

The Holy Spirit & Spiritual Gifts in the Local Church



The Woodland Hills Church Perspective

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CURRENT STATEMENT ON ISSUES RELATED TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Generally speaking, the Woodland Hills Church perspective on the theology and practice of the spiritual gifts represents a broadly “continuationist” theology (i.e., all of the New Testament gifts are available today), with an “open but cautious” attitude (i.e., we want to find a balance between neglecting the gifts on one hand, and an unhealthy use of the gifts on the other hand).

Our current Woodland Hills Church “Statement on Controversial Issues” has four statements on questions related to the Holy Spirit. They read as follows:

1. What is the significance of the ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit’? We affirm that there is an experience, often subsequent to conversion, of being ‘filled’ with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18). This experience is primarily for the purpose of empowering a believer for ministry (Acts 1:8).

2. Are the ‘Gifts of the Spirit’ for Today? We affirm that the gifts of the Spirit are for every believer today, though they are not to be used as ‘criteria’ of one’s spirituality. They are to be used in appropriate contexts and within the New Testament guidelines (I Cor 12-14).

3. Are ‘Tongues’ the ‘evidence’ of the ‘Baptism of the Holy Spirit’? While we affirm the value of speaking in tongues for those who have the gift, we deny that it is the single necessary ‘evidence’ of receiving the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

4. What about ‘holy laughter’ and being ‘slain in the Spirit’? While affirming that various extraordinary manifestations of the Holy Spirit are possible, we deny that they should be made into any sort of ‘spiritual criteria’.

While these statements are helpful as far as they go, more depth and clarity on this often controversial topic can be of great value. Toward that end, the following questions and responses are designed to offer some guidance, both theological and practical.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1. How do we define “spiritual gifts”? Are these limited to empowering of the Spirit through us or do we also consider things that come naturally to us due to our personality to fall under the umbrella of “spiritual” gifts?

In his most extensive discussion on spiritual gifts (I Cor 12-14), the apostle Paul describes them with several Greek terms/phrases: *charismata* (“gracious giftings”; I Cor 12:4); *pneumatika* (literally “Spirit-things”; I Cor 12:1; 14:1), and *phanerosis* (“manifestations” of the Spirit; I Cor 12:7). Paul is clear that the gifts are intended to be used primarily in the context of the gathered community for the purpose of blessing and building up each other as a single body. And so, a simple, biblically-based definition of spiritual gifts would be: an ability graciously given to a believer by the indwelling Holy Spirit, to be used in humility and self-sacrificial love, for the primary purpose of blessing, building up, and maturing other believers in a community context, as, together, we all seek to grow in agape-love and be shaped into the cruciformity of Jesus.

Regarding the question of whether the spiritual gifts are supernaturally empowered or whether the Spirit simply works through natural gifts that we innately possess: At WHC we would question the assumed “either-or” nature of the question itself. Two opposite errors are to be avoided here. One (commonly found in anti-charismatic circles) is to reduce the spiritual gifts to nothing more than natural abilities, thus avoiding any supernatural dimension to the gifts. In this view, for example, the gift of “prophecy” is simply the ability to preach a sermon based on the Bible. The other error is to make a complete division between the spiritual and so-called natural gifts, such that natural abilities are no longer recognized a legitimate spiritual gifts from God. A balanced perspective recognizes a both/and

approach, which would most likely reflect the apostle Paul’s stance.¹ In fact, Paul’s instruction about the gifts seems designed to “deliberately broaden” the sense of the Spirit’s work in the church, and to “extend the class of gifts” given to the church.² Thus, at WHC we recognize the reality of supernatural gifts that God gives to people that may have no basis in a natural ability on their part (e.g., prophetic words, tongues, etc.). But we also recognize that God can take a natural ability and specially energize it by his Holy Spirit such that it is used for the building up of the body of Christ. The real criterion by which to judge a gift as from the Holy Spirit or not is by its fruit – if it blesses and builds up, the body, it is a gift of the Spirit. A supernatural ability alone is not an adequate criterion, since demonic powers can also enable supernatural abilities. Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon properly emphasize this communal edification criterion when they write: “For Paul, whether or not a spiritual gift is of the *Holy Spirit* is whether or not that gift edifies the church. People today often speak of the Spirit as individual and personal, when . . . the Holy Spirit is intensely communal and corporate.”³

2. How do we view the lists of the gifts (I Cor 12, Rom 12, Eph 4) along with other shorter references to the gifts in the Bible? E.g., are they ad hoc lists that fit the occasion of the letters written, or, together, do they provide a normative, exhaustive list of spiritual gifts for all of church history?

1 While some think Paul’s concept of spiritual gifts would have had to involve obviously supernatural and “non-rational” dimensions, there is no reason to think this is necessarily the case for Paul in all circumstances (e.g., most of his list in Romans 12 seems an obvious case in point). See M. Parmentier, “The Gifts of the Spirit in the Early Church,” in *The Impact of Scripture in Early Christianity*, eds. J. den Boeft and M. L. van Poll-van de Lisdonk (Boston: Brill, 1999) 58-78; Anthony C. Thiselton, “The Holy Spirit in I Corinthians: Exegesis and Reception in the Patristic Era,” in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honour of James D. G. Dunn*, eds. Graham N. Stanton, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 219-22.

2 Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), p. 269; also p. 278.

3 Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015), 58.

