

GOSPEL HIGHWAY

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6. TONGUES, HEALINGS AND MIRACLES

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Our studies on 1 Corinthians 12-14 have shown that the revelatory gifts of tongues, prophecy and special knowledge have ceased. We now have the completed Scripture to guide us in all matters of faith and practice. This view, derived from the Bible itself, has been called *cessationism*. The cessationist position has been attacked by opponents in various ways. The approach is often to caricature the cessationist position instead of by providing a more convincing exposition of Scripture.

One such attack takes the form of labelling all cessationists as dispensationalists. While most dispensationalists would hold to the cessationist position, it is not true that all cessationists are dispensationalists. Dispensationalism holds to the view that God's programme for the world consists of several distinct periods, or "dispensations". According to the majority-view of dispensationalism, there are seven such periods in which people are saved in different ways - by believing in the promises of God, by keeping the laws of Moses, and so on. To them, the Old Testament saints were not regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The nation of Israel constituted the people of God, distinct from the New Testament church. A premillennial return of Christ is held in which there is "the great tribulation" sandwiched between "the rapture" and "the revelation". These views are not subscribed to by very many cessationists.

Our concern here is with other forms of attack that appear valid because the Scripture is appealed to. Our opponents claim that their beliefs on tongues, prophecy and healings are based on certain passages of Scripture, which we will need to examine. They also claim that the cessationists limit the power of God, allowing for no possibility of God performing miracles today. They also accuse the cessationists of being "cerebral", that is being cold and academic, and giving no place to the feelings. We will answer these accusations by appealing to the Scripture itself.

Signs Of The Apostles

Mark 16:17-18

One passage often appealed to by the charismatics for their tongue-speaking and healing practices is Mark 16:17-18. The passage says, "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." The claim is that believers are promised by the Lord the ability to perform these signs, the purpose of which is to convince non-believers of the truth of the gospel.

We have learned of the three basic rules of interpreting the Bible - first, to take the words of Scripture plainly; second, to take the words in context; and third, to compare scripture with scripture. Applying the first rule, that of "plain sense", the passage shows that, (i) believers - all believers, without exception - should be able to do the things promised; and (ii) all the signs - not just one or two of them - should be capable of being performed by the believer. No exception is indicated in the passage.

The plain meaning

These, however, are not true of the charismatics. Not all of them are able to speak in tongues, despite being taught how to have the "gift". This has caused many of them to be confused and to wonder why

it is that the gift is denied them. Can it be that they are not true believers? Can it be that they are loved less by God compared to others? Can it be that they lack faith? Can it be that they have not desired the gift strongly enough? Or is it because they have not used the right method to obtain the gift? What is the right method anyway? Where in the Scripture do we find the *method* of getting the gift taught?

Furthermore, those who claim to have the gift of tongues do not have all the other gifts mentioned in Mark 16:17-18. They may say, "But I am satisfied to have just the gift of tongues. I know of others who have the gifts of healings and casting out demons." We would question, however, such claims. In the first place, we question whether their so-called "tongues" are human languages. It is easy to say that they know of others who speak in certain languages, but were they present when those languages were spoken? And if they were present, can they be sure that what they heard were truly the languages claimed to be? Many charismatics have attended healing rallies in which various claims have been made. Again, we would question whether true healings and true exorcism had been performed. What we hear of are things that cannot be verified - the curing of head and stomach aches, the lame being made able to limp (not to walk!), the partially blind being made able to see better, and the partially deaf being made to hear better. Testimonies abound of those who have been healed of cancer and leukemia, but what has not been told is that those same persons die of those same diseases not long after.

Why do the charismatics claim the gift of tongues, and even of healing and the casting out of demons, and not the other gifts mentioned in Mark 16:17-18? When they are bitten by poisonous snakes, would they claim the promise of this passage and not rush to hospital to get an injection? When they accidentally drink poison, would they stay home calmly and expect to live? The ridiculous claims of the charismatics are obviously not consistent with the plain meaning of this passage of Scripture.

