

Spirituality II: 1 Corinthians 12 & 13

A fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit From Methodism to Pentecostalism to Charismatic Renewal

This study explains:

- (i) How an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit has its roots in Wesleyan Methodism.
- (ii) The flow of renewal from Methodism to Pentecostalism and into mainstream denominations.
- (iii) Why the churches live in tension with different views on styles of worship, openness to the ministry of the Holy Spirit and forms of expression.

Almost all Christian denominations in the UK have been influenced by 'charismatic renewal'. When we become a Christian – when we are 'born again' we are encouraged to see the world through a different lens. We are spiritual people. We are guided by God's Holy Spirit. We believe that God strengthens us, God speaks to us and God leads us. Specifically, God helps us to become more sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit so that we can support each other and do his work. This is not so much 'women's intuition' or a 'sixth sense', but a spiritual intuition sharpened by God. The term 'renewal' describes how people may have been attending Church for some time but have found that their faith has been rekindled. There is a close association between renewal and conversion in that when we understand how the Christian faith can transform our lives, when we begin to feel it for ourselves, we are more likely to open our hearts to God, accept Jesus as Lord and become one of his disciples.

This sense of renewal has its roots in the Wesleyan-Holiness Movement which followed the export of Methodism to the United States in the 18th century. Its original participants were devout church goers who felt that they had never had a personal experience of God – the likes of which was experienced John Wesley at Aldersgate in London when his heart was 'strangely warmed'. This kind of experience deepens people's personal relationship with God. Rather than simply believing what scripture has to say, they can know that they are loved and that their sins are forgiven through a personal encounter with God. This spiritual hunger and searching gave rise to the Azusa Street revival of 1906 in San Francisco. This event marked the birth of Pentecostalism. A steady wave of renewal has followed since.

At first, Pentecostals were given the left foot of fellowship (rather than a handshake) but their growth was astonishing. One leading figure in the 1920s was Aimee Semple McPherson. She became the first woman to preach on radio, and three services a day seven days a week at the world's first mega-church. After the Second World War the Pentecostal Church began to use television as a platform for teaching and evangelism. Much of their work remained highly successful (even though we tend to remember only the cringe-worthy moments). The first significant transition of Pentecostalism across the denominations occurred when an Episcopalian minister, Dennis Bennet, shared his experience of the Holy Spirit with his congregation – and faced swift rejection. However, Media interest (Time Magazine, Newsweek) was stirred because he appeared "very suave, sophisticated...the very opposite of all the stereotypes." Similarly a group of Roman Catholic priests from Pittsburgh were touched in 1967 whilst exploring whether 'ministry in the spirit' was for them. As they entered the chapel they felt obliged to lie prostrate on the floor, some discovering that they had the gift of tongues. Thus the charismatic renewal movement was born, with over one hundred million Roman Catholics worldwide affiliating to the organisation. The influence of the spirit moved from the United States to both South America and Europe. Whilst some of our Churches were initially wary about the Pentecostalism, all of us have been touched. Many Churches embrace a range of hymnody (some of which is very recent), creativity within worship and openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Sadly, this is not always the case. The threat of change, concerns about over-emotionalism and differing attitudes towards expression mean that some have emphasised the peace and calm that the Holy Spirit can bring. Sometimes this is cloaked in talk of 'reverence' - but this term is so subjective it is of little use. Whilst there is some truth in this argument we must guard against castrating the work of the Holy Spirit who moves both as a gentle dove and as a mighty wind.

The events that followed the Azusa Street Revival left some commentators uncomfortable as they witnessed what they considered to be spiritual excesses. In time, members of the Pentecostal Church were nicknamed 'Holy Rollers'. The reaction to this revival led some in established denominations, most notably the Southern Baptists, to argue that certain gifts of the spirit ceased when the scriptures grouped together now as the New Testament, were agreed in the mid 5th century. Whilst broadly accepting the ministry of the Spirit among the people of God, some argued that spiritual gifts have

ceased because we no longer need them. 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 is often cited as a justification for this – “Love never faileth; but whether there are prophecies, they shall fail [shall be superseded, be rendered useless, unnecessary, and meaningless, because no longer practical or needful, shall be canceled, done away with or put away]; whether there be tongues, they shall cease [be caused to cease, stop altogether]; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away [shall be superseded; the same word used of prophecy is used here also].” ie spiritual gifts are transitory and will disappear in time, but the love of God and of each other will remain. However, interpreting when this will happen is difficult. Will this take place as the Church matures, at the end of our lives (when we inherit our place in heaven) or when Christ returns?

In Spirituality III and IV we will look at specific gifts in more detail and explore differences in theological outlook. Perhaps the most important comment to make is that as we continue to welcome people into our Churches from different denominations, they will bring experiences and influences that are different to our own. This shows itself in different theological emphases (e.g. adult baptism vs. infant baptism, centrality of communion vs. priority of preaching, extent of lay ministry vs. extent of ordained ministry and different expectations where the ministry of the Holy Spirit is concerned). It is also true that all denominations have drifted to some extent from their original emphases. Methodism has always stressed the search for a personal experience of God but who would have known that this hunger was linked indirectly to the Azusa street revival and the birth of Pentecostalism through the Wesleyan Holiness movement!

- 1/ When you look at the make-up of your Church, how many people are Methodist born and bred, and how many bring insights and experience from other denominations?
- 2/ Have you had a personal experience of salvation – a time when you encountered God in a profound way and made a faith commitment in response?
- 3/ Is it wrong to become emotional in worship? If so, when is it wrong?
- 4/ Are there any gestures of expression that you find helpful in worship? (A raised hand, head bowed, kneeling). Why do you find this helpful?