Given the “occasional” and situation-specific nature of Paul’s letters in general, and given the fact that each of the gift lists is different from the others, we can safely conclude that Paul’s three lists are occasional and ad hoc in nature. It also appears to be the case that, even in I Cor 12-14, Paul’s purpose is not primarily systematic instruction about the gifts, but rather “ad hoc correction” directed towards specific problems with the use of the gifts in the Corinthian church.⁴ And so, we must face the fact that much of what we read in Paul about the gifts is going to be partial, allusive, and situation-specific. This means that, if we are going to be fair to the letters of Paul, we will have to be tentative and sometimes even ‘agnostic’ in some of our conclusions concerning the gifts. All of this has several important ramifications:

1) Since no single one of the gift lists is exhaustive, there is no reason to think that combining them together gives us an exhaustive list either. Paul never felt the need to give an exhaustive list of the spiritual gifts, and neither should we.

2) This means that there are probably more – maybe many more – abilities at work in the body that we could designate as “spiritual gifts.” Certainly the type of list in Rom 12 could be expanded upon with additional ways in which people bless the body in different cultural contexts. Therefore we should not create a definitive list as the exclusive gift list from which someone has to choose – even for the purpose of people taking “gift tests.”

4 Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 886. This book of Fee’s is the most exhaustive study of the Holy Spirit in Paul’s letters available. He summarizes his conclusions on the spiritual gifts in pages 886-95. He offers a more popular-level study of the Holy Spirit in Paul in his book, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), on the gifts see pages 163-78.

3. Are spiritual gifts given on a spontaneous, “as needed” basis, or are they given as permanently resident within the person?

The New Testament doesn’t explicitly answer this question, and there are exegetical cases that can be made for both views. At WHC we believe that there is no formula or universal rule here – the Holy Spirit sometimes gives gifts permanently and other times gives them temporarily. Some gifts (e.g., speaking in tongues) seem typically to be given to a person on a permanent basis. However, a gift may also be given to someone for a season of their life, or even for a single ministry experience. In any case, we affirm that the spiritual gifts are given to people as the Holy Spirit himself desires – again, there are no formulas. And whatever gifts someone has been given – either temporarily or permanently – are to be used in humility and self-sacrificial love for the building up of the other members of Christ’s body.⁵

4. Could we get a basic definition of what is meant by some of the more controversial gifts and how we understand them at Woodland Hills? What exactly is a word of knowledge? A prophecy? A word of wisdom? Faith? Healing? Miracles? Distinguishing of spirits?

As Gordon Fee reminds us, all of our nice, neat attempts to categorize the gifts in the various lists should be seen as “tentative at best.”⁶ Fee himself suggests that three broad types of gifts can be detected. We will follow Fee here, though with one modification. Fee labels his first category of gifts as “forms of service.” However, we believe it is important for us all to remember that ALL of the spiritual gifts are for the

5 James Dunn (*Jesus and the Spirit*, reprint, ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997 (1975)], p. 209) has argued that the spiritual gifts are only given in the moment by the Spirit, and are not latent talents or inherent abilities (e.g., . . . But Paul never says this. Dunn’s “either-or” model, while quite influential in the debate today, does not capture Paul’s claims, and unnecessarily limits the ways in which the Spirit can distribute and manifest his gifts.

6 Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 887.

purpose of serving others. And so we will adjust Fee's first category to "forms of assistance."

Forms of assistance – e.g., serving, helping, giving, mercy, leading, administrations;

Miraculous activities – e.g., miracles, healings, a supernatural level of faith;

Inspired utterances – e.g., prophesy, word of knowledge, word of wisdom, tongues, interpretation of tongues, discerning of spirits, teaching, exhortation.

There is not much confusion or debate over the first type of gifts – forms of assistance. But when it comes to miraculous activities and inspired utterances, disagreements in the church are common. On one hand, Pentecostals and Charismatics have defined these gifts in certain ways, while non-Charismatics have often defined them in other ways. Part of the difficulty here is that, while the apostle Paul mentions them, he never gives clear definitions of them. Apparently his original audience knew what they were, so there was no need to explicitly define them in his letters. When everything in the New Testament and early church is taken into account, the following definitions seem appropriate for us to embrace at WHC:

Prophecy – We can define prophesy as a Spirit-inspired message given for the purpose of encouraging, exhorting, or guiding the community. Used in its broadest sense, the forms by which the prophetic message can come vary widely, as seen throughout the Bible and through church history. Prophetic messages have come to people through angelic visitations, an audible voice, an inner voice, a phrase impressed upon the mind, scripture passages,

visions, pictures, dreams, impressions, or a sense of "knowing." Why does God so often give prophetic messages in highly symbolic ways? Jack Deere perceptively answers this question: "symbolic language conceals truth from the proud, reveals the most profound truth to the humble, and jars us awake when we are tempted to use God rather than love him It [also] impacts our emotions."⁷

Tongues – Paul's actual term here is "different kinds of tongues." This phenomena is first associated with the day of Pentecost when the disciples spoke in languages unknown to them, but understandable to Jews who were in Jerusalem from other parts of the Empire (Acts 2). In the context of the local house church, however, Paul is clear that the exercise of the gift of tongues refers to speech that is unintelligible to the community, unless it is accompanied by the gift of interpretation of tongues (I Cor 12-14). There is no sense in Paul that those who speak in tongues are in any kind of trance or out of control, since they are told to exercise their gift within certain parameters. The types of language that may be spoken vary greatly, even to the point of Paul saying some may speak in a language of "humans" or even of "angels" (I Cor 13:1).