The correct context

The charismatics have also failed to apply the other rules of interpretation to the passage - namely, those of "correct context" and "the analogy of Scripture". The rule of "correct context" would require us to understand the passage in the light of the occasion and circumstances in which those words of the Lord were uttered. We would need, therefore, to look at the verses before and after the passage in question. The proper context would require that we consider the passage from verse 9 to the end of the chapter. Some scholars have questioned whether this passage should be regarded as part of Scripture, claiming that it was added later and did not form part of the original Gospel of Mark. Until convincing evidence is given to prove that, we should regard Mark 16:9-20 as part of Scripture.

The context shows that the disciples of the Lord, namely the eleven apostles, had great difficulty believing that the Lord was risen. We are told in verses 9 to 11, "Now when *He* rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, *they did not believe.*" (Emphasis added.)

We are told in the next two verses, "After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country. And they went and told *it* to the rest, *but they did not believe them either.*" (Emphasis added.)

We are told, immediately after that, "Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; *and He rebuked their unbelief* and hardness of heart, *because they did not believe* those who had seen Him after He had risen." (Emphasis added.)

Three times we are told that the disciples did not believe the Lord was risen. We are told also that the Lord was not pleased with their unbelief. It was in this situation that the Lord appeared before them to give them the Great Commission. It says, in verses 15 and 16, 'And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.'" The phrases, "he who believes" and "he who does not believe", refer to the hearers of the gospel.

The Lord then addressed the apostles, who were receiving this Great Commission, saying, in verses 17 and 18, “And these signs will follow those who believe. In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” The Lord had just rebuked the disciples for not believing that He was risen from the dead. As these words were uttered, we can almost see Him lifting His gaze away from them into the distance sadly. The phrase, “those who believe”, here means those of the apostles who believe that He was risen. Of course, the Lord expected every one of the apostles to believe Him, but He had first to rebuke their unbelief and then give them the promise of the accompanying signs when they obeyed Him.

The people referred to in verse 16, therefore, are different from those referred to in verses 17 and 18. The former are hearers of the gospel, the latter are the apostles who are being commissioned to proclaim that gospel. It follows that the signs mentioned are meant only for the apostles, and not for all who believe in the gospel. Confirmation of this is found in the subsequent verses. We read in verses 19 and 20, “So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. ***And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.*** Amen.” (Emphasis added.)

Comparing with other scriptures

We have still to apply the third rule of interpretation, that of “the analogy of Scripture”. The Great Commission is given in a fuller form in Matthew 28:18-20. The Lord says, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth, go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” This parallels the version recorded in Mark 16:15-16, which was given on a different occasion. We find that, in Matthew 28, there is absolutely no mention of the sign-gifts to those who believe the gospel. This shows that Mark 16:15-16 alone constitute the Great Commission, while verses 17 and 18 were applicable only to the apostles who were receiving that commission.

Further confirmation may be found in other parts of the New Testament. The Great Commission was given on another occasion in a different form in Acts 1:8, which says, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” This verse tells us that the apostles would become witnesses to the Lord. The word “witnesses” is not to be understood in the loose sense that we use it today of those who preach the gospel. Here, “witnesses” carry the idea of those who were officially appointed to testify to known facts, such as the ones we find in the law courts today. The apostles were appointed by Christ to testify to the fact that He was risen, and to declare that He was indeed the Saviour who was prophesied of in the Old Testament. We are told, in Acts 1:2-3, “He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 2:32).

Similarly, when another apostle was to be appointed to replace Judas, the qualifications needed were spelled out as follows, “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22). Another example should suffice. When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, he said, “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.”

Authenticating the apostles

We see, then, that the apostles were the specially chosen instruments of Christ to bear witness to Him. To them were given the special signs mentioned in Mark 16:17-18. When Paul was appointed to be an additional apostle, specially assigned to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles, he was given a vision of the risen Christ while on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). He referred to that experience in later years, claiming that he was a true apostle (1 Corinthians 15:8-9; Galatians 1:1, 15-16). When challenged about the authenticity of his apostleship, he said, in 2 Corinthians 12:12, “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty

deeds.” Paul was appealing to the miraculous deeds which he performed among the Corinthian Christians in an earlier visit as proof of his apostleship.

