

## **The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the local church**

### **While waiting to begin...**

1. What does a Spirit-filled person look like? Have a look at these Bible passages: Galatians 5:16-26, Ephesians 5:18-21, Colossians 3:16-17
2. On Sunday mornings over the last few weeks we've been reading through Psalm 119. Have you noticed anything or been struck by anything? (Open it up to refresh your memory!)

### **1. "Prophet" and "prophecy" in OT and NT: what are we actually talking about?**

- (a) Old Testament "prophet" = a person given special revelation from God. E.g see Deuteronomy 18:15-22
- (b) New Testament: important distinctions...
  - *All Christians*, Acts 2:17, "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy."
  - *The church*, Revelation 11:1-3, "prophesying"
  - *Some people*, Ephesians 2:20, 3:4-5, 4:11, "apostles and prophets."

### **2. The identity and role of the "prophets" in the New Testament**

- (a) Who were they? Contemporaries of the apostles... like Agabus (Acts 11:27-28, 13:1-2, 21:9-14, 28:17)
- (b) They spoke truth from God... and established the "foundation" of the NT church (Ephesians 2:20)

### **3. Why won't we find "prophets" in the church today?**

- (a) The "foundation" has been laid (Ephesians 2:20, 2 Corinthians 12:12)
- (b) The Bible is entirely sufficient revelation from God
  - Jude 3, "contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all." (Gk. *hapax* – see 1 Pet. 3:18)
  - Hebrews 1:2,3, "... he has spoken to us by his Son... he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high..."
- (c) Jesus no longer gives Apostles and Prophets to his church
  - WCF 1.1, "those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased"
  - WCF 1.6, "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men..."

#### **4. Why might we want a fresh word from God? And why is it dangerous?**

- Seems to be more exciting... More authoritative... and Less hard work than studying the Bible!?!?
- But: resting in God's word... and not binding our consciences wrongly...

WCF 1.10, "The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture."

WCF 20.2, "God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are—in anything—contrary to his Word, or which—in matters of faith or worship—are in addition to it. Therefore, anyone who believes such doctrines or obeys such commands out of conscience betrays true liberty of conscience. The requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, destroys both liberty of conscience and reason."

#### **5. How DOES the Spirit use His Word?**

- Not revelation but illumination
- So we pray... meditate on scripture... and expect to grow through the renewal of our minds (Romans 12:1-2)... sometimes with mysterious or surprising results...
- "As we are the subjects of this illumination and are responsive to it, and as the Holy Spirit is operative in us to the doing of God's will, we shall have feelings, impressions, convictions, urges, inhibitions, impulses, burdens, resolutions. Illumination and direction by the Spirit through the Word of God will focus themselves in our consciousness in these ways. We are not automata.... We must not think [these things] are ... necessarily irrational or fanatically mystical" (John Murray, *Collected Writings*, I, p. 188).<sup>1</sup>

#### **Further reading: 3 articles and 3 books... in order of increasing length!**

- (1) *Spirit of light*, by Sinclair Ferguson - <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/spirit-of-light>
- (2) *Why I am a cessationist*, by Thomas Schreiner - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/cessationist/>
- (3) *It all depends upon prophecy: a brief case for nuanced cessationism* (Themelios 44 /1) - <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/it-all-depends-upon-prophecy-a-brief-case-for-nuanced-cessationism>
- (4) *Baptism and fullness*, by John Stott
- (5) *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament teaching on the gifts of the Holy Spirit*, Richard Gaffin.
- (6) *The Holy Spirit*, Sinclair Ferguson.

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst some special gifts in the NT era are no longer given to the church, some continuing gifts have some things in common with them. There are, for example, analogies between the ministry of the apostle and the ministry of the preacher; the Puritans sometimes termed preaching "prophesying." The Puritan theologian John Owen said something similar: "But although all these gifts and operations *ceased* in some respect, some of them absolutely, and some of them as to the immediate manner of communication and degree of excellency; yet so far as the edification of the church was concerned in them, something that is *analogous* unto them was and is continued." (Cited in Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, p233)