it is suggested that prophecy is a revelation received by the prophet (v30), within his or her control (v29-33). It should be spoken intelligibly (v9), to the Church (v3), to teach others (v19, 31), so that they may be built up, encouraged and consoled (v2-5, 26, 31). It also has the ability to convict unbelievers of the truth (v24-25). Prophecy is not infallible, thus it is not essential that it be shared (v29-32), and it should be weighed (v29) against the authoritative word of Jesus (v37-38).

Prophecy cannot simply be preaching. In 1 Corinthians they are clearly not delivering prepared sermons, though one would hope that good preaching should still be “prophetic” according to the observations above. In 1 Corinthians prophecy is at least at times spontaneous, though I wouldn’t want to insist on spontaneity.

Prophecy cannot also simply be “telling the future.” If prophecy can result in unbelievers worshipping God, then it must contain something of the gospel. The gospel itself is a prediction of the future coming of Christ, and other New Testament prophets can be quite specific in their predictions (Acts 11:28, 21:10-11). But prophecy is broader than future predictions.

In one sense, at Pentecost we all become prophets. In Acts 2 we become those who declare the wonder of God (Acts 2:11) – and Peter regards Joel 2:28-32, where sons and daughters will prophecy, as something of an explanation of this.

John Piper has defined prophecy as *“Spirit prompted, Spirit sustained, revelation rooted, fallible speech”* (in an MP3 sermon). This corresponds with Don Carson’s definition, *“A spirit-prompted utterance, but with no guarantee of divine authority in every detail.”* (Carson, *Showing the Spirit*). These are helpful definitions as far as they go.

#### *b) Is it practiced in your church? In what way?*

In terms of Acts 2 and 1 Cor 14:24-25, I would encourage us as a congregation to see the speaking of the truth of the gospel, intentionally and personally, into each other’s lives as a helpful context in which prophecy will be fostered. In our preaching, Life Groups, 1-2-1 discipleship, and open times of prayer, praise and testimony I expect there to be “prophetic” elements going on throughout. It is clear that there are times when someone is able to apply the gospel to another with precision and accuracy that is evidently inspired by the Holy Spirit.

There have also been occasions when people have felt they have been given specific prophecies for individuals or the leadership or the church family. On these occasions we ask the person to inform us as an eldership so that we may weigh carefully what has been shared, before deciding whether

or not to take it further or share it with anyone else. We want people to know that we will welcome such a prophecy, but would not make a spectacle out of it. I think these kinds of prophecies are probably pretty rare, and are actually pretty rare in the New Testament too. It is worth remembering that the book of Acts spans a number of decades.

#### **4) What do you understand by the gift of “tongues”? Is it manifested today? If so how and when?**

##### *a) What do you understand by the gift of “tongues”?*

Again, our clearest insight into the gift of tongues comes in 1 Corinthians. Although in Acts 2 they speak in other intelligible languages, in 1 Corinthians the tongues are not understood on their own at all. Here they are spoken to God (v2) and are thus a prayer language (v14-15). They may be accompanied by a gift of interpretation (v5, 27) which the speaker themselves should pray for (v13). Without interpretation, the speaker is edified (v4), and so private use of the gift without interpretation is not forbidden (v39). If interpreted the whole church may then be edified (5, 13-17, 28).

In the Old Testament, when God addresses his people through incomprehensible tongues it is a sign of judgement (v21), and thus uninterpreted tongues will perform that function to unbelievers (v22). Tongues will not contribute to their conversion like prophecy, but to their rejection of God, His people and the gospel (v23).

If in Corinth tongues are a private prayer language (when uninterpreted), then it seems distinct from Acts 2, where they are various kinds of tongue or language. This warns against a single definition to fit all occurrences (a point worth bearing in mind regarding prophecy too).

It is worth investigating how something unintelligible can be self-edifying, when in 1 Corinthians 14 edification is clearly linked to the mind (v6, 9, 14, 19-20, 31, 35). Interestingly, Thiselton (1 Corinthians) connects tongues with our eschatological groaning in the Spirit, and Garland suggests therefore that tongues signify our weakness in this age. He notes, *“we do not know how to pray except with unspeakable groans, and the Spirit comes to our aid.”* (Garland, *1 Corinthians*). If so then uninterpreted tongues, by the Spirit, articulating to God our eschatological longing, may well have an edifying effect on the speaker.

##### *b) Is it manifested today? If so how and when?*

Understood this way, I think tongues can be manifest today, and is something of a private prayer language, signifying our weakness and dependence on God, expressing our longing for the new creation.

We would not encourage public speaking of tongues in this way, but would instead ask people to be praying that God would give them an interpretation that would allow them to express the tongue in an intelligible manner.

However, I would be very happy for people to privately utilise the gift of tongues for their own edification.