If the miraculous deeds of Mark 16:17-18 were signs of the apostles, how can they be performed by non-apostles today? Those who claim the ability to speak in tongues, to heal, and to cast out demons will have to claim also that they are apostles. We know, however, that the apostles and prophets (the Old Testament ones included) were appointed by God to reveal His will. We are told, in Ephesians 2:19-20, “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*...” The teaching of the apostles and prophets constitutes the foundation of faith. Their teaching arises from Christ, and depends on Him, who is the chief cornerstone of that foundation. The apostles were given the ability to perform miracles so as to convince all that they were true messengers of Christ.

Authenticating the apostolic message

The apostles were helped in their ministry by other men. Some of them were prophets, others were evangelists, and some were deacons (Acts 6:8; 8:5-6; 11:28; 13:1; 21:10). Whatever their official positions may have been in the church, a limited number of such men were also given the ability to perform signs and wonders, the purpose of which was to confirm the message proclaimed by the apostle - that Jesus Christ is the promised Saviour of the world. This was “the mystery kept secret since the world began”, which was now being revealed (Romans 16:25-26; Ephesians 3:2-6; Colossians 1:25-27). This purpose of the sign-gifts is declared in Hebrews 2:3-4, “...how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”

We see, then, that the miraculous signs served two basic purposes: (i) to show that the apostles were special witnesses of Christ; and (ii) to show that the message they and their colleagues were proclaiming was authentic. These two purposes have been fulfilled. There are no more apostles around today. The foundation of the church, namely the written word of God, has been laid. How can there be people around today who have the miraculous gifts?

We do well to remember the words of the Lord in Matthew 7:21-23, “Not everyone who says to Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we no prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness!’”

God Is Able!

The accusation is often made against cessationists that they limit the power of God. The claim is that since God is all-powerful and unchanging, He is able to perform signs, wonders and miracles today, just as He was able to do so in the past.

Here, the charismatics have confused the ability of God with the purposes of God. God has not changed. He continues to be God, who is all-knowing, all powerful, and unchanging in His divine essence. He is in sovereign control of all creation, and He is able to suspend “the laws of nature” so that a miracle occurs. We are not questioning the ability of God at all. We are not limiting His power. We are only questioning the charismatic understanding of the purposes of God.

The ability and purposes of God

God does not act the same way in all circumstances, and in all ages. He commanded Moses to climb up Mount Sinai to get the two tables of the Law. He did not require the other prophets to do the same. He certainly does not require us to do the same today. God allowed His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross of Calvary as a sacrifice for the sins of His people. He does not require that believers today do the same. Those were events unique to the persons and the times concerned. There is a sense in which we are to imitate the Lord, but not in *this* sense. Although these events are recorded in Scripture, they are not meant to be followed in a crass and literal manner. This is where the correct rules of

interpreting Scripture need to be followed. The Bible is not a book of magic and charms. It is a book that reveals God and His will to us. It is meant to be used intelligently.

The Old Testament scriptures paved the way for the New. The Old Testament prophets foretold the coming of the Saviour. The Old Testament sacrifices foreshadowed the atoning death of Christ. When Jesus Christ came into the world, He fulfilled all the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning His person and work. He ushered in a new age in which the gospel is to be proclaimed to all nations (that is, all ethnic groups), in which all who are to be saved will be called out of the world into His kingdom. This “age of grace”, or “age of the gospel”, began with the first coming of Christ and will end with the second coming of Christ. More precisely, this period began with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, and it will end with the day of judgement. The Bible calls this period “the last days”.

The uniqueness of “the last days” is made clear by the apostle Peter in Acts 2:16-21. He applied Joel’s prophecy to the period which began on the day of Pentecost, saying in verses 16-18, “But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams, and on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.’” These are words of prophecy, couched in Old Testament imagery. It will not be right for us to press for a literal, word-for-word correspondence with the events of Pentecost. The main thrust of the prophecy is that the beginning of the gospel age would be marked by signs, wonders and miracles. Peter understood it that way.

