

## **BCCC Statement on the Holy Spirit & Spiritual Gifts**

### **TEACHING PART 1 – Baptised & Filled with the Spirit**

*Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> June 2006*

	<b>Statement</b>	<b>Biblical References</b>
1.	We believe baptism in the Holy Spirit to be an integral part of a believer's conversion, by which the Holy Spirit comes to indwell in the believer. It is not an event that happens subsequent to conversion and that introduces believers into an advanced state of spirituality that they otherwise could not enjoy. This is not to deny that progress needs to be made in our Christian experience. We should always be discovering and entering more fully into the riches that are rightfully ours in Christ. This is only possible by continually being filled by the Holy Spirit.	Matthew 3v11, 16 Acts 2v16-21 (Joel 2v28-32) Romans 8v9 1 Corinthians 12v13 Ephesians 1v13-14 Ephesians 4v4-6 Ephesians 5v18
2.	We believe that growth in Christ-like character and the "Fruit of the Spirit" is the evidence of the Spirit's work in the life of the believer. The use of any particular gift is not in itself a sign of spiritual superiority or maturity nor should any spiritual gift be sought as the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.	II Corinthians 3v18 Galatians 5v16-26

#### **Readings:**

- Ephesians 1:13&14
- I Corinthians 12:13
- Galatians 5:22-26
- Ephesians 5:15-21

### **1. Introduction – Who is the Holy Spirit?**

Vitally important that we understand this if we are to appreciate the ministry of the Spirit:

- *He is a person* – Jesus referred to Him as "He" and as a Counsellor like Him (John 14:17).
- *He has feelings* – He can feel love (Romans 15:30) and grief (Ephesians 4:30). In fact, He feels grief every time we speak or act in a way that is sinful and dishonouring to Christ.
- *He can be resisted* – He does not force Himself on people, but convicts, teaches and leads them. It is possible for people to resist His leading and conviction in their lives (Acts 7:51).
- *He is fully God* – when Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit, Peter could say that had lied to God (Acts 5:3-5). The Spirit has all the qualities of God, and although He is sent by the Father and the Son He is equal to them in power, holiness and eternal being.

Therefore, we should always think of the Spirit as a person with whom we have a relationship, not a thing we can get more of. We should not make false distinctions between the Father, Son and Spirit either, and should realise that to know one is to know the other. The Spirit living in us means that Christ lives in us or that God makes His dwelling among us. Following the Spirit's leading is the same as doing God's will or living under the lordship of Christ. These are three ways to describe one reality.

### **2. Every true Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13&14)**

Indwelling HS is a new blessing under New Covenant – promised:

- Joel (9<sup>th</sup> Century BC) – day when God would pour out His Spirit on all His people (2:28-32)
- Jeremiah (7<sup>th</sup> Century BC) – New Covenant in which God would write His Laws on the minds and hearts of His people (31:31-34)
- Ezekiel (6<sup>th</sup> Century BC) – God would put a new spirit in His people, removing their heart of stone and giving a heart of flesh (11:19&20), later reveals that this means putting His Spirit in them who will move them to obey His laws (36:26&27)

- Christ promises to His disciples that the Spirit will come to live in them – He will be the Comforter like Christ, the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of holiness (John 14:16&17, 16:13)

All Christians have the Holy Spirit indwelling:

- Romans 8:9: “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ”
- Ephesians 1:13&14: “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession- to the praise of His glory”

So, then, of the Spirit indwells us, how do we receive Him?

### **3. The Spirit is received through baptism in the Spirit, and this happens when we are saved (I Corinthians 12:13)**

The Spirit comes to indwell us through Baptism in the Holy Spirit. In Acts we see three groups of believers receiving the Holy Spirit as the apostles laid hands on them:

- a) Jews (Pentecost – Acts 2)
- b) Samaritans (Acts 8)
- c) Gentiles (Acts 10).

This order follows the order that Christ had predicted for the spread of the Christian message in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). After these three key times in Acts it seems that individual believers received the same blessing of the Holy Spirit as they became Christians.

So, then, what is the baptism in the Holy Spirit? There are three Scriptural references:

- 1. The baptism in the Spirit promised** – John the Baptist (Matthew 3:11: “He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire”). We should notice from this passage that it is Jesus who baptises with the Holy Spirit (or in Him). We should not speak of being baptised *by* the Spirit.
- 2. The baptism in the Spirit given** – this happened on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5: “For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit”).
- 3. The baptism in the Spirit described** – this baptism is the point of entry into Church (I Corinthians 12:13: “For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body ... and we were all given the one Spirit to drink”). It is worth noting that in this verse the Spirit is in us and we are in Him. We can envisage this as placing an open bottle under water – the bottle is in the water and the water is in the bottle. When we are baptised in the Spirit He comes to live in us. Ephesians 4:4-6, which speaks of one baptism that unites all Christians probably also speaks of the baptism in the Spirit.

