

The Holy Spirit & Miraculous Gifts (1)

1. There is no question to anyone who takes the Bible seriously that the Holy Spirit gave miraculous gifts to some people in the early days of the church.

- A. Acts 2:1-13, 10:44-48, 1Cor. 12:1-11, etc.
- B. The question is whether or not these gifts continue in the church today.
- C. Naturally, there are those who claim to have such gifts today, but the claim itself does not verify the reality of the gifts. We must answer this question based on Scripture, not on experiential claims.

2. It is not the case that the bestowal of miraculous gifts is the primary work of the Spirit in the lives of believers.

- A. See Romans 8, Galatians 5:16-24, 2 Cor. 3:17-18, etc., where the focus is on the moral & ethical transformation of believers, not on miraculous abilities.
- B. *The list of activities of the Spirit in the church. . . represents what the Spirit does for all believers. The central thrust of New Testament teaching about the work of the Holy Spirit dearly has these spiritual qualities and activities in view. When Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit apart from problems associated with claims to possess the Spirit, he gives prominence to the ethical role of the Spirit. Human attention, however, tends to focus on the more spectacular ecstatic and miraculous manifestations of the presence of the Spirit.* (Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today*, 1996, p. 111)

3. It is often assumed that the Bible is filled with miraculous occurrences. However, this is not the case.

- A. Miracles in the Bible are clustered in certain periods of history: the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt, the time of the prophets Elijah & Elisha, the coming of Jesus, & the establishment of the church.
- B. Otherwise, it is evident that there were sometimes lengthy periods of silence in which miracles did not occur, except perhaps sporadically & for some special purpose. When they did occur, it was to place emphasis on God's saving power & the revelation of His will — not in order to call attention to the miracles themselves.
- C. Amos 8:11-12 prophesied a time when the voice of God would not be heard, even though people would seek it. I Sam. 3:1 indicates that in Samuel's time, revelations from God were rare.
- D. Judaism has always acknowledged that during the period after Malachi's prophecy, genuine prophecy ceased. Following the Maccabean Revolt & the overthrow of Israel's Syrian oppressors, once the Temple had been purified, the stones of the altar (on which Antiochus Epiphanes had sacrificed pigs) were put in storage until a prophet would arise to tell the people what to do with them, thus indicating that there was no prophet then available (1 Maccabees 4:46). Likewise, 1 Maccabees 9:27 says, "It was a time of great affliction for Israel, worse than any since the day when prophets ceased to appear among them." This situation did not change until the coming of John the Baptist, & helps explain why John created such a sensation (Matt. 3:5-6).

- E. Few would question that the Spirit is no longer inspiring the writing of Scripture, as He once did (2 Peter 1:20-21); so, it is obvious that He chooses to work in different ways at different times.

- F. So, to question the validity of miracles today is not to doubt that they once existed; it is rather an attempt to be true to what Scripture says — & doesn't say. Nor is it an attempt to limit God's/the Spirit's power in any way. If He chooses to bestow miraculous gifts, He has the right to do so. But the question is, *is* He doing so today?

4. There are indications that miraculous gifts have ceased.

- A. Hebrews 2:3-4 associates miraculous gifts with the ministry of the apostles, & there can be little doubt that the gift of apostleship is no longer available, based on Acts 1:21-22.

- B. Hebrews 2:4 also affirms that the function of these gifts (or at least one of their functions) was to confirm the gospel when it was first preached by the eyewitnesses. See also Rom. 15:18-19, 2 Cor. 12:12. Now that this function has been fulfilled, one wonders what would be the purpose of continuing the gifts.

- C. It is a matter of history that when a group known as the "Montanists" arose in the 2nd Century A.D., claiming prophetic gifts, they were regarded by most Christians as heretics. Many charismatics themselves acknowledge a cessation of miraculous gifts from sometime after the apostolic age until the charismatic revival of 1901.

- D. The claims of miraculous gifts today often do not correspond with what we read in the NT. For example, those gifts were verifiable & seemingly beyond question. Today, the gifts usually offered in evidence are those that are not verifiable, such as the claim to speak in tongues, internal healing, etc. Why do we not see evidence of people being raised from the dead, limbs restored, etc.?

- E. 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 predicts the cessation of such gifts as prophecy, tongues, & knowledge, "when the perfect comes." In the context of 1 Cor. 13, this would seem to refer to a contrast between partial & impartial revelations from God. I.e., once the Scriptures were completed, there would no longer be any need for the gifts. To argue that we continue to need revelatory gifts goes counter to Paul's claim that the "God-breathed" Scriptures can make us "complete." What is lacking in them that we still need revelations from God?

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