## **5) What are the clearest evidences of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of your church?**

The clearest evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of our church is sacrificial love for God and for others. Jesus summary of the law (Mark 12:29-21) and his continual refrain throughout his farewell discourse that we might love as *he has loved us* (John 13:34-35) makes it clear that love is at the heart of Spirit wrought discipleship.

A love for God necessarily means no longer enjoying sin and beginning to grow in holiness (1 John 3:1-10), enjoying a new freedom that means that sin no longer reigns over us (Rom 6:11-14). The love is a sacrificial love, because it requires the continual mortification of the flesh. A sacrificial love for other people is also clearly the evidential fruit of the Spirit in our lives. When Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-26) he begins with love, and much of what follows is by nature *relational*: patience, kindness, gentleness etc. It is clearly also the point Paul is trying to make by placing 1 Corinthians 13 at the heart of his teaching regarding spiritual gifts. "Do you want to know what true 'spirituality' looks like," says Paul, "it looks like love."

## **6) What would you say to Christians who believe that in theory all the gifts are available today and yet do not expect to see them manifested in their church?**

I would want to ask on what Biblical grounds they are being asked not to expect them. Why would God make available gifts that we are not expected to see manifested? If we are not actively praying that God will gift us as a church, and if we do not have some level of expectation that that prayer will be answered, then why would we see them manifested in our church.

Often we think that if they are miraculous gifts they will just appear without any room or encouragement given to them. However, that is not the way we view other gifts. It is not by accident that many gifted teachers realise their gifting, grow in their gifting and bless the church greatly in that gifting, in contexts where an emphasis is given to raising up Bible teachers! But gifted bible teachers are no less a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit than gifted prophets.

I would also want to ask what it is they would be expecting to see. If we take our cue from the most extreme examples on the God Channel then there is a good reason why we will not see them manifested in our churches. However, if we seek to define these gifts within the parameters the Bible gives then we would probably find that there are ways these gifts are already being exercised in a variety of contexts, we are just cautious about labelling them such.

## 7) How do you handle differences of opinion on spiritual gifts within church leadership, within church membership and in your relationship with other churches?

We would ask our church members to respect the line that we take. Within the church there are some who would regard our position as restrictive, and others who would regard it as far too open. Our position on gifts is not part of our statement of faith, and so we are happy to welcome people into membership from a variety of backgrounds, and simply ask that they would respect our position and not seek to undermine it.

We would want the leadership to be in agreement on this issue. If there is a tension amongst the leadership on an issue like this, and if different leaders in different contexts are pushing different positions it is unhelpful for the membership, and can be pastorally damaging. It can also result in it being a “taboo” subject which the leadership cannot speak on because they are not in agreement. However, if there is unity then it can be taught carefully, with conviction, in a way that will serve the entire church whatever previous experience they may have had.

In our relationships with other churches we are keen to make a distinction between primary and secondary issues and to make sure they we are finding unity around a common understanding of the gospel, rather than a common understanding of the gospel plus spiritual gifts. There will be many ways it is possible to express that unity, whilst respecting a difference on this issue, without undermining our convictions.

However, there may well be limits to the way we can express that unity if there is a considerable difference of opinion that would result in confusion. So, for example, it would be difficult to plant a church, or engage in mission, in partnership with a church that had particularly strong convictions about the need for signs and wonders to accompany evangelism. It would be important to be honest about that early on. However, that difference of opinion should not stop us partnering with such churches around the gospel in a way that may help them and us plant churches and engage in mission more effectively. We are involved in a coalition of churches that is seeking to plant 20 churches in Birmingham by 2020, and we make clear that we are “together, planting churches” rather than “planting churches together.”

### *Recommended Reading*

- David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)* (Baker Academic, 2003)
- Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians (Pillar New Testament Commentary Series)* (William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2010)
- Francis Chan, *Forgotten God* (David C Cook, 2009)
- Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 2012)

# Paper #3: John Risbridger

**About the author:** *John joined Above Bar in 2004, where he is responsible for the preaching programme and the leadership team. He studied Mathematics and Economics in Nottingham, spent 5 years in NHS management, and was then 10 years on the staff of UCCF. He loves Bible teaching ministry and has a particular interest in worship and its relationship to theology and mission.*

**Viewpoint:** *Continuationist*

**Church:** *Above Bar Church has been on the high street of Southampton for well over a century. We are a multi-generational church seeking to nurture an authentic community of disciples who treasure Christ above all else and who are therefore Bible-centred, God-dependent and mission-focused. We are deeply committed to expository Bible teaching and have a growing heart to bless our city through serving its most vulnerable citizens and making the gospel known as widely as we can.*

*Our church is glad to welcome people from many different nationalities, socio-economic contexts and church backgrounds. There is inevitably a spectrum of views therefore on areas of controversy among evangelicals and a commitment to handle our differences with grace and generosity. I am glad to serve in a church where people work and worship happily together with a wide variety of views on these questions – even within our Leadership Team.*

*The same would be true in the Keswick Convention which I serve as the Chair. The views expressed below therefore should be taken only as my personal views (some of them tentatively held, others more firmly) and not as the official positions either of Above Bar or of Keswick Ministries.*

## 1) Do you believe that the miraculous gifts were the “signs of the apostles” and therefore confined to the apostolic era? Why?