Discerning of spirits – some have shortened this gift to "the gift of discernment," but that is not what Paul says. He explicitly states that this gift is about discerning or distinguishing among various "spirits." In I Cor 12:10, it comes right after the gift of prophesy, which in chapter 14 Paul says requires discernment. And so one role of this gift seems to be the ability to discern whether a prophetic word is from God's Spirit or not. This gift is also tied to

⁷ Jack Deere, *The Beginner's Guide to the Gift of Prophecy* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 2001), p. 95.

the idea mentioned in I John 4:1: “testing the spirits to see whether they are of God.” And so, this gift would also enable one to discern the presence of demonic spirits at work in the life of the church.

Words of knowledge and wisdom – there is disagreement as to whether these two gifts refer to spontaneous messages of supernatural knowledge and wisdom, or whether they refer to more “natural” speech, i.e., a word of exhortation or instruction (preaching and teaching) about the mysteries of the Kingdom and the wisdom of God. Paul simply doesn’t tell us, and the argument is mainly one of semantics anyway. Charismatics tend to see these two gifts as spontaneous and supernatural in nature, while non-Charismatics tend to see them as more “natural” instances of Spirit-inspired wisdom and instruction. Practically speaking, since the gift lists aren’t exhaustive anyway, we can admit that even though we don’t know what exactly Paul meant by these two specific gifts, we believe that God can and does gift members of the body with both spontaneous utterances of knowledge and wisdom (in this sense they can also be categorized as forms of prophetic speech), and also that God gives and works through more “natural” gifts of wisdom and knowledge for the purpose of instructing and guiding the body. The way we will use these terms are as follows: (1) “Word of knowledge” – a piece of knowledge (i.e., a “fact”) that God impresses upon someone’s mind about someone or something else. (2) “Word of wisdom” – divinely inspired wisdom (i.e., a “principle”) impressed upon someone’s mind by God. Typically, the purpose for both words of knowledge and wisdom is to share them with the intended recipient(s) for their blessing and growth, and/ or to lift that person or situation up in prayer. This means that upon receiving a word of knowledge or wisdom, one

must then seek God’s guidance about whether – and if so, how – to share it with another person.

Miracles and Healings – the fact that Paul uses the plural form for both of these gifts has led some (e.g., Fee) to claim that Paul “probably means that the gifts are not permanent, but each occurrence is a gift in its own right.”⁸ But this is not necessarily the case. The plural form could also refer to more permanent miracle/healing gifts within the community that focus on certain types of miracles/healings (e.g., exorcisms, raisings from the dead, etc).⁹ Again, Paul simply doesn’t provide any further details. Once again, we should not allow any particular exegetical guess about what Paul means to limit what the Spirit can do with regard to miracle and healing gifts. We don’t need to know whether a gift of healing or miracles will be temporary or permanent in order to be open to its reception and exercise in our lives.

Faith – Paul mentions “faith” as a spiritual gift (I Cor 12:9). In Rom 12:3, he states that God has given to each believer a certain amount of “faith.” In this sense, every Christian could say they have been given the “gift of faith.” And yet, in the context of I Cor 12-14, Paul is most likely referring to a noticeably supernatural level of faith that can “move mountains” (I Cor 13:2). Fee defines this gift of faith as “a supernatural conviction that God will reveal his power of mercy in a special way in a specific circumstance.”¹⁰ It is helpful to remember here that “faith” (Greek = *pistis*) is commonly a term related to covenant relationship, and signifies one’s trust and

⁸ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, p. 169; Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, p. 166.

⁹ Here, Max Turner’s (*Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 275-77) interpretation is more attuned to Paul’s flexible language than is Fee’s.

¹⁰ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, p. 168.

dependence upon the character and promises of one's covenant partner. For example, as Greg has frequently taught from the pulpit, the biblical notion of praying in "faith" does not mean that one has "psychological certainty" that what they are praying for will happen. Rather, it means that one has absolute trust in God's character, and the faith-filled conviction that the "Already" of God's Kingdom is at work in the midst of our "Not Yet" world.

5. How are we to understand the five-fold equipping leadership gifts mentioned in Eph 4? And once we determine how we are going to use these terms, how might those who have these gifts at WHC actually equip others with them?

This is an important question, and it is tied to the wider question of our views on church leadership. Given the broader scope and relevance of this question, it will be explored in an independent document on WHC's perspective on the leadership gifts.

6. What is a wise and biblically faithful way to practice the gift of prophecy in our meetings today? What are some basic guidelines for this in small group settings? What does it mean to "test" prophetic words and how do we practice that in community? How does one bring a prophetic word of repentance or chastisement? Is every word to be a positive word of encouragement? Do we speak a word in boldness or humility? Or both?

As with all the other gifts, Paul assumed they would be used within a house-church setting – i.e., within a smaller context where most of the people actually knew each other and their gifts. Paul never imagined a mega-church. Given our context today, while some of the gifts will be helpful within a large congregation (e.g., preaching, etc.), most of the gifts will be most effectively used within smaller contexts. In terms of how to deliver a prophetic word within an appropriate WHC we are given direction from biblical instruction and pattern. We have also been given a

living contemporary example as Janice has developed a number of wise principles in the use of her prophetic gift among us throughout the years. These principles include:

Humility – To remain healthy, the prophetic gift must operate out of a humble heart and with a firm commitment to seeking confirmation from others. This principle will involve balancing the strong inner sense of prophetic urgency and conviction with a self-critical humility that recognizes any particular word may not be from God and so must be tested. This principle suggests that prophetic people should avoid saying things like: "Thus says the Lord," or "God told me to tell you that . . ." Instead, we should humbly bring the word to the person or group we sense it is for, and then leave it to them for discernment and confirmation.