We are told further, in Acts 2:19-20, that “the last days” will end with signs. The signs, however, will not be seen in God’s people as was the case at the beginning but in the heavenly realms and on earth. The passage says, “I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath; blood and fire and vapour of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.” This is exactly the language used by the Lord when He spoke of His second coming in Matthew 24:29-31. This is also the language employed by the apostle John in Revelation 6:12-17, when he described what will happen on judgment day.

Joel’s prophecy, quoted by Peter in Acts 2, ends with the words, “And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” This corresponds with the “great commission” of Matthew 28:18-20, in which the gospel is to be preached to all peoples in the world. People from all nations will be saved. Non-Jews as well as Jews will become the people of God. Local churches, made up of believers from all ethnic backgrounds, will be established. The traditional barrier between Jews and Gentiles will be broken down (Galatians 3:14, 26-29). We see, then, that the gospel age began with signs and it will end with signs. It is a unique age which stands in great contrast to the Old Testament age.

The signs of tongues and prophecy

During the Old Testament time, the nation of Israel constituted the people of God. God made His covenant with that nation, raised up prophets from the nation, gave His law to the nation, and promised that the Saviour would arise from the nation (Romans 9:4-5). Those who were not Israelites by birth had to be absorbed into the nation of Israel in order to become God’s people. Non-Jews, like Ruth, had to adopt the Jewish way of life and to worship the God of the Israelites. Up to the time of Christ, there were Gentiles who attached themselves to the temple and synagogues. These were known as “proselytes” (Acts 2:10; 13:43).

With this background in mind, we understand why it was so difficult for the Jews to accept the fact that the old order was being swept away with the dawning of the new age. The apostles themselves needed to be persuaded of this change. They had been told by the Lord, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This was, of course, a reference to the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the gathered disciples. The power of the Holy

Spirit was to enable the disciples to proclaim the gospel to all nations - beginning in Jerusalem, to all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. This was the “greater works” mentioned by the Lord in John 14:12, which the disciples would do. The works would be greater in extent and scope - covering more than the land of Israel, and involving more than just the Jews.

When the promise of Acts 1:8 began to be fulfilled, the Jewish disciples continued to have difficulty believing that other nations would be incorporated into the church, on an equal footing with them. Jews and proselytes the disciples could accept; the Samaritans the disciples could possibly accept; but not outright Gentiles! Although the Samaritans were a despised half-caste, who had Jewish blood in them, they worshipped the same God as the Israelites did, and believed in the coming of the Saviour (John 4:1-26). To the Jews, the Gentiles were worse than the Samaritans. This accounts for why the gift of tongues was given to the Samaritan believers in Acts 8:14-17 and to the Gentile believers in Acts 10:44-48. It was to convince the Jews that there could be true believers from other nations, who would be treated as equal to the Jewish believers.

We are told in Acts 10:44-45, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.” On this basis, Peter said, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?” Later, at the church council in Jerusalem, Peter affirmed the same thing, saying, “Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:7-9).

The gift of tongues to the hearers *en masse*, that is, all together at the same time, was a sign that a new age had arrived. A similar experience was encountered by the apostle Paul when he met with a group of “disciples” in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7). These men were either disciples of John the Baptist who departed from Israel before the Messiah was revealed to the public (John 1:29-36; 3:22-36), or disciples of a disciple of John the Baptist. They had known only “John's baptism”. They were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, not knowing that He had already come. They were, as it were, Old Testament believers living in the New Testament age. When Paul proclaimed to them about the Christ who had come, they were baptized “in the name of the Lord Jesus”, meaning that they had become Christians. When Paul laid hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit. This was indicated by their tongue-speaking and prophesying. On this occasion, the signs were given more for the benefit of the believers than of Paul, for Paul had already understood that the gospel was to go to all nations (Acts 9:15-16; Colossians 1:26-27). The Ephesian disciples needed to be convinced that a new age had dawned.