I am inclined to believe that 2 Cor 12:12 gives insight into Paul’s own views on the things that mark an apostle (rather than simply quoting back Corinthian criteria) and I do therefore think that ‘signs, wonders and miracles’ are to be included among the marks of an apostle. I am less convinced that we can deduce from this that such signs were confined to the ‘apostolic era’. A number of reasons come to mind:

- To say that these marks are necessary for apostleship says nothing either way about whether others may also evidence them (even if to a lesser degree). If Paul is arguing that they are *necessary* for apostleship, it doesn’t follow that he regards them as *sufficient* for apostleship (and therefore that anyone who exercises them must by definition be an apostle). It is simply flawed logic to argue that way.
- It is clear from Acts 8 that some who were not recognized as apostles did manifest supernatural gifts. 1 Corinthians 12 seems to reinforce this, since they are included in the

lists of gifts for the general building up of the church, with no suggestion that they are limited to apostles.

- I am increasingly asking whether 'apostleship' has a completely fixed meaning in the NT in any case. Ephesians 4 has *apostles (plural)* given to the church by Christ *after his ascension*. It seems very unlikely that this is *only* Paul and Matthias, but may well reflect a continuing ministry of gospel-shaped church planting and nurturing of leaders. If so we may not be on safe ground to assume that, in 2 Cor 12, Paul is thinking only of apostles who minister before the closure of the canon.
- The reports of miraculous manifestations in pioneer missionary situations are, to my mind, too widespread to be readily dismissed.

Finally, to say that signs and wonders are signs of the apostles is not to say that they are *only* signs of the apostles. They are clearly signs of the Kingdom and signs of the Messiah too! It seems to me that Heb 2:4 sees them not only as signs of an apostolic *era* but as signs of the apostolic *message* too – the message we ourselves proclaim!

## **2) Does your church pray for sick people to be healed? How is this done? Do you expect healing to take place?**

We do pray for sick people to be healed. We do this regularly for many folk within our church prayer meetings, for example. The elders also engage in prayer for healing, modelled as closely as we can on James 5, when this is requested. We believe that the emphasis in James is for the sick person to initiate this. Such times of prayer are preceded by an explanation of what we are doing and include moments for confession of sin, opportunities for verses of scriptures to be spoken into the person's life, extended prayer for the person (and often their spouse if they are married), laying on of hands and anointing with oil. We are clear that the oil has no supernatural properties but symbolizes our expectation that the person is being set aside for the particular blessing of God, ministered by the Holy Spirit, as we pray for them.

We expect God to work in such times of prayer and they are simply beautiful times of deep fellowship, which people always appreciate hugely. Some people have got better physically after such times of prayer – occasionally in a way that has seemed quite remarkable. Some have died not so long afterwards. Invariably people's lives have been deeply touched by the presence of God and the love of his people. We encourage folk to expect God to be at work, but alert them to the fact that his ways are higher than ours and that the way he works may be very different to what we expect or hope for. We don't believe that healing is there for us to name and claim and regard this as a cruel doctrine which has too often compounded the suffering of dear Christian people.

## **3) What do you understand by the gift of prophecy? Is it practiced in your church? In what way?**

Carson (*Showing the Spirit*) has convinced me that, in both Testaments, prophecy is broad in its reference, encompassing binding canonical revelation (which I understand to be completed! – e.g. the writing OT prophets and the book of Revelation) at one end of the spectrum, right the way through to something much more immediate and localized in its scope (e.g. the OT schools of the prophets, the kind of prophecy described in Acts 21).

I am increasingly unpersuaded by Grudem's insistence that the definition of prophecy must be restricted to 'spontaneously given' revelation. That prophecy *can* and *should* include this is evident from 1 Cor 14:30; that it *must* be spontaneous (and that this is therefore definitive for prophecy) is not at all clear to me. Indeed, I find it almost inconceivable that Paul would choose, as his great 'example gift' of the word ministry that edifies the church, a category that doesn't include the careful, thoughtful exposition and application of scripture into the life of the church!