Community Testing – Paul is clear that the gift of prophesy is to be used with discernment in the community (I Thess 5:20-22; I Cor 12:10; 14:29, 32). That is to say, every prophetic word should be tested by others in the community for confirmation, etc. Criteria by which to "test" prophetic words include the Bible, the fruit produced, and the discernment of others. A prophetic person never has autonomous authority, but is always in mutual submission to others within the body. The gift of prophesy has often led to "prophetic" people claiming autonomous authority in an individualistic spirit. It has often fostered spiritual pride, an unteachable heart, and a critical spirit. These things must be monitored and avoided if the gift of prophesy is to bless rather than curse a body of believers.

Agape-love – Paul's agape-principle is the key to exercising this and any gift. The gift of prophesy must be exercised out

of a humble, self-sacrificial agape-love for the building up of the community. Jack Deere's "Ten Rules for Prophetic Success" are worth considering: (1) emphasize the "main and plain" things, not the "rare and bizarre"; (2) don't do anything "strange" without a clear leading from the Lord (and, I would add, the confirmation of others); (3) don't do anything prophetically that is potentially embarrassing or harmful to someone else without their permission; (4) repeat to yourself: "I am NOT an exception to the first three rules"; (5) - (10) the same as rule number four!¹¹ As Deere says, always apply Jesus' "Golden Rule" when delivering prophetic words.¹² Now, this does not mean that prophetic words are always light and fun to receive. The Bible reveals many times when the prophetic word was heavy, challenging, and convicting. But even here, the person giving such a word is called to express it in such a way that agape-love and the building up of the other person is the motive. In our culture, people have a hard time imagining how boldness and conviction can coincide with humility and gentleness. But the New Testament calls us to exhibit both types of characteristics. Personally, I have often seen both of these things demonstrated by Janice at the same time - a real sense of urgency and boldness about a word she has received, and yet once she gives it she challenges the person to seek confirmation from God and others to verify its authenticity. This is the model we are called to follow at WHC.

Nurturing and Mentoring the Prophetic Gift - as is the case with any gift, people with the prophetic gift need encouragement, mentoring, guidance, and correction as they learn how to use their

gift to bless others. As a leader of a small group context, one can help mentor and mold a prophetic gift by making clear that since this gift is for the body and requires discernment, giving regular feedback to prophetic words will be part of the normal process of growth. Whenever possible, any correction should be done in a one-to-one context. This is not always possible, and at times it will be necessary to respond to an inappropriate use of the prophetic gift in a public setting. When responding publically, our goal is to teach and shape, while doing so out of a spirit of gentleness and love.

7. Is it biblical to speak in boldness when healing like the apostles did? (Acts 3:6-7)

Absolutely! Unfortunately, most evangelical Christians today have no real category for this kind of speaking. With regard to healing, most Christians today believe that prayer is what is called for - i.e., asking God to heal the person. But notice that in Acts 3, Peter and John didn't pray at all for the lame man. In fact, Peter said to the man, ". . . what I do have I will give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" Peter realized that what he possessed was the power of the Spirit within him and the authority of Jesus to speak to diseases. As believers, we possess the same things today. Why then don't we speak in this way more often? Several things keep us from doing this:

1) "What if God doesn't want to heal this person?" Notice that no one in the New Testament ever assumes that God doesn't want to heal someone. The general assumption is that sickness is a work of Satan, and God desires to heal it. There is, of course, the time when Paul prays three times to be free of his "thorn in the flesh," and God says that he can use him in this state better than if he

¹¹ Deere, *Beginner's Guide*, pp. 111-12.

¹² Deere, *Beginner's Guide*, pp. 115-16.

were free of it. But notice that Paul's guiding assumption is that God wants him healed, and that this is an exception.

2) "But what if we speak boldly to someone to be healed in Jesus' name, and nothing happens?" This is probably the main fear that prevents most Christians from following the example of Peter and John. The fear is that if nothing happens, then both the person speaking the healing will look foolish and God himself will look powerless. So we are afraid to embarrass ourselves and God. But this fear is due to a bad theology. As Greg has shown in his recent sermons on faith, biblical faith is NOT psychological certainty that something is going to happen. Rather, it is relational trust in the goodness and promises of God. And so, we can speak with boldness to diseases without being absolutely certain that a healing will occur. The reason for this is that there are other factors and wills involved than just ours and God's. Remember that Jesus himself didn't always experience immediate success in his healings and miracles. One day Jesus was speaking healing to a blind man, and during his first attempt, only a partial healing occurred - the man could only see dimly (Mark 8:22-26). But this did not stop Jesus from continuing to boldly push ahead. He continued to speak healing again - while laying his hands on him and spitting on his eyes - and the man was eventually fully healed. (Perhaps we just aren't using enough spit these days?) Another time Jesus was attempting to do miracles and healings in his hometown of Nazareth - and most of them did not work! Mark tells us that Jesus was "unable to do many miracles there" except for a few healings, due to the town's lack of faith (Mark 6:5-6). In any case, Jesus didn't hold back from speaking boldly with confidence, even though he knew there were other factors involved in whether the healing would work or not. His confidence wasn't that this particular

person would be healed instantly. Rather, his confidence was in the authority the Father had given him, the power of the Spirit inside him, and the fact that he was called to be the Messianic warrior against all the works of Satan. We too have the calling to follow in the example of Jesus, speaking in his name, doing the works he did (John 14:12), all the time realizing that the results involve many variables we cannot know about. We are called to be faithful, whether we are "successful" or not.