We should also make reference here to the claim from some Pentecostals that baptism in the Spirit is always accompanied by speaking in tongues. In Acts the gift of tongues was sometimes given to groups of people when they received the Spirit, but not in every case (it is mentioned in the case of the Jews at Pentecost – 2:4 – and the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius – 10:46 – but not in the case of the Samaritans). In addition there is no reference to many of the people who are said in the New Testament to have been filled with the Spirit speaking in tongues, including the Lord Jesus Himself! I Corinthians 12 shows very clearly that no one spiritual gift that is given to all Christians, and nowhere does the NT imply that a person who is baptised or filled with the Spirit must exhibit a particular spiritual gift. Being led by the Spirit is connected to Christ-like character (fruit of the Spirit), while being filled with the Spirit often seems to be connected with speech that is either prophetic or praising God. We cannot consider the topic of tongues any further in this sermon, but will return to it in part two of this series.

The Pentecostal position, by comparison, sees baptism in HS as being an event subsequent to conversion which ushers the person into a deeper level of spiritual life. Usually Pentecostals say that all Christians have the Holy Spirit indwelling, but that not all have been baptised in Him, and that this baptism, which is available to all believers, is necessary in addition to conversion for the Christian to be empowered for witness and service. Normally Pentecostals expect the baptism of the Spirit to be received through the laying on of hands. This view seems to have originated as an attempt to explain what happened when professing Christians who had remained static in their faith or had shown little spiritual life became enlivened and filled with passion for the faith (often known popularly as “the second blessing”). This was felt to be similar to the groups in Acts

who received the Holy Spirit often (in the case of the disciples in particular) some time after coming to believe in Christ. Acts therefore becomes a paradigm for our expectation of salvation. If the believers in Acts could receive the Spirit subsequently to placing faith in Christ then perhaps we can too. However, this reading of Acts does not consider its unique place as the bridge between the gospels and the epistles and the disciples' unique position as people who came to faith in Christ before the New Covenant came into full effect at Pentecost when the Spirit was first poured out on the Church. The epistles never speak of two groups of Christians – those who have the Spirit fully and those who do not – they assume that all believers have the Holy Spirit. This is also in keeping with the Old Testament prophecies where the New Covenant blessing of the Spirit was for all believers. In fact, this was the very thing that marked out the New Covenant as being different from the Old. In the Old only those people who were specially chosen by God for service were anointed with the Spirit – in the New all believers would have the Spirit poured out on them (Joel) and (something that was never experienced in the Old Testament) living in them (Ezekiel).

This problem with reading Acts as a pattern for Christian experience today rather than a record of the unfolding of salvation history as the Old Covenant moved into the New arose from observing experiences of individuals and then going to Scripture to try to explain what was seen. We need to base our understanding of concepts like the Baptism of the Holy Spirit on what Scripture actually says and then interpret our experiences against a Scriptural framework. I would suggest that those people who had these new spiritual experiences were either not genuinely saved before having these experiences or were saved but had grown cold in their faith without progressing to a deeper level of relationship with the Lord. The faulty must also lie, at least in part, with some evangelicals who under-emphasised or neglected the role of the Spirit, who encouraged assurance of salvation in cases where there was no genuine evidence of a transformed life, and who did not adequately teach new believers about the person and work of the Spirit. Undoubtedly there are, and should be, times in our experience where we are more aware of God's presence, power and person, but these are better understood as being freshly filled with the Spirit or encountering Him in a fresh way than being baptised with Him. The baptism with (or in) the Holy Spirit is a once off event, whereas we can have many such spiritual experiences in our lives. We should not seek only a "second blessing", but a third, fourth and fifth etc. However, for the most part our spiritual growth should be a steady progression of further obedience to God and responsiveness to the Spirit's leading.

#### **4. Our relationship with the HS should be a progressive one of Him leading us into new and deeper relationship (Galatians 5:22-26)**

However, while I cannot agree with their understanding of the baptism with the Spirit, the Pentecostal movement can remind us of a truth of absolute importance – that the Christian life is not intended to be static! A lifeless Christian is a contradiction in terms. Not just once for all experience of Spirit. He does not only make us a new creation, He continues to transform us into the image of Christ, so making us able to do what God wants from us – good deeds, ministry in Church and witness. There are not two classes of Christians, and we should not encourage new Christians to seek a one off baptism of the Spirit, but rather to surrender their lives daily to Him. God will give His Spirit to those who ask Him (Luke 11:13), and it is not necessary for hands to be laid on for Him to do this (although the laying on of hands may have a role in confirming God's calling in the lives of individuals and certainly did have a role for the apostles in terms of exercising their apostolic authority).