These are the only instances recorded in Scripture in which the hearers spoke in tongues and prophesied *en masse*. They were the “first fruits” of the gospel age. The mass tongue-speaking and prophesying were *signs* of the beginning of the gospel age, given to convince the doubting Jewish Christians. Once the purpose was fulfilled, the signs were not repeated. The three thousand souls who believed through the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost did not show the signs (Acts 2:40-47). The multitudes of people converted through Paul's ministry on other occasions did not show these signs. The *gifts* of tongue-speaking and prophesying were possessed by some individuals, as was the case in the Corinthian church, to reveal God's will. These gifts were *revelatory* in nature. When given *en masse*, as happened in the few instances recorded in the book of Acts, they constituted *signs* of the beginning of “the last days”.

The signs are not meant to continue all through the gospel age. Neither are they meant to teach believers today the need of a baptism of the Spirit after conversion. Revivals may occur, as have occurred on many occasions in different parts of the world, in which many are converted at the same time. In such times of intensified activity of the Holy Spirit, the works of grace in the souls of convicted sinners may appear dramatic - for example weeping over sins, writhing in agony of soul, shouting for joy over sins forgiven, and so on. Wise counsellors will not encourage nor give too much credence to such outward manifestations, but will look instead for the inward and lasting changes

wrought by the Holy Spirit. Yes, mass conversions can take place, as happened on the day of Pentecost, but the signs of tongue-speaking and prophecy are not expected to be seen. The teaching of Scripture is that the baptism, or reception, of the Spirit occurs at conversion, without being accompanied by tongue-speaking and prophesying (Galatians 3:2; also Romans 8:9, 11; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

The ability of God is one thing; the purpose of God is another.

Subjective Experiences

Since God is able to perform miracles, will He ever perform any today? There are “cessationists” of sorts today who would dogmatically give a negative answer to that question. Theirs, however, is not the view of classical cessationism. The traditional reformed view is that God may work miracles according to His sovereign will, although He does not do so through men who are gifted with that ability. In this regard, it is important to be clear concerning the different issues that are involved.

God's sovereignty and the authority of Scripture

One area of distinction to be made is the difference between the authority of God over all creation and the authority of His word to believers. Put another way, there is a difference between the sovereignty of God over His creation and the submission of His creatures to His authority. God rules over the whole creation, and the so-called laws of nature are His way of keeping the universe going. He is able to suspend these laws at His will so that things do not work the way they normally do. When this happens in the life of an individual, a miracle is said to have occurred. Since God is unchanging, He continues to be able to perform miracles. There is no indication in Scripture that He has chosen to suspend the performance of miracles of every kind. Our understanding of the sovereignty of God will have to allow for the possibility of God performing miracles when, where and how He wishes.

God has chosen to reveal Himself and His will in the Scripture. His sovereignty extends over the writing of scriptures and the preservation of those scriptures. The completed revelation testifies to its own divine origin, authenticity and sufficiency. God is faithful and His word cannot be broken. He cannot act contrary to what He has declared in Scripture. All true evangelicals hold to the sole authority of Scripture in all matters of doctrine and practice. What Scripture says is what God desires of His people to believe and do. We have seen that signs, wonders and miracle serve certain purposes that were already accomplished at the beginning of the New Testament age. The revelatory gifts were given to some individuals at that time and have been withdrawn. No man may claim to have the revelatory or sign gifts - to perform them when, where and how he pleases. To do so would be to act contrary to the teaching of Scripture. It will be to call into question the sufficiency of Scripture. It will be to undermine the sole authority of Scripture in the life of the believer.

The cessationist position is based on the principle of the sole authority of Scripture. It does not necessarily rule out the ability, and possibility, of God performing miracles in this age.

Guidance sought, guidance given

A related matter is the difference between *guidance sought* and *guidance given*. A believer may seek guidance from God through prayer, consultation with other men, the application of Scripture to the situation, and the consideration of God's providential dealings in the circumstance. He may ask God to give clear guidance in decision-making, but he may not determine the will of God by pre-determined signs. The casting of lots, and the like, to determine God's will belong to the pre-Pentecost age (e.g. Acts 2:26; Judges 6:36-40). In a crisis, he may ask God to intervene miraculously, but he should not dictate to God how He should act. God is in sovereign control over nature and the life of the believer, and He has given the completed Scripture which is sufficient to guide us in all our needs. That is so far as the seeking of guidance from God is concerned.