3) "But if we take this bold 'speaking in Jesus' name' approach to the healing of diseases, aren't we falling into a dangerous 'Health and Wealth'(or 'Word-Faith') theology?" While it is true that the Word-Faith movement (i.e., Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, et al.) does speak boldly to diseases, it is not true that we have to hold to a Word-Faith theology to do so! Here are some of the major differences between Woodland Hills's approach to this as opposed to the Word-Faith movement.

a) First, we do not believe that all Christians are promised physical healing in this life based on the atoning work of Christ. The Word-Faith movement takes a few Bible passages out of context (such as Isaiah 53:5 and I Peter 2:24), and then builds an entire theology of atonement-based physical healing around it. When the entire biblical teaching about Christ's atonement is taken into account, we see that physical healing is usually not even mentioned. In the case of I Pet 2:24, it is citing Isaiah 53:5. Read in context of the entire passage in Peter - and the wider New Testament teaching on the atonement - it is quite clear that the "healing" Peter is referring to has to do with sin (i.e., broken covenant relationship) and its consequences, a point that Peter explicitly states in this verse!

b) The most dangerous aspect of the Word-Faith teaching is its claim that if a Christian isn't healed or if a Christian struggles with financial poverty, then it is mostly likely due to a lack of faith or unconfessed sin in one's life. This is a highly damaging teaching within the body of Christ. Because of this, we have written an official Woodland Hills statement on this question (available in our WHC Statement on Controversial Issues document) which reads as follows:

Is it God's will for Christians to always be 'healthy, wealthy and prosperous'? - While affirming that health and wealth can be a blessing from the Lord, we deny that sickness or poverty are necessarily evidences of a lack of faith or of sin in a person's life. Following the example of Jesus, we understand sickness and poverty primarily as works of the kingdom of darkness. Thus, we affirm that one of the Kingdom responsibilities of those who are blessed with health and wealth is to help those who are sick and/or in poverty.

c) This brings us to a third point - the proper biblical perspective by which to understand healing is in the context of the New Testament's "spiritual warfare" worldview (or what scholars today refer to as early Christian "apocalyptic eschatology"). From a spiritual warfare perspective, everything in this world - including our physical bodies - are subject to attack by forces of the kingdom of darkness. We have been given spiritual power and divine resources to counter these demonic attacks and the pervasive negative physical consequences of the Fall. But we live in an "Already—but Not Yet" Kingdom, where God's power has broken in but has not yet fully renewed all things. We live between the first and second comings, between the dawning of

the Kingdom of God and its final consummation. And in this state, Christians will sometimes experience the negative effects of the fallen world through no fault of their own. We can't simply say that if a Christian doesn't experience healing then they must lack faith or have unconfessed sin in their life. As the Bible teaches, there are many variables involved in whether our prayers bring about the desired outcome. In the Word-faith movement, the only variables that are given primary attention are God's will and our own faith and sin. But as the Bible teaches, many other things are involved as well such as forgiveness (Mark 11:25-26), heart motives (James 4:3), persistence in prayer (Luke 18:1-8), number of people praying (e.g., Matthew 18:19-20), proximity (e.g., laying on of hands; Mark 8:22-25; Hebrews 6:2), inclusion of fasting (Mark 9:29), balancing prayer with action (e.g., Joshua 7:6-13), demonic Interference in the spiritual realm (e.g., Daniel 10; I Thess. 2:18; Job 41), and the inherently resistant fallen nature of creation (Romans 8:19-22; Job 38-41).¹³ The last two of these variables reveal that a group of Christians could be managing all of their own variables faithfully, and yet still their prayers may not come to fruition due to demonic resistance in the spiritual realm, etc. It is these sorts of considerations that reveal the Word-faith movement to be a well-meaning but nonetheless dangerous teaching within the church today.¹⁴

¹³ For a helpful discussion of a spiritual warfare view of prayer, including many of the variables that can be involved, see Gregory A. Boyd, "Praying in the Whirlwind," in his *Satan and the Problem of Evil* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), chapter 7.

¹⁴ For helpful critiques of the Word-Faith movement, see Gordon D. Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* (Costa Mesa, CA: Word for Today, 1979); D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995 [1988]); David W. Jones and Russell S. Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness: Has the Prosperity Gospel Overshadowed the Gospel of Christ?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010).

8. What does the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” refer to? Are the “baptism of the Spirit” and being “filled with the Spirit” the same thing?

