

Holy Spirit Un-truths

I recently came across a different Christian viewpoint about the work and effect of the Holy Spirit. On myfishbites, we try to look clearly at what we feel the truth of God's Word is and we are open to correction and help, like we all should be all the time – as we allow God's Spirit to work in our lives.

This talk itself has and is being shaped and refined. I don't claim this is all completely accurate but I'm open to God and what he says and reveals through his Word. This isn't intended to cause offence but to make us think. Let's not miss out on what God has and cause others to miss out too. Let's try to be open and recognise that God is way bigger than we can imagine. He won't go against his Word but he will challenge our understanding of him!

When we read the Bible, we must read it in context with the rest of the Bible. If we don't, we pull out principles and ideologies that are incomplete or incorrect. So be careful how you read the Bible and be careful what you believe.

Allegation – The gifts of tongues and prophecy do not exist today – nor do other 'signs' gifts like healing

Part of the evidence for this is taken from 1 Corinthians 13.8. Let's look at this in 4 Bible translations:

NIV – Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

MSG (Bible paraphrase) – Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit.

AMP – Love never fails [never fades out or becomes obsolete or comes to an end]. As for prophecy (the gift of interpreting the divine will and purpose), it will be fulfilled and pass away; as for tongues, they will be destroyed and cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away [it will lose its value and be superseded by truth].

KJV – Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

Keep Reading – The Bible has the answers

If we read these out of context with the Bible, we may (at a push) conclude that these gifts don't exist today. But I've read this many times and before today never even considered that the Bible was saying that these gifts do not exist today.

Let's read on in 1 Corinthians 13 and see what else the Bible continues to say in verses 10-12:

...but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

The Bible makes it very clear here that there will be a time when prophecy will be fulfilled and pass away, when tongues will be destroyed and cease – and when knowledge will be superseded. When will this be?

The answer according to the Word of God is ‘when perfection comes..’ What does the Bible mean by ‘perfection’? It means Jesus. Let’s read on because the Bible says, ‘..then we shall see face to face.. then I shall know fully.’ So, the Bible confirms that perfection is when we see Jesus face to face and know him fully. It is at this time (and not before) that the gifts of prophecy, tongues will cease.

The Bible contrasts the ‘now’ to the ‘then’. In the ‘now’ we have gifts of tongues, prophecy – and these are necessary, but are imperfect. The Bible says, ‘now we see but a poor reflection in a mirror’. But when we reach the ‘then’ – we will see Jesus face to face. There will be no need for prophecy or tongues as we will be with Jesus for ever.

This bit of the Bible also says that ‘all knowledge will pass away’. Has that happened? Not in any way. So it’s very clear this isn’t saying we don’t use spiritual gifts today! Why didn’t Jesus just say that somewhere to his disciples or in the Bible? Because gifts have not ‘passed away’!

Practical Fulfilment

“But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.”

We can also be sure that prophecies will cease in a very practical way. A prophecy doesn’t continue for ever – prophecies are fulfilled. We also know that in practical terms, tongues will be stilled – when people finish speaking, when people die. Knowledge also passes away – many ancient skills have been lost across nations. So in a very real and practical way, these Bible verses are true – there is no mention that these gifts stopped at any one time – for example, after the last early church apostle died. No, the Bible doesn’t mention that anywhere.

Common Sense

If we accept that tongues and prophecy no longer exist, then we must accept that knowledge no longer exists as this is included in the same Bible passage. We cannot take 2 things from 3 from a passage and claim they do not exist but the other 1 thing does. It’s illogical and inconsistent.

Let’s read John 14.11-14 – we look at this because Jesus here claims that his disciples in the future will do even greater things than Jesus did – and of course Jesus used the prophetic, healing, deliverance and more..

Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

The same people who argue that miracles and prophecies no longer exist read this (above) to mean that we will do more than Jesus because he could be in one place at the same time, whereas because there are loads of Christians in the world, we will physically be able to do more.

But once again, people are reading something into the Bible that isn't there. Again, I feel people are limiting God by their own take on the Bible. How do I read John 14.11-14? Well, yes, we will be able to do more than Jesus because he was one man and the body of Christ is so large. But surely Jesus meant more than this. Although we are not Jesus and would never claim to be as he is God, we do possess a great power through the Holy Spirit in our lives, that goes beyond more physical numbers.

And what does it mean, 'because I am going to the Father?' Well, further in John 14 we find the answer..

AMP – And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengthener, and Standby), that He may remain with you forever.

