

But is the absence of miraculous giftings (such as tongues) proof that the Spirit is being quenched or hampered? Some charismatics think so. There is an entire strain of Pentecostalism that would doubt the salvation of anyone who cannot speak in tongues! Never mind that the “greater” gifts of the Spirit are evident in their lives—the Spirit’s character-fruit, a life of selfless love, the practice of holiness. If these people don’t experience the Spirit as “we” do, they just don’t measure up spiritually. How ironic that the very Spirit who intends to produce humility and gentleness in God’s people becomes, so often, an excuse for pride and judgmentalism.

Both streams of Christian faith need to go back to Paul’s basic teaching on the Spirit—1 Corinthians 12. There is one body, even though there are many and different kinds of gifts (vss 4-6). Each member of the body has just the manifestation, to just the degree, that God intends (vss 7-11). This diversity of gifts and experience must never destroy unity . . . indeed, it enhances unity when rightly appreciated (vss 12ff). Many gifts to cover the church’s various needs. Many degrees to which those gifts are experienced (weak/strong, mature/immature, honorable/less honorable, presentable/unpresentable—vss 21ff). But still there is one body and each of us belongs to it (vs 27).

If we take these admonitions to the Corinthians seriously (admonitions, by the way, given in a context addressing the very issue of the wide variety and diversity of spiritual gifts!), we must recognize God has given “different kinds of gifts . . . for the common good” and “has arranged the parts of the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be” (1 Cor 12:4ff). In the end, dismissing those whose experience of the Spirit differs from our own is an indictment, not of fellow Christians, but of God’s wisdom in arranging the body as he has.

Missing the Spirit’s Point

Much of our wrangling about the Spirit misses the main point anyway. We seem to argue, when the subject of the Spirit comes up, about matters that are peripheral and inconsequential while ignoring entirely the larger spiritual issues at stake.

Those of us, for instance, who believe that miraculous manifestations of the Spirit ceased with the apostolic era (or, at least, have no

place in the lives of disciples today) are determined to debunk the gift of tongues or healing in contemporary times. We construct whole theologies in our efforts to prove that the possibility of and our need for miraculous works of the Spirit no longer exists.

But when we've constructed our rational ramparts against any attack of the supernatural, we seem to overlook one radically important truth: there is no other way the Spirit *can* act upon us and our world *except* through the miraculous and the supernatural. So what if we doubt gifts like prophecy and miraculous powers? The larger question is: do we believe in an indwelling Spirit who changes hearts and teaches us about life and equips us for ministry and grows us into the fullness of Christ? If so, then by definition we believe in a Spirit who works outside of worldly physics, operates by different laws, and is not bound by the "normal" and "natural." How can we speak of a Spirit living in us *except* by talking about the extra-ordinary? How can we claim a Spirit who comforts and guides us, who matures and deepens us, who transforms sinners into saints *without* talking about processes and practices that are "super-natural"?

The Spirit living in us is a miracle. The Spirit operating as our *Paraclete* is a wonder. The Spirit as our "seal" and "guarantee" is a miraculous sign. The Spirit transforming us, conforming us to God's will, reshaping us into the image of Christ is a marvel of God's supernatural power as great (indeed, greater!) than strange words on our lips or healing energy in our hands.

We better hope and pray for a Spirit of the supernatural sort, capable of wonders and awe-inspiring acts. Any lesser Spirit leaves us to our own paltry powers and meager self improvements. When I look honestly at my own heart, I know I need a miracle, a great miracle, and nothing short of a miracle. In that wider context, it's difficult for me to get very excited over the question of whether the Spirit still heals bodies or inspires tongues. If the Spirit has the miraculous power to do what is needed in my heart and mind, he can do whatever he wants with my tongue and hands.

On the other hand, those of us who believe in a present experience of supernatural miracles seem just as likely to miss the main Spirit-point. Like our non-charismatic brothers, we've been equally eager to construct