I therefore tend to a broad definition of prophecy that is simply 'speaking the word of God'. In our church this is primarily done through systematic expository preaching (which, to be preaching, must be applied to the life of the church through prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit). Alongside this, however, we welcome a more spontaneous ministry in which particular scriptures are shared which are believed to be pertinent to the life of the church or of an individual and we explicitly invite such contributions in some of our prayer meetings. I have occasionally been very blessed by the sharing of other specific words and pictures, and believe there is a place in the prophetic ministry for this (Acts 21 again), but I would always urge careful testing by scripture and would be unhappy to make such words binding on the conscience of a believer.

#### **4) What do you understand by the gift of "tongues"? Is it manifested today? If so how and when?**

I believe that the gift of tongues is a God-given 'language' for *prayer*, since tongues are addressed to God (1 Cor 14:2). Carson (*Showing the Spirit*) has argued convincingly that the definition of 'language' need not be restricted to identifiable human languages. I do not see any reason to doubt that it is manifested today (the burden of proof is surely on the cessationists), nor any reason to think that the Holy Spirit wouldn't give this gift fairly widely to the people of God (1 Cor 14:5). However, I don't believe that all Christians can claim this gift (1 Cor 12:28), nor do I believe it should be seen as 'the initial physical evidence' of spiritual fullness. Indeed, I think 1 Cor 12-14 is probably written to counter an 'overheated' estimation of the importance of the gift of tongues as a marker for spiritual maturity.

I 'do not forbid speaking in tongues' – indeed, having seen how some believers have been so richly blessed in private prayer through this gift, I want gently to encourage its use in that context. However, while I'm not sure I can prove it, my sense is that Paul's instructions for handling tongues in the public assembly are more concessionary than normative – i.e. he isn't saying that we should expect or encourage tongues in church gatherings, but giving instructions about the disciplines that should apply should this happen.



We have never had a public tongue given in a church service at Above Bar Church. If we did we would wait for interpretation and encourage the weighing of that interpretation. I would expect such an interpretation to sound more like a prayer *to* God than an instruction *from* him. I have, on one occasion in another church, been significantly helped by the interpretation of a tongue, though not entirely happy with the way it was handled.

## **5) What are the clearest evidences of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of your church?**

The gospel coming with regenerating, life-transforming power into peoples' lives, bringing conviction of sin, joyful embracing of the work of Christ, assurance of adoption, progressive holiness, overflowing thankfulness and active commitment to mission. We see all this to some measure but we long to see it more! 1 Thess 1 would be the model. The sense of 'every member ministry' where we expect to give and receive God's grace through the exercise of each other's gifts (not just the preacher's gift!). The sense of congregational worship (including preaching) as a supernatural event, not a mere lecture or a tired formality.

## **6) What would you say to Christians who believe that in theory all the gifts are available today and yet do not expect to see them manifested in their church?**

If I'm honest I'm probably in that category and so I welcome the challenge of the question! The temptation for me is to organize the life of the church so as to create a platform for 'my ministry', so that I have plenty of control and can stay well within my comfort zone! I think it's excellent, therefore, that we should encourage one another to have higher expectations that God may do the unexpected! However, I'm not so convinced that the NT lists of gifts are intended as exhaustive. They seem to me more ad hoc and situationally determined. I wouldn't be at all troubled by the thought that different missional contexts may require the giving of different spiritual gifts and I am confident that the Holy Spirit has more than sufficient creativity to meet each situation (e.g. creative gifts for internet evangelism in the contemporary world).

For me the big issue is not to 'audit' whether all the gifts are being used (let's face it, those who talk most about this are often not talking about all the gifts in any case but only three or four!), but (1) to encourage a view of the church in which a wide range of gifts are expected, valued, developed and given space to operate; (2) to encourage each believer to discover and use whatever gifts the Lord has given (e.g. 1 Pet 4:10ff); (3) to be open to a God who may surprise us (1 Thess 5:19ff) and (4) to practice the NT disciplines in the using of NT gifts (especially the discipline of weighing, testing, etc.).

## 7) How do you handle differences of opinion on spiritual gifts within church leadership, within church membership and in your relationship with other churches?

Some years ago I was asked to give a review for a re-print of John Stott's *Baptism and Fullness* (it wasn't reprinted in the end). Reading the book again left me thinking (a) that he had largely won the argument on the baptism/fullness question (many charismatics are no longer wedded to the idea of a subsequent baptism of the Spirit) but that he had largely lost the argument on the gifts (which has simply moved in directions he hadn't foreseen with the input of Grudem, Carson, Fee, Deere, Turner, etc.).

Much though I admire the spirituality of some of those who testify to some kind of second 'baptism' experience, I still cannot see it biblically and can't shake the concern that the language is inevitably divisive (even though not always intended as such). However, when it comes to the gifts, my experience has been when they are taught alongside the New Testament disciplines for their use; and when people are encouraged to use them in a way which invites testing rather than as a form of spiritual bullying; and when we combine prayer for healing with a robust conviction of the sovereignty of God; and when, in relation to tongues, the emphasis is on personal prayer rather than the assembly, this whole area doesn't have to be as divisive as it can first seem.

