

Elder Statement – October 30, 2020

This summer, we as an Elder Team at Bethel began a study on the Spiritual Gifts as part of our preparation for our fall sermon series. This has been a tremendously encouraging, edifying, instructional and stretching time, for which we deeply thank God.

As part of this study, we have been reading, discussing, praying and digging into the Scriptures about all the Spiritual Gifts listed in the New Testament. Some are gifts we have readily understood, taught and exercised as a church. However, others we soberly acknowledge have not been. As Elders, it is our responsibility before the Lord to shepherd, guard and guide this Church in obedience and submission to God and His Word as best we can.

Within Bethel's Constitution our Statement of Faith states:

We believe that the Holy Spirit sovereignly chooses to give every believer at least one gift for service in the ministry of the local church to accomplish God's purposes.

While there are a variety of spiritual gifts described in the Bible, we recognize that the practice of the gifts of tongues, interpretation, healing and prophecy has resulted in some confusion and division. We believe that God is not limited, and can and does use these gifts as He sovereignly chooses. These gifts need to be exercised in accordance with scriptural direction. We do not see the practice of these gifts as a requirement to evidence faith in Christ, the filling of the Holy Spirit, or spiritual maturity.

When it comes to the grouping of "Power Gifts," which includes gifts like tongues, interpretation, healing, prophecy, miracles, words of knowledge, faith and discernment, we know there has been and can be great confusion. We grieve that these have been the source of division between many Christ-followers. Perhaps it is because of the unknown OR bad experiences OR fear OR a noble desire to guard our unity OR something else. Whatever the reason, in our study together and discussion, we have become convicted and burdened before God by our avoidance of these Holy Spirit given gifts at Bethel, and we feel compelled to not continue in this way any longer.

We do believe, as our statement of Faith states, that these "Power Gifts" are real, active, Holy Spirit given gifts, which God sovereignly assigns for the church today. We do believe that without all of the Holy Spirit's gifts being active in our midst, we are like a body missing a limb, or perhaps more accurately, a body with a limb that is significantly under developed and malnourished. As a result, we believe we are not experiencing all that God would have for us as a church nor are we experiencing all that God wants to do through us to impact our community and world for Christ.

It is for these reasons, that we feel compelled to keep building up ALL gifts that God, by His Holy Spirit is giving to our congregation. This includes continuing to practice and strengthen those that we have long utilized, but also beginning to learn and develop in areas where we have previously lacked. We are in united and full support of the teaching we have received so far in this Spiritual Gifts series and what is going to be shared in the coming weeks. We need this instruction to help us learn and have a common understanding of the Scripture. We also need to put what we are learning into practice (James 1:22).

We humbly acknowledge as Elders, and as a whole church, that we are on our journey with this. We have not arrived and we do not have everything figured out for the course ahead. We need to exercise patience and grace for one another, but the unknown cannot hold us back from stepping out in faith.

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Finally, we are keenly aware that some are thrilled with this study and examination of the Scriptures, while others may be cautious, struggling or concerned. To our entire congregation we want to boldly and unequivocally share the following commitments to you as your Elders:

- 1) We are committed to God's Holy, inspired and inerrant Word. To the best of our abilities, before God, we will lead Bethel to continue to rightly preach, teach and apply the entire council of God (James 3:1).
- 2) We are committed to guarding Bethel from error, abuse and misuse of all Spiritual Gifts. To the best of our abilities, before God, we will step up to our given responsibility to test and discern the work and words of our Church, rejecting what is not from Christ, but holding firmly to the truth (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22).
- 3) We are committed to living out what we say we believe. We are not changing or altering our Statement of Faith, but we are going to lead Bethel to live out our Statement of Faith. We feel compelled to lean into the Holy Spirit's work in our midst, and are going to embrace being pushed or stretched to do so. God is God, and we are not (Isaiah 55:8-9). At times, the ways of God may push well beyond our "comfort zones" or "boxes" and when this happens we will submit ourselves under God.
- 4) We are committed to upholding what the Scripture teaches with respect to orderly, peaceful, appropriate worship (1 Corinthians 14:39-40). We will not allow chaos or confusion. "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace." (1 Corinthians 14:33)
- 5) We are committed to the unity of our church (Ephesians 4:3-6). The very heart of the Spiritual Gifts is to operate as one, united body (1 Corinthians 12:11-12). We will work with incredible diligence to protect and maintain our unity together.
- 6) We are committed to love as our greatest aim and to saturate every aspect of our Spiritual Gifts in love (1 Corinthians 13). Love is greater and more important than any gift (Matthew 22:34-40, 1 John 4:7-16). We commit to pursue love and lead in love. And we will be open at all times to your questions, input or comments, doing our best to respond in love.

In Christ,

Your Bethel Elder Team

Ron Eastman (Chair), Carl Waun (Vice Chair), Allan Self (Lead Pastor), David Kettlewell, Phil Moddle, Thys Schyff, David Switzer