The giving of guidance by God to a believer is another matter. God may act miraculously in extraordinary circumstances for the good of His people, and to the glory of His name. These extraordinary actions might include the giving of a vision, a healing - yes, even a tongue or a prophecy. Or, more likely, it may be an extraordinary intervention of some kind to deliver His people from a crisis that involves life or faith. When this happens, the believer should not be surprised nor alarmed.

After all, we believe in a living God who is in sovereign control over all creation. We trust in a heavenly Father who cares for His children. A miraculous divine intervention should cause the believer to be thankful to God, and to resolve to lead a more consecrated life. It should humble the community of God's people and lead to a sense of awe and praise. It is not meant to be paraded triumphalistically in public as "a testimony", or bandied around in dramatic and pietistic tones.

God does intervene miraculously in the lives of His people, although His people should not be surviving on a diet of signs, wonders and miracles.

The place of feelings

Another area of differentiation is the role which feelings play compared with the teachings of Scripture in the life of the believer. God made man a being that is rational, emotional and volitional. Put another way, he is capable of understanding, feeling and acting. He has the faculties of mind, heart and will. All three faculties are important. The teaching of Scripture is that the mind must have the priority (Romans 12:2; 2 Timothy 1:7). The feelings must not be suppressed, lest we become cold and judgmental. Neither should they be allowed to dominate, lest we become frothy and emotional. Instead, the feelings must be regulated, or controlled, by the truth of Scripture. It follows that the mind should be filled with truth so as to guide and regulate the feelings. Effort should be made to study, think, and understand the word of God. Doctrine should not be despised.

What about "impressions"? An impression is a sudden thought that comes to a person in a compelling manner. It, therefore, involves the mind and the heart. Are impressions to be trusted? Just as God may give a vision or perform a miracle, He can guide by an impression (Acts 16:6-10). Man has a subjective as well as a rational faculty. He has a soul, which is spirit in essence. The Holy Spirit dwells in the believer and interacts directly with the soul (1 Corinthians 2:11-16). God's normal way of acting is to guide the believer via the mind, that is by the understanding of truth. By His Spirit, He may cause a thought to bear strongly upon the soul. The believer should obey that impression, ***if it is in accord with the teachings of Scripture***. The impression may be to do good to a stranger, to witness to a colleague, to pray for a distant friend, or something else of like nature.

The qualification, "if it is in accord with the teachings of Scripture," should be noted. The Holy Spirit may prompt us to act in a certain way in any particular moment of our life, but He will not prompt us to act contrary to the teachings of Scripture. The ***source*** of authority is the Scripture. The ***agency***, or ***instrumentality***, of that authority is the Holy Spirit illuminating the mind with regard to truth and giving the believer the desire to obey the truth. The illumination may come to the believer as an impression, or it may come to the believer when he seeks to know and obey the truth. In the one case, the Holy Spirit takes the initiative in giving the impression. In the other case, the believer takes the initiative to understand truth and is given illumination by the Spirit.

The devil may impersonate the Holy Spirit as the agent of an impression. He is capable of transforming into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:3, 14-15). He primarily attacks the mind, shooting at it with fiery darts (Ephesians 6:16). Since he is a deceiver, he will attempt to sow doubts, errors and evil thoughts in the mind of the believer. He will attempt to cloud the believer's perception of the truth and shake his faith, as happened to Eve in the garden of Eden. He will misapply truth and prompt the believer to act according to his wiles, as happened to the Lord in the wilderness (Matthew 4). Knowing the truth will prevent us from succumbing to perversions of the truth. It will help us to distinguish between the genuine impressions given by the Holy Spirit and the goading of the devil, who is opposed to the truth.

A believer who keeps a close walk with his Lord will have many precious experiences of divine interventions and guidance. He will not be one who seeks such experiences for their own sake. Instead, he will be one who sees the importance of knowing the word of God and obeying it. Increasingly, he will learn the difference between the mistaken impulses of his sinful self and the spiritual guidance of the Spirit, based on the objective word of God. The filling, and leading, of the Spirit is experienced more by the knowledgeable and obedient than by the ignorant and disobedient (John 14:23; 1 John 1:3-4).