Biblical teaching on the relevant passages that is clear in its position, whilst being generous to those who disagree, has been very important in Above Bar Church. Within this I have always tried to identify the extensive areas of *agreement* that exist on spiritual gifts (and more widely on the work of the Spirit) so as to show that we can disagree agreeably on the areas where opinions differ. Willow Creek's Network Course, with its emphasis on the broad range of NT gifts rather than just a few controversial ones, has helped people get spiritual gifts out of the 'slightly freaky' box in their mind and into a box with rather more familiar categories, which makes the whole conversation easier and more inclusive.

### *Recommended Reading*

- Don Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Baker Academic, 1996)
- Wayne Grudem (Ed.), *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Zondervan, 1996)
- Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (IVP, 1994)
- Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Baker Academic, 2009)
- Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians (The New International Greek Testament Commentary)* (William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2013)

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## Paper #4: Greg Haslam

**About the author:** *Greg was born and raised in Liverpool, studied Theology and History at Durham University, and trained for the ministry at London Theological Seminary. He pastored in Winchester for 21 years until his call to Westminster Chapel in 2002. Greg is also a regular*

conference speaker and writer. He is married to Ruth and they have three grown-up sons and five grandchildren.

**Viewpoint:** *Continuationist*

**Church:** *Westminster Chapel is an historic evangelical Congregational building in the heart of Victoria, London. Built in 1841, with an interior reminiscent of C.H. Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle, but smaller in capacity, it's said to hold 2,500 people. It is famous for the faithful Biblical Expository ministry of greats like Dr. Samuel Martin, Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and my predecessor Dr. R.T. Kendall, who all ministered here for many years, and all of whom I greatly admire. I became Dr. Kendall's successor on his retirement in March 2002, and was ordained on the same day that Dr. Lloyd-Jones resigned from the Chapel in March 1968, by a curious co-incidence. Even more amazingly, I unwittingly preached my first sermon on the same text the Doctor finished his ministry with - Rom.14:17. I've pastored Winchester Family Church (FIEC) and Westminster Chapel (FIEC) for a total of 35 years.*

## **1) Do you believe that the miraculous gifts were the “signs of the apostles” and therefore confined to the apostolic era? Why?**

No. I don't believe they are 'past their sell-by date'. I believe that suggestion is an eccentric opinion with no basis in fact, and that it has robbed God's Church of God's best for centuries, and continues to do so in today. The Pentecostal and Charismatic movements of the 20th century are very instructive. They evidence both the best and the worst in attempting to be truly scriptural, and throw up eccentricities and abuses in some cases. But alongside these losses, more importantly there's significant gains – including new spiritual dynamic life, genuine revivals, millions of converts, lively churches, ministry to the poor, vibrant worship and fellowship, accelerated mission, trained and gifted leaders and people, greater love for Christ, greater honour for the God's Holy Spirit's work.

There are many misunderstandings about ancient and modern apostles. The NT itself never limits them to Twelve. Nor did they completely die out, but were replaced by Christ sending more, even if the title '*apostle*' fell into neglect. All of Christ's original apostles were authorised to perform miracles by Jesus, including Paul (e.g. Matt 10:1-10). But Paul uses a phrase '*the signs of an apostle*' in defence of his own apostolic calling and ministry, challenging critical Corinthian disdain for Paul as he was among what he sarcastically calls '*super-apostles*', the apostles the Corinthians most admired (2 Cor 12:11-12).

In the early 20th century, Princeton theologian B.B. Warfield and others, unwisely concocted the 'cessationist' argument after the emergence of Pentecostals in 1901, and inferred that only NT 'apostles' moved in signs and miracles in the Bible, which eventually ceased. The Book of Acts and church history suggest otherwise. The disciple Ananias healed Saul's blindness (Acts 9:17-18). Evangelist Philip wrought miracles in Samaria, vindicating his message, and shaking a city (Acts 8:4-6). Jerusalem deacon Stephen did miracles in Jerusalem before his murder at Saul's hands (Acts 6:8-10). He also had a vision of Christ in heaven as he died. None of these men were apostles.

Both Acts 6:8, and 1 Cor 12:7-11, list miracle gifts that ordinary Greek converts in Israel and Corinth could potentially use, as part of Christ's equipping for Christians, just as many churches all over the world experience the same phenomena today. I've seen this in both churches I've led in Winchester and London, over the space of 34 years.