So Jesus is saying that we will do greater things than he will because he will go to be with the Father and therefore send the Holy Spirit to be with us forever (as Christians). The Holy Spirit is part of the Godhead (God, Jesus, Holy Spirit) and so is God. Therefore, as God is omnipotent (completely all-powerful), is there a limit to the power of God? No. Therefore if we have the Spirit in us, we have been given the full resources of God – Ephesians 1.19-20:

AMP – And [so that you can know and understand] what is the immeasurable and unlimited and surpassing greatness of His power in and for us who believe, as demonstrated in the working of His mighty strength, Which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His [own] right hand in the heavenly [places]

So if we claim that prophecy and miracles do not exist, we effectively claim that it is impossible for God to perform miracles. It's crazy. The danger is that if we limit God by saying this – then we are at risk of self-fulfilling prophecy. This means that if we say God no longer heals (for example) then probably God will not heal in that church.

People's Experience

I have no doubt that God has 'saved' me or however you want to call it. I belong to a church, give time, money and energy to that church. I have seen God change me by his Spirit. By God's grace I am what people would call a 'Spirit-filled baptised disciple.'

I have the gift of speaking in tongues (given by God for his glory not mine, and to build up the church) and have a small gift of prophecy. I can testify that these gifts are very much alive today. I have seen the prophetic fulfilled, have seen prayers answered by people praying in tongues. People cannot claim these gifts do not exist. They exist in my life and in 10s of millions of Christians lives since the New Testament. I have also seen people healed (including in front of me in a garage forecourt and at church) and have heard accurate testimony of incredible healings (of limbs, raising from the dead, blind regaining sight and more).

Romans 12.5-6 makes it clear that the church is one body. If people deny part of the ministry of the body, they deny the full effectiveness of God. Which explains why many churches who refuse to recognise spiritual gifts are dying today. Like the fig tree cursed by Jesus, so many churches who do not interpret the Bible correctly, are withering up and dying. The life and fullness of Jesus squeezed out of them..

AMP – For as in one physical body we have many parts (organs, members) and all of these parts do not have the same function or use, So we, numerous as we are, are one body in Christ (the Messiah) and individually we are parts one of another [mutually dependent on one another]. Having gifts (faculties, talents, qualities) that differ according to the grace given us, let us use them: [He whose gift is] prophecy, [let him prophesy] according to the proportion of his faith;

We also learn from Romans that the gift of prophecy is a very valid gift in the ministry of the church today. Paul takes it for granted that prophecy does exist and that people do have this gift.

Our knowledge is imperfect and incomplete

So let's carry on looking at 2 more verses in 1 Corinthians 13:

AMP – For our knowledge is fragmentary (incomplete and imperfect), and our prophecy (our teaching) is fragmentary (incomplete and imperfect). But when the complete and perfect (total) comes, the incomplete and imperfect will vanish away (become antiquated, void, and superseded).

So here we have a further explanation of what the Bible means in 1 Corinthians 13.8. It clearly tells us that our knowledge and prophetic are incomplete and often only a fragment of the truth (as we are human, and not God). This is what the Bible means when talking about prophecy and tongues. It is not saying that they do not exist outside the New Testament.

Another piece of evidence used against signs gifts being used today is Hebrews 2.2-4 and Mark 16.20. Once again, we see verses plucked out of context to 'prove' other verses. Though, as we shall see, they do nothing of the sort.

NIV – Hebrews 4.2-4: We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced

by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

NIV – Mark 16.20: Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

The key part is where Hebrews says, 'God also testified to it (his saving power through Jesus) by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.'

But this again proves nothing other than what it says. God proved the salvation found in Jesus was true by using signs, wonders, miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Yep. But where does it say that this ministry has ended? Nowhere, that's where!!

God **STILL** testifies to the truth of Jesus through signs, wonders, miracles and gifts (as he does through his creation, Romans 1).

All these are 'distributed according to his will.' So it is God's will that decides about miracles, tongues, prophecy, healing. God's. Not man's will. Not man's theological interpretation.

Baptism in the Spirit

What about the baptism of the Spirit and the arguments used from Ephesians 4.4-5 that there is one baptism and therefore no separate 'baptism of the Spirit' after conversion? Let's look at the verses in context:

NIV – As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

So what is Paul's emphasis here? Living a life worthy of God's calling, loving one another and making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. Paul re-affirms that there is one body, one Spirit of God, one hope in Christ, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. His whole tone is to remind divided Christians of the core fundamentals of their faith.

There is no doubt that there can often be one moment of a Christian coming to faith (there was for me, some people cannot always so easily identify this time). But there are also other experiences of the Spirit (again, I had and have this on occasions). What we choose to call this is a matter of semantics.

NB. I do not claim to know everything. But I want to interpret the Bible correctly and fully, in context. It worries me when Christians present an incomplete or controlled view of God – and when the Bible is mis-used, or not used at all. I realise there are equally honest differing views about the Holy Spirit. But think – if we limit mighty God to our human interpretations – will we restrict God's power in our lives and circle? I think so. To me at least it seems far worse to restrict and quench God's Holy Spirit than to have the occasional excess (which can be dealt with!)