Conclusions On The Spiritual Gifts

The revelatory gifts of tongues, prophecy and extraordinary knowledge have been withdrawn with the completion of the written word of God. Signs, wonders and miracles were given by God to authenticate the apostles' ministry and message. Since there are no more apostles, and the written word of God is complete, no man today has the ability to perform signs, wonders and miracles as he pleases. Tongues and prophecy were given *en masse* to the early converts in order to convince the Jewish believers that the gospel age had begun. These gifts were signs of "the last days" - in which Christ is proclaimed as the Saviour, and people from all nations are called out of the world to become members of His church.

The cessationist position is based on the principle of the sole authority of Scripture in all matters of doctrine and practice. It is not contradictory to the view that God can, and may, perform miracles in certain circumstances, in accordance to His will. The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith states this truth as follows: "God, in His ordinary providence makes use of means, yet He is free to work without, above, and against them at His pleasure" (Chapter 5:3). God's power is seen more in His control over the myriad of everyday events than in a one-off miracle. The believer who keeps a close walk with his Lord will be no stranger to divine interventions and guidance, none of which needs to be miraculous. He will not trust in his feelings but in the word of God. He will seek to know the word of God and obey it. His whole life, including his feelings, will be regulated by the word of God.

This view of the revelatory and sign gifts, and of the Christian life, is opposed to that of the charismatic movement. The charismatic position is that the gifts have continued to today, or are being revived today. By claiming the revelatory gifts, the charismatics are actually undermining the principle of the sole authority of Scripture. They are then open to all kinds of weird teaching, as has happened already. From the beginning of the charismatic movement in the nineteen-sixties, claims of tongue-speaking and prophecy have been made. To these were added the casting out of demons, healings, and visions - none of which can be verified. Following these, there are the "holy laughter" and other antics - such as hissing like a snake and rolling on the ground - connected with the "Toronto Blessing". Where, and what, will all these lead to next? The charismatics have no way of determining the direction of their faith. This is for the reason that they do not have a rule or standard to be guided by.

Why are the errors of the charismatic movement so serious? Firstly, it has the effect of undermining the faith of true believers. While it is possible to have true faith in Christ without upholding the sole authority of Scripture, it is impossible to have a stable and clear faith without it. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). One's faith is sustained by the word of God. If the Bible is not the complete revelation of God, if it is not the sufficient and final word, the faith of the believer will have to depend on some other sources of authority.

Secondly, the errors of the charismatic movement undermine the foundation of the Christian faith. The church is built on "the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*" (Ephesians 2:20). The church is being sanctified and cleansed "with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26). When the foundation is undermined, the whole building will totter. While Christ will ensure that the gates of Hades do not prevail against His church (Matthew 16:18), it is required that His faithful followers "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

Thirdly, the charismatic movement brings great dishonour to the name of God. A distorted form of Christianity is being propagated as an expression of true Christianity. This is accompanied by a desire to fraternize with others who hold to a low view of Scripture, but who claim to have the gifts and related experiences. Their so-called tongue-speaking, prophecy and healings are done without biblical warrant. If someone were to carry out dubious activities in your name, or to forge your signature, you would feel terribly offended. The charismatics are doing just that. They are carrying out their activities in the name of Christ. They are acting presumptuously. According to Old Testament teaching, they have to be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). According to New Testament teaching, church discipline needs to be applied upon them (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15; Titus 1:10-11, 13).

It is our sincere hope that there will be those who are turned back from the errors of their ways. It is not good enough to claim that one is not an extreme charismatic, or is a non-charismatic who is sympathetic to the charismatic position. Teachers of the word will be judged more strictly by God (James 3:1). Pastors will have to give an account of how they have taken care of the souls placed under their charge (Hebrews 13:17). Christians have a duty to withdraw from those who are propagating errors in the name of Christ (Romans 16:17; 2 John 9-11).

The errors of the charismatics need to be exposed. The correct teaching of God's word needs to be declared. The alarm needs to be sounded. Who will stand up for the truth in this age of apostasy?

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