The 'apostolic era' never ended, nor have miracle 'signs' ceased, since they help us to endorse and spread the Gospel more effectively. The influential movement *Newfrontiers* that I served for 12 years, led by Terry Virgo, experienced miraculous signs as regular, normal phenomena, amid an atmosphere devoid of 'hype', accompanied by low-key wise experience, and good practice, learned over years of consistent activity in the power of the Spirit. The gifts never totally disappeared since the 1<sup>st</sup> century, they just went underground, only to re-emerge again later as history abundantly witnesses to.

They sometimes decline, primarily due to the regular habit of church leaders to 'quench' God's Spirit and his holy fire. Paul urges us not to do this (1 Thess 5:19-20). Our churches need more holy fire! I've seen signs and miracles when a 'Fire-fighter' attitude is abandoned. Ephesians 4:7-16 lists the diverse 'Five-fold ministries' of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, that Christ still gives to his church in perpetuity as our ascended Lord, until the worldwide church is edified, and fully equipped, to produce unity, maturity, and fullness, climaxing with Christ's future return. The suggestion that the completion of the Biblical canon is that terminus, as Warfield suggested, is not tenable. The climax is surely the *Parousia!* Paul isn't alluding to the Bible here, there's no evidence he meant this in the text. He describes the long-term advance and success of Christ's church, and the necessity of varied gifted servants to plant healthy churches in every generation. All five components of Christ's own abilities are vital. Their absence spells decline and low standards to this day, in many denominations and churches. Their reception accelerates momentum and a brighter future.

Hence, we cannot do without all the Gifts of the Spirit, and the Five-fold Ministries, for they are vital to advance God's church, and produce evident quality, that distinguishes us from merely human efforts and skills, tired religion, and fruitless religious activity. We should model 'stand out' beauty and order, community, and power, in contrast to heretical cults, false religions, and rationalistic atheism with its destructive reductionist philosophy of mechanistic naturalism. God is not dead. He's alive and everywhere active in his world. Vibrant churches can demonstrate this fact every time they meet. We're commanded to 'eagerly desire spiritual gifts' in 1 Cor 14:1. This has never been rescinded elsewhere in scripture, nor has the apostolic ministry of planting churches, laying solid foundations, teaching, and shaping of Christian community, that's still needed today. Apostles are 'sent' to do this. We're called to watch out for '*false apostles*', which implies there are real ones in the church both then, and now (Rev 2:2; 2 Cor 11:13). The false, implies that the genuine still exists.

**2) Does your church pray for sick people to be healed? How is this done? Do you expect healing to take place?**

Yes. Since the early 1980's, when I became eager to discover more, I set out to read scores of books on Charismatic issues and new dimensions of biblical ministry, like supernatural gifts. I consulted wise and biblically anchored authors and friends, from several new church streams on both sides of the Atlantic. They included John Wimber, Sam Storms, Derek Prince, Wayne Grudem, Jack Deere, Terry Virgo, and classic Pentecostals like Donald Gee. They persuaded me from scripture, and I gained faith to move out in these areas. I began by preaching 30 sermons on 1 Cor.12-14, carefully unpacking every detail, and defining the gifts too. The church was never the same again. We began to move in, and experience spiritual gifts first-hand, and progressively. The result was an amazing transformed church!

The first healing I saw was just weeks later. A 9 year old girl from the local estate was diagnosed by her Consultant as having an incurable degenerative disease in her legs, muscles, and bones. He predicted she'd be in a wheelchair by the age of 16. I laid hands on her, and prayed for her healing. Days later she returned to the consultant for further tests to confirm the diagnosis. Every previous result of their machines had suddenly reversed to 'normal', baffling her Consultant and his colleagues. Catherine is now over 40, and remains healed! Healing was 'normal' in the NT, and can also be frequent now.

The Bible commends *'the laying on of hands'* and prayer as means to such an outcome (e.g. Mark 16:18; Acts 9:17-19). This may also be accompanied by anointing with oil, symbolising the Holy Spirit, thus raising faith (James 5:13-15). We do this when requested, or when God indicates specific 'conditions' prophetically, that he wants to heal. I pray for these before some services, so that I know prophetically what needs to be healed. Any intimations of 'medical conditions' God gives, are then publicly announced, trusting that God brought them to my mind. Usually, they are all true and present, then those people come forward to be ministered to. God is very specific with this information. I even announce medical names I've never heard of before, and regularly see healings of those illnesses, infirmities, or injuries. This accuracy lifts the people's faith, and mine. Some are converted! The gift of hearing from God in prophecy is absolutely vital for church leaders, and others in the church, for many practical reasons.