In each of the Gospels, John the Baptist says that, although he is baptizing in water, one is coming who will baptize with “the Holy Spirit” (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). Today, there is much debate about what the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” actually refers to.¹⁵ One of the major points of debate is whether the baptism in the Holy Spirit happens to all Christians at their conversion, or whether it is a second, separate experience after conversion that empowers the Christian for ministry. The first view has been strongly advocated by James Dunn, while the second view – which is the most common view among Pentecostals and Charismatics – has been defended by a range of Pentecostal scholars, including Howard Ervin.¹⁶ Since the work of Dunn, most now either explicitly or tacitly agree (including pentecostal scholars such as William Atkinson, Gordon Fee, Robert Menzies, James Shelton, Roger Stronstad, and Max Turner) that the apostle Paul equates the receiving of the Spirit with conversion. And so, the traditional Pentecostal view of a “second experience” is not supported by Paul. Where the debate currently centers is whether Luke (particularly in his second volume, the book of Acts) presents a different (though complementary) view that supports the traditional Pentecostal view.

¹⁵ A range of interpretations of Spirit-baptism and/or the reception of the Spirit is surveyed in H. I. Lederle, *Treasures Old and New: Interpretations of “Spirit-Baptism” in the Charismatic Renewal Movement* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998); Max Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 38-79.

¹⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1970); Howard Ervin, *Conversion-Initiation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Critique of James D. G. Dunn’s Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984).

Among Pentecostals themselves today, some say “yes” and others say “no.”¹⁷

In light of the exegetical evidence (i.e., outside of the debate concerning the book of Acts, the evidence from the rest of the NT seems settled here), it appears that most, if not all, early Christians believed that the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” described the coming of the Spirit upon the believer at the conversion experience. And so it is best that we save the language of baptism of the Holy Spirit for the experience of the indwelling of the Spirit given at one’s conversion. But it also is clear that the New Testament teaches that the believer can and should seek to be “filled” ongoingly with the Holy Spirit, and can experience new and powerful experiences of the Spirit subsequent to conversion (e.g., Eph 5:18). Regardless of the language we use, the important distinction to maintain is between conversion/regeneration (in which every Christian first receives the Holy Spirit) and subsequent infillings of the Holy Spirit. Gordon Fee nicely captures this balance: “For Paul life in the Spirit begins at conversion; at the same time that experience is both dynamic and renewable.”¹⁸

9. How should we think and talk about the gift of speaking in tongues (prayer language, etc.)? What are these things? Should everyone expect that speaking in tongues will be the “initial evidence” of being baptized in the Holy Spirit? What is a wise and biblically faithful way to practice the gift of speaking in tongues in our meetings today? What are some guidelines for this in small group settings?

¹⁷ Those who say “yes” include William Atkinson, *Baptism in the Spirit: Luke-Acts and the Dunn Debate* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011); Ervin, *Conversion-Initiation*; Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994). Those who say are hesitant, or who offer an explicit “no,” thus essentially agreeing with Dunn’s exegesis, include Fee, *Gospel and Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), chs. 6 & 7; Lederle, *Treasures Old and New*; Turner, *Power from on High*, 445-46. On Paul’s view see Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 863-4.

¹⁸ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, p. 864.

In the church today, consideration of the gift of tongues cannot escape the fact of the “three waves of the Holy Spirit” in the 20th century – (1) the Pentecostal movement (arising in the first decade of the 20th century); (2) the Charismatic movement (arising in the 1950s and 1960s among mainline and other denominations); and (3) the “Third Wave” of the 1980s, primarily associated with Peter Wagner, John Wimber and the Vineyard movement.

The traditional Pentecostal view holds that everyone who experiences the baptism of the Holy Spirit will also experience speaking in tongues as the “initial evidence” of that baptism. Within Charismatic circles, there was diversity of perspective on this question: some held to the Pentecostal view while others believed that other manifestations of the Spirit could accompany the baptism in the Spirit. With the Third Wave, most believed that tongues is simply one of the possible evidences of having received the baptism of the Spirit.¹⁹

It is the traditional Pentecostal view that has precipitated most of the debate around the tongues and Spirit-baptism question. This view ran into the problem that the apostle Paul says that not everyone will speak in tongues (I Cor 12:29-30). The way that Pentecostals found to reconcile these two things was to claim that when Paul said not all believers would speak in tongues, he was referring to the “public” gift of tongues where the tongue is spoken out loud in a worship service and then interpreted by someone. However, according to the traditional Pentecostal view, Paul does believe that every believer should expect to be given a tongue at their baptism in the Spirit as evidence of that event, and to use as a personal

19 Vinson Synan provides a succinct survey of the views in “The Role of Tongues as Initial Evidence,” in *Spirit and Renewal: Essays in Honor of J. Rodman Williams* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 67-82. Vinson seems to favor the traditional Pentecostal view himself.

prayer language. They took this distinction from Paul’s discussion in I Cor 14:1-28, where Paul speaks about tongues both as in terms of use in a public setting and use in a personal prayer setting.

Where does WHC come out on these questions? In terms of background, our pastoral team at WHC is composed of people who come from both Pentecostal/Charismatic and non-Pentecostal contexts. And our interpretation of these debates reflects this diverse background. On one hand, we fully agree with Pentecostals and Charismatics that the full range of spiritual gifts, including tongues, is available and active in the church today. However, more in line with a “Third Wave” perspective (as well as with a growing number of contemporary Pentecostal scholars), we disagree with the traditional Pentecostal claim that tongues is the necessary “initial evidence” of having received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and with their “two separate gifts of tongues” interpretation of I Corinthians 12-14.²⁰ To speak to each of these issues:

1) Regarding tongues and the baptism of the Holy Spirit – while tongues may accompany the baptism or “filling” with the Spirit, this is not necessarily the case. For example, in his discussion of the gifts in I Corinthians, “Paul nowhere puts moral pressure on the Corinthians to manifest the gift in private. The only pressure Paul does put upon them is to exercise the gifts within the framework of love (ch. 13) for the ‘common good’ (12:7).”²¹ In fact, as Luke and Paul both affirm, the common evidence of the Spirit’s presence in one’s life is an experience of power for the Christian life and ministry (Acts 1:8). This means that at WHC

20 E.g., Gordon Fee is probably the most well-known Pentecostal New Testament scholar alive today, and he rejects the traditional Pentecostal views on these issues as built on flawed exegesis. See especially his *God’s Empowering Presence*.

