

Joel's Remarkable Prophecy of the Holy Spirit, #8 Applying the Message about the Outpouring of the Spirit Today

Intro: What we have tried to do in our study of the outpouring of the Spirit is to look at the passages about the Holy Spirit in their cultural context. In this study we have been using some of the things we have discussed in our class called "Honoring God's Voice". The first question of exegesis is always, "What did the words mean to those to whom they were first spoken?" And then, having determined that we ask the second question, "What do they mean to us?"

When we read what the NT says about the Holy Spirit there is no doubt that the NT church was highly charismatic, the evidence being pervasive in the NT (Earlier chart showing the churches where miraculous gifts of the Spirit were present). But how do we apply the teaching about the outpouring of the Spirit in the NT to the church in the 21st century?

Possible answers

Some affirm that nothing has changed

Pentecostalism says "Expect a miracle!"

Pentecostals contend that we must have apostles, prophets, and the various spiritual gifts just as did the first century church. The problem with this view is the fact that one cannot verify the manifest miraculous elements of the first century charismatic experience with the so-called charismatic experience of the modern Pentecostal.

Revelations are of dubious value and often contradict the NT.

Signs are not authentic miracles (for example, substitute ecstatic utterances for tongues and pseudo-miracles for authentic miracles)

Ignores the external historical evidence that spiritual gifts came to an end and re-interprets the statements about the cessation of spiritual gifts to extend them to the second coming.

Denominationalism says, "Let the Spirit guide you".

Some claim that Jesus promise to guide the apostles into all truth has a modern personal application. It is argued that every believer has the Spirit guiding his understanding; thus, whatever conclusions he reaches about the Bible he concludes were given to Him by the Spirit. (That, by the way, is reason why it is so hard to convert many denominational people. If you think God has directly told you what to believe, you're not going to be too impressed with the thinking and corrections of someone else!)

The problem is two-fold:

There is no manifest miraculous confirmation of the truth and no way to determine who is being guided by the Spirit and who is not

Even those who claim to be guided in understanding by the Spirit do not agree on the most fundamental questions about God and salvation! If the Spirit is guiding them into all truth then he is doing very poor job of it! People claiming to be guided by the Spirit are teaching the Godhead has both one person and three! That baptism is essential to salvation and isn't. That instrumental music is fine, though there is not a shred of NT authority for it.

The truth is the "charismatic movement" crosses over all denominational lines; yet brings no clarity to the religious confusion of denominationalism! Why is that?

Some re-interpret the NT teaching through modern experience, reducing the manifest and nearly universal miraculous experiences of the early church to a few and creating a non-miraculous category of "receiving the Spirit" for most others.

The attempt to give a modern application of NT statements about "receiving the Spirit" has resulted in the affirmation that every person who is baptized immediately "receives the Spirit" in a non-miraculous and non-detectable way.

Some affirm this "indwelling" as a personal presence of the Holy Spirit in their body, though without any manifest evidence of His presence.

Others affirm this "indwelling" as a representative presence of the Spirit in one through the indwelling word of God.

I see a number of problems with this approach:

Granting this assumption leads to classification of Biblical texts into miraculous and non-miraculous, or charismatic vs. non-charismatic texts. This creates confusion, especially when the same terms are used to describe two supposedly different things and no way to tell the difference!)

It separates the statements about the Spirit's indwelling in the epistles from the background experience of those same churches described in the book of Acts.

Most gospel preachers among us that affirm a personal indwelling are emphatic in pointing out the Spirit works through the word. However, the idea of a personal indwelling may lend itself to concepts such as Holy Spirit enabling or inner guidance. Else why is it necessary to have the Holy Spirit merely dwelling in a Christian's body if He does nothing while there and there is no real evidence of substance that He is present other than the affirmation that the Bible says so (which is in this case is a matter of special pleading)?!

I would like to offer an alternative view that I believe does justice to the Biblical data and which is still in harmony with commonly held views about how the Spirit works today. In short, we simply acknowledge that the

reception of the Spirit described in the NT was a miraculous experience that has ceased, but resulted in a written testimony that continues to bless people today.

Things we should do in applying the NT teaching on the outpouring of the Spirit
First we must acknowledge the manifest miraculous nature of the outpouring of the Spirit in the first century.