### **3) What do you understand by the gift of prophecy? Is it practised in your church? In what way?**

I value prophecy highly, and teach about it to others. I wrote a 400-page book about prophecy based on 15 practical, biblical, conference seminars - *'Moving in the Prophetic'* (Monarch UK). Prophecy is quite different from the gift of preaching and teaching, but the best preaching should be invaded by prophecy regularly. Preachers then say things they never intended, under the anointing of the Spirit – exactly the words people most need, usually. C.H. Spurgeon often moved in prophecy, but didn't name it as such. He would point to specific individuals as he preached, then announce facts about them he couldn't have known but for God. Examples include a shoemaker who kept his shop open on Sundays, challenging him that he'd skipped church and earned nine pence last Sunday, with only four pence profit. *It was all true!* Another time in Exeter Hall, he pointed to a young man, announcing that he'd stolen a pair of kid gloves from his master,

and had not paid for them. The frightened apprentice, later confessed all, repented, and begged Spurgeon not to expose him to his boss, or worse still, his mother!

Prophecy is an existential *'here and now'* lower case 'r' - 'revelation' from God. It's like a spiritual 'hunch' that we *'know in our knower'* it's from God. It is speaking forth messages the Holy Spirit prompts within us, that cohere with scriptural truth. God 'downloads' verbal and visual data, clear burdens and words, in our spirit and mind. We can then *'speak to men for their strengthening, encouraging, and comfort'* (1 Cor 14: 3). The goal is therefore to *'Build up', 'Stir up', and 'Cheer up'* God's people. Usually, these prophecies are 'spot on' and amaze people, as a sign of God's love for them. Prophecy shouldn't compete with NT theology, since biblical theology urges us to eagerly desire prophecy. God didn't give Scripture to replace prophecy, nor prophecy to replace Scripture. Scripture commends prophecy highly, and forbids us disdaining it (1 Thess 5:19-21).

A prophet before God can see issues clearly. By God's word, he is moved to solve those issues. A prophet is a slave to God, not to man. This clean fear of God, delivers us from any unclean fear of man. God's prophets see what others do not, hear what others cannot, and dare to say what others dare not. *Preachers and churches desperately need this gift!* Agabus modelled this role signally (Acts 13:1-3; 21:10-15). But this primarily testifies to the awesome greatness of Jesus, not the awesome power of his prophets!

Other leaders can then 'weigh' and 'test' prophecies, and the congregation should do so too, and not fear prophetic people (I Cor 14:29-33). It's oppressive to 'police' prophecy, but do 'pastor' it. A prophet is not right all of the time, but then, neither are *pastors!* But we don't *shut them up*, so we should eagerly *hear a prophet* also. God wants His people to be guided to their earthly callings, and destiny. Prophets can often discern such things (Acts 13:1-3). Prophets can bring a *'now word'* to us, but also highlight, confirm, and endorse God's guidance, and written word by citing it and imparting insight, as fresh as today's newspaper. The twin-gifts of 'Prophetic Teacher' - a gift-combination to be highly commended.

#### **4) What do you understand by the gift of "tongues"? Is it manifested today? If so, how and when?**

Speaking in tongues is a God-given supplementary aid to assist prayer and praise. It flows through supernaturally through our normal speaking equipment. It aids our weaknesses and difficulties in prayer, and sung worship (Rom 8:26-28). We often don't know what to pray, or sing spontaneously. The Holy Spirit then prays or sings through us. If this happens publicly, the Spirit will often give someone a vernacular interpretation, so all can understand and be edified, by the contribution as Paul urges in 1 Cor.14. 'Tongues' are clearly God-ward and, *'does not speak to men, but to God'*, says Paul (14:2), throughout this chapter. So tongues at Pentecost were for God's benefit alone, in the Upper Room, and only secondarily became a *sign* to the growing crowd of pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem, who individually could understand many of those praise languages, and were blessed by them. But when it came to the preaching of Peter to the whole crowd, this was not in tongues, but the common language of those pilgrim Jews – Hebrew,

Aramaic, or Greek - so all could understand everything that was spoken. The result was 3,000 converts!

Within our churches, 'tongues' should be limited to a few contributions to avoid 'showing off', or perhaps stumbling visitors who may think we are all mad! Pastors should shepherd this gift well, and clearly explain to a mixed congregation what's going on, why, and how. The opposite of this, is risking some form of aversion, and '*quenching the Holy Spirit*'. Paul's wise advice in 1 Cor.14 about both prophecy and tongues is mandatory for today, not history. This guards us against ridiculing 'tongues', and despising 'prophecy'. 1 Cor. 14 is a model of positive and corrective teaching, that avoids any dismissive 'trashing' of God's good gifts, for more positive 'embracing' of them as normal worship.