21 Gerald Hovenden, *Speaking in Tongues: The New Testament Evidence in Context* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), p. 161.

we do not hold to a traditional Pentecostal understanding of the gift of tongues. And so, our understanding of the “evidence” that accompanies a person’s experienced of being “baptized in the Holy Spirit” will involve visible signs that this person has actually experienced conversion to Jesus, and is demonstrating an active commitment to growing in cruciformity and the Kingdom way of life.

2) While Paul does speak about tongues either being spoken in public or prayed quietly to God, this does not mean that Paul thought there were two different types of tongues gifts. Rather, it shows that he thought there were two different uses of the same gift of tongues. And so, the “gift of tongues” and a “prayer language” are one and the same gift. It can be used in a public setting with an accompanying interpretation. But if no interpreter is present, then Paul’s instruction is to “speak to yourself and to God” (I Cor 14:28). One gift – two possible uses of that gift.

3) A final practical question arises at this point, one that often causes conflict within church contexts where people from both charismatic and non-charismatic backgrounds worship and pray together. The question has to do with what the apostle Paul’s instructions concerning the orderly use of the gift of tongues within a church context: “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God” (I Cor 14:26-28). The practical question is: What does it mean to “be silent

in church and speak to themselves and to God”? In other words: Just how silent is “silent”?

It is important to recognize that when we read this passage of I Corinthians in context, it becomes clear that Paul’s real concern is about maintaining an orderly community worship and ministry time. When it comes to applying Paul’s teaching to our contemporary church context, it is crucial to remember that people from different church backgrounds and with different personality types will have different judgments about when something is “orderly” or not. And thus there can be disagreements about just how “silently” we are to pray in tongues in a group context. For example, several years ago in our WHC prayer ministry, this issue arose and began to cause some division. During prayer times, those from a charismatic background would often praying in tongues. They were not intending that the tongue be interpreted, and so they were merely in prayer mode with their tongue language. From their perspective, they were praying “to themselves and to God.” However, some of the other people who came from a non-Charismatic background were finding themselves distracted by the audible sounds of those praying in tongues. They were concerned that Paul’s teaching was not being followed in that they felt that the people praying in tongues were not being “silent” enough. In the end, it turned out that the conflict boiled down to this: At what decibel level is “silent” no longer silent?! As we talked through this issue, the prayer ministry came to a very gracious and loving resolution. We considered together how the agape-love principle could apply here. In the end, those who prayed in tongues agreed they could do so more quietly than they normally would, simply to bless those who didn’t and who found it distracting. And those who didn’t speak in tongues agreed they could offer grace to those who do by being willing to allow them to pray more loudly than they might personally prefer, realizing that it comes from a passion for Jesus. By the end of the evening, the tension was largely resolved. Once again, mutual

agape-love was the answer to this conflict! This is the type of approach that we would like to see exhibited within all of our small groups and house churches when the issue of praying in tongues arises.

10. How do we begin to manifest the gifts in a small group (practices, exercises, experiential activities)? Is it right to think that I can become better and more skilled at moving in the Spirit (i.e. miracles, prophecy, discernment) through practice and training (like a teacher could further develop that Spiritual gift through practice and training even if he/she is gifted already)?

These are important and practical questions. And while there are biblical and theological principles that can help guide us (principles we can take from the questions above), I think that when it comes to practically guiding people in their awareness and development of their spiritual gifts, there are no easy “formulas.” Whatever else we say, it seems clear from scripture that people can be gifted by God and yet be in a state of immaturity with regard to that gift, both in terms of how and when to exercise it as well as the heart-attitude in which it is exercised (e.g., I Cor 12-14). And so in this senses, yes, we can become better and more skilled in the exercise of our gifts, as we learn how to use them in increasingly effective ways to bless the wider body.

11. What is considered acceptable – or unacceptable – behavior when experiencing God and practicing the gifts? Is being “slain in the Spirit” biblical? Uncontrollable laughter or shaking? How do we know whether or not a “manifestation” is of God or just someone acting in the flesh? Where do we draw the line? How will we empower people who have the gift of discerning of spirits so that they know what is of God and not? Who gets to say what is in bounds or out of bounds at WHC?

To expand a bit upon our current statement on these issues, we can say that the basic WHC approach to this question is this:

We believe that God sometimes works through extraordinary and surprising manifestations of the Holy Spirit. He is God, and he can work in whatever ways he so desires, including being “slain in the Spirit”; “holy laughter”; and other extraordinary phenomena. However, we also recognize that such things can also be instances of merely human emotionalism, or even a demonic counterfeit, that serve to distract people from a true Kingdom focus. Therefore, as in all areas involving spiritual phenomena, spiritual discernment is always needed within the community context. There is one sure sign that an extraordinary manifestation is from God: namely the agape-test: “Does this experience/gift foster growth in humble, self-giving love for God and others (I Cor 13:1-3)? Even when the community senses that God is behind an extraordinary manifestation, it should never be made into any sort of universal “test” by which to measure other people’s spiritual maturity. The important principles and guidelines here are given by Paul in I Cor 12-14: orderliness, humility, concern for the blessing and building up of others, and agape-love are the primary criteria by which we judge spiritual phenomena as positive or negative.