In an earlier lesson we noted that the Scriptures refer to the miraculous work of the Spirit in new disciples with consistent terminology.

From God's standpoint the Spirit is "given" or "a gift" from God. From God's standpoint the Spirit is "poured out".

From man's standpoint the Spirit is "received" or "drunk".

In many of the texts where this language is used there are contextual indicators to show us that the writer is thinking of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit.

This miraculous reception of the Spirit gave the early disciples of the apostles clear evidence that they had become God's children. Thus, the Spirit is said to be a "seal" and "earnest" and "a witness", a clear evidence that they belonged to God. Through the miraculous revelations the Spirit the church was led in worship and guided in life.

Through the miraculous gifts of the Spirit the church could convict sinners and lead them to faith.

Second we must understand that this outpouring ceased making it impossible for disciples to identify with the experience and apply the teaching connected with it.

All of us who read 1 Cor 12-14 realize that Paul gives commands that regulate spiritual gifts. We realize that we cannot obey them as they exist because spiritual gifts no longer exist.

Thus, we cannot obey the command to "earnestly desire to prophecy" (1 Cor. 14:1).

We cannot let two or three tongue speakers speak in turn and then let one interpret" (1 Cor. 14:27).

We cannot apply the teaching about veiled women prophesying in 1 Cor. 11:3ff.

All we can do with these commands and statements about the Holy Spirit is find principles of application while acknowledging that the experiences being described no longer exist. Thus we apply the principle but not the specific command.

We seek to always communicate in a clear and understandable way.

We may keep our services decent and orderly.

We may encourage women to respect God's order of authority in teaching and leadership.

But doesn't this sound like the Holy Spirit isn't doing anything today? Yes, we are acknowledging that the Holy Spirit simply isn't doing now what He did then! However...

Third, we must acknowledge that what the Spirit accomplished through NT revelation and confirmation can still have an affect in the present just as it had an effect among the ungifted in the first century. The record of what the Holy Spirit did and said through the spiritual gifts is available to us in our NT.

Spirit-powered miracles can now produce faith.

Through Spirit-powered miracles unbelievers were made to believe in the validity of the gospel through the miracles performed (Ac. 5:12).

Those Spirit-powered miracles can still lead unbelievers to faith. By reading in the NT about the healings and other gifts we can be assured that the gospel is of divine origin.

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31)

Spirit-revealed sermons can now convict sinners & tell them how to be saved.

When the apostles were filled with the Spirit they spoke messages that convinced the sinner that he needed to repent and to believe in Jesus Christ! (Ac. 2:37-38)

Those Spirit-revealed sermons can still convict sinners to the extent that we can show the sinner that he is in the same condition as those who first heard the message and needs to obey the same message to be saved.

We instinctively separate out of the cases of conversion the miraculous elements and look for those timeless principles (For example, we read the account of the Ethiopian and apply it by urging people to believe and be baptized, but we do not expect the Holy Spirit to tell the preacher what road to get on to find a prospect and to miraculously disappear after the baptism!)

Spirit-revealed truth can lead the 21st century disciples

The early church received their guidance directly and by miracle through prophets and tongue-speakers. Their worship was guided by such experiences.

The Spirit-revealed truth was written by the apostles to guide the future church. Today the Spirit leads us through that message.

Fourth we must acknowledge that reading about the miraculous work of the Spirit in the NT is not a disadvantage to experiencing it personally nor is it an affirmation that the Spirit no longer works.

As much as we might like to “see” a miracle first-hand, such was not nor now is a necessity to faith.

Testimony can establish truth

A message from a truthful messenger is just as beneficial as an eye-witness experience.

*Jesus *said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.” (John 20:29)*

and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, (1 Peter 1:8)

The testimony of miracles can convince people with a right attitude; but even seeing miracles cannot convince people with a wrong attitude

“But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.’” (Luke 16:31)

The Spirit’s word is as living and active now as it was in the first century to produce the blessings God purposed in unbelievers and believers even while no one is receiving the Spirit in the way described in the NT.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

Conclusion: The wonderful blessings of the Spirit’s coming and work are available to us through the Spirit-revealed and Spirit-confirmed message.