## **5) What are the clearest evidences of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of your church?**

A church whose members are filled with the Spirit will change everything! Here's a sampling of what I've seen: Love of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Gospel zeal, and preaching in clarity and power. Great joy. Good marriages. Healed relational rifts, and no more quarrels. Lots of laughter and joy. Passion for God's Word and preaching. Regular conversions. Harmonious multi-ethnic relationships. Tangible unity, amid diversity. Secure, wise leaders. Good theology. Happy pastors. Loyal friendships. Missional zeal. Vision for the future. A real *BUZZ!* Extraordinary hospitality. Many new visitors. The felt presence of God. People reluctant to go home. Passion for God's wider church. A high percentage of members who gladly serve in scores of ways. Favour with neighbours. New visitors and guests. Enthusiasm. Frequent baptisms. Eagerness to learn. Passion for Christ.

## **6) What would you say to Christians who believe that in theory all the gifts are available today, and yet do not expect to see them manifested in their church?**

I'd say, '*That's very inconsistent! What is your problem with this? Are you scared?*' The NT teaches us to gladly receive and grow in the gifts, so why not shelve your prejudices and do some serious reading, before you cheat yourself and your congregation of blessing, especially if you're a Pastor. The gifts bring more benefits than they do trouble! Clear teaching is a must. I recommend preaching a series of 20 messages on 1 Cor 12-14, with opportunities to help people practice, and move in these gifts. Along with this, have the courage to challenge and correct critics, helping them to see why these biblical activities are normal for God's church. *Let Jesus have his church back again!* (Rev 3:19-20). He's seen what you and I can do. Now it's our turn to see what He can do! Church becomes '*A taste of paradise on earth*' when we cease quenching the Spirit, and start pleasing the Lord.

Whole churches then heal up incrementally, to become an amazing 'Family' at last. Dissent, distress, grumbling and contention, will become 'history'. As a new future opens, where God is our 'all-in-all', and beckons us towards more. Who would want anything less? The Book of Acts is the

only divinely inspired church history we possess. We are wise to regard it as normative for all believers and churches, for all time. Its message is, *'Coming soon to a local church near you!'* The Book of Acts is full of miracles and supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit attending God's servants, and the advance of mission throughout the Empire. Where does Acts suggest this will all cease, or we can safely ignore such things, and regard them as redundant now?

The Apostle Paul writes in Rom 15:18-19, that these phenomena were all essential factors for his success in spreading the Gospel:

*"Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done – by the power of signs and miracles through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the Gospel of Christ."*

His testimony is very significant. Paul's definition of *'fully proclaiming the Gospel of Christ'* consists of the regular God-ordained combination of Word and Spirit, in proclamation and demonstration, expressed in words and wonders.

Phenomena like healing, deliverance, prophecy, and supernatural signs, all complement and demonstrate the Gospel truths we preach. God still graciously enables his servants to speak under the anointing of his Spirit, and enables us at his prompting, to minister supernaturally to people's bodies and souls in co-operation with the Spirit by praying for tangible signs of his power to heal and bless the whole person, not just their minds alone. Clearly for Paul, this was the way to, *'fully proclaim the Gospel'*. Thus, challenging our default reluctance to embrace the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, reflecting more the legacy of the materialistic culture of 18th century Enlightenment rationalism, and anti-supernaturalism, than it does the holistic approach of Christ's 1st century emissaries, up to and including contemporary apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers today.

*If we preach the word, God will send the wonders.* Paul tells us that demonstrating God's power through miracles is as much a part of the Gospel as the sermon is. New life in Jesus is not just something for us to talk about, but something to be experienced and enjoyed. Signs and wonders are supplementary proofs that Jesus is alive, not dead. He is now resurrected, present with us, alive in our midst – *doing what only he can do.*

## **7) How do you handle the differences of opinion on spiritual gifts within church leadership, within church membership and in your relationship with other churches?**

My practice has been to preach and teach clearly from the Bible for every change that is controversial, and do it with grace and clarity. We can't successfully argue with what the Bible clearly teaches. So have the courage to convince yourself first, then persuade others to, *'Do whatever he tells you'*, as Mary advised the stewards at Cana when the wine ran out. This enabled the miracle of Jesus turning water into wine. Our churches need those transformations too. So



Speak to dissenters one-to-one, teasing out new longings for God. Treat them seriously, and win them over. Don't get mad with people. Love them. Teach them. And persuade them. Also recommend good books to read. Arrange timely special seminars. Have a retreat with your team. Give people space to process change, and hopefully you'll see God at work in new and delightful ways that will bring more of the presence of God than ever before. This is not just for our sake alone. The world desperately needs this dimension of Christ's work too!

### *Recommended Reading*

- John Wimber, *Power Evangelism* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1985)
- Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Kingsway Publications, 1994)
- Greg Haslam, *Moving in the Prophetic* (Monarch Books, 2009)
- Sam Storms, *The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (Regal, 2002)
- Wayne Grudem (Ed.), *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Zondervan, 1996)