Moving to the “authority” question. The leadership of any particular body of believers should ask and answer this question together: Practically speaking, how and where will we encourage the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, while offering the safety of a discernment and mentoring process that helps to lead and guide the use of the gifts so that they actually serve to edify and build up the community. Structurally speaking, at WHC it is the pastoral team – particularly the pastors on the Body Life team – that hold this level of leadership authority, guided by the executive team. Together we must prayerfully discern what is and is not “in bounds” with regard to the theology and practice of the gifts at WHC.

In terms of lessons learned from our own past: Several years ago, we used to have a Saturday evening worship service in which people were encouraged to operate in the spiritual gifts, but we never developed a leadership team that would also provide a context for discernment and mentorship. As we move forward, both of these aspects must be addressed together whenever we begin a new initiative involving the gifts. Given both the stunning neglect of the gifts in many contexts today, as well as the excesses and abuse of the gifts in other contexts, Christians in our culture – just like in Paul’s – need to be guided and mentored in the agape-centric use of the gifts in a community context. This is quite challenging, since in our culture most people who will be drawn to public use of the miraculous and inspired utterance gifts will be coming from Pentecostal and Charismatic backgrounds where these gifts were regularly exercised in a highly individualistic fashion, and with little-to-no actual mentorship, guidance, correction, or discernment. But if the gifts are to be used for the actual building up and maturing of the entire body of Christ, these we cannot neglect these aspects when practicing the gifts together.

12. How will we aim to respond to people who come into our meetings and try to manipulate things in ways that they think is “spiritual,” but is really just part of their inherited, individualistically-oriented traditions?

In the first place, we must be aware that, given the wide range of traditions and contexts from which our attenders come, we will always and inevitably have to deal with this issue. Several things can help us as we do so:

Teaching – as we begin to move ahead with encouraging the exploration and development of the gifts of the Spirit, we must include clear and consistent teaching on this topic throughout our church, so that people understand our perspective and can know what to expect when they see the gifts practiced in a WHC venue.

All WHC leaders – both staff and volunteer – should have access to more in-depth teaching on this topic, along with practical guidance on how to facilitate healthy exploration and exercise of the gifts in smaller contexts.

Modeling – All WHC leaders should be able to not simply talk about our view of the gifts, but to model our perspective in the way they share their own gifts within the body. Here, modeling the exercise of one’s gifts with a humble heart and for the blessing and edification of others is centrally important.

Mentorship: Guiding and Correcting – inevitably, some of our leaders will run into situations where people are exercising the gifts in ways that are not humble or helpful to others. At this point, it becomes our responsibility to guide and correct them for the good of the community and their own personal growth. It is always best when correction can happen in a one-to-one setting to prevent unnecessary embarrassment, etc. Part of this guidance and correction will be to help people from other backgrounds and perspectives to understand our theology and practice of the gifts at WHC. Once they have this background knowledge of our perspective, it may still require more focused guidance on how to exercise a gift in a way that is sensitive to others in the group.

13. What is our theology and practice of deliverance ministry? What is considered appropriate (language, volume, demonstrativeness) when addressing the demonic?

We have an eight-week class, developed by our Discipleship & Formation Pastor, Kevin Callaghan, called “Standing Free,” the purpose of which is to teach our theology and principles of spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry. This class does a good job of expressing our theological

convictions, and the necessary balance, on the topic. When it comes to the actual practice of a deliverance session, there will be variations on method and tactics, and at one level this is fine, since we believe that one of the dangers of many deliverance ministries is a sense that they have the “one and only” deliverance formula that really works. While we want to be open to different ways God may lead us in a deliverance session, we also want to rally around some common biblical principles. These would include modeling our method after Jesus, who kept things simple and straightforward (unlike the other exorcists of his day).

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Here are some helpful resources on spiritual gifts and related issues. While we at WHC would not endorse everything in all of these books, each of them is helpful in understanding some of the issues involved in this controversial area.

William P. Atkinson, *Baptism in the Spirit: Luke-Acts and the Dunn Debate* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

Gregory A. Boyd and Paul Rhodes Eddy, “The Charismatic Gifts Debate,” in *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009 [2002]), pages 235-48.

Stanley M. Burgess, *Christian Peoples of the Spirit: A Documentary History of Pentecostal Spirituality from the Early Church to the Present* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

Jack Deere, *The Beginner’s Guide to the Gift of Prophecy* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 2001).

Ralph Del Colle, et al., *Perspectives on Spirit Baptism: Five Views* (Nashville: Broadman & Holmen, 2004).

Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), especially pages 886-95.

Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), especially pages 163-78.

Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy In the New Testament and Today*, rev. ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000 [1988]).

Wayne Grudem, ed., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1996).

Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015)

Gerald Hovenden, *Speaking in Tongues: The New Testament Evidence in Context* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

H. I. Lederle, *Treasures Old and New: Interpretations of “Spirit-Baptism” in the Charismatic Renewal Movement* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998).

Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998).

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