In Galatians 5 Paul speaks about the struggle within the believer between the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit. These two parties desire opposite things. Paul shows that we must continue to be led by the Spirit and to keep in step with Him. If we do, then we will bear the fruit of the Spirit. This fruit is described as including nine qualities which together describe Christ-like character. The greatest evidence of the Spirit's work in the life of a person is increasing Christ-likeness. Every Christian will be aware of this struggle that Paul describes. We are all too aware of the tension within us, and the conflicting voices of the flesh and the Spirit. We have heard His voice as He shows us the truth and warns us of the harmful consequences of our actions. However, He never possesses us or forces God's will on us. Someone has described the Spirit's work in our lives by analogy with power steering in a vehicle. The driver must make the decision which way to turn, but as soon as he begins to turn the wheel the power steering kicks in and enables him to turn a heavy truck which he would otherwise be unable to steer clear of danger. In a similar sense, as we exercise

our will to choose to do what God desires the Spirit provides the power enabling us to do it. Without Him we would not be able to follow through on these decisions. He is always leading us to do what is right, but we must follow His leading!

## **5. We need to keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:15-21)**

Lastly, if we are to follow His leading we need to keep on being filled with the Spirit according to Ephesians 5:17. Several people are described in the New Testament as being filled with the Holy Spirit:

- John the Baptist (Luke 1:15)
- Elizabeth (Luke 1:41)
- Zechariah (Luke 1:67)
- Jesus (Luke 4:1)
- All believers on Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4)
- Peter (Acts 4:8)
- Praying Church (Acts 4:31)
- Requirement of first deacons (Acts 6:3)
- Stephen (Acts 7:55)
- Barnabas (Acts 11:24)
- Paul (Acts 13:9)

However, Paul makes it quite clear in Ephesians that being filled with the Spirit is not reserved for special servants of God, but should be the normative experience of every Christian. The Spirit lives in you if you are a true believer, but you must continue to surrender every part of your life to Him. If you imagine your life as a house with many different rooms (for different things that are important to you) you need to open all the doors and allow "access all areas". Don't squeeze the Spirit out of room after room until He is left standing in the entrance hall! We must allow the Spirit to exercise His Lordship in every part of our being. We should always be asking Him to search us and reveal our sin to us. So often we deceive ourselves and ignore our own pride, selfishness and greed. The flesh runs amok – unchecked and unbridled. How often we grieve the Spirit by ignoring His warnings and leading. We must be honest and submit to His probing!

In Ephesians 5:17 Paul says we must be filled with the Holy Spirit as opposed to being drunk on excess alcohol. It is important to realise that this is not a comparison (i.e. Paul is not suggesting that being filled with Spirit is somehow similar to drunkenness, although some people have tried to use this verse to justify certain behaviour that may seem at first glance like drunkenness), but a contrast. Paul is emphasising that when people are drunk their speech is unclear, empty of meaning and out of control, whereas the Spirit brings control, clarity and purpose to speech and actions. Even in these few verses from Ephesians we can see several results of a Spirit-filled life. We realise that the Spirit's work in us is not only about Christ-like character but also the outworking of Christ-like character in our actions and speech, including:

- Wise living (v15)
- Thoughtful, fulfilled living (v16)
- Understanding of God's will (v17)
- Speech which blesses others and praises God (v19)
- A heart and speech that is thankful to God (vv19&20)
- Submission to others (v21)

A Spirit-filled Christian (whether or not they would describe themselves in that phrase) is one who is wise, thoughtful, purposeful, obedient to God, humble and submissive to others, and who speaks words of praise and blessing. If you have ever met a Christian like that then you can be sure that the Spirit is at work in them and they are genuinely Spirit filled. I am sure that this is how the apostles recognised the Spirit-filled people they needed to serve as deacons in the Jerusalem church. Is this what people would see when they look at you?

## **6. Conclusion: Keep in Step with the Spirit!**

In conclusion I must ask you some vital questions:

- Are you a Christian? Have you ever surrendered your life to Christ, repenting of your sins and trusting in Him to save and transform you? If so, did you realise that He baptised you in the Holy Spirit and gave you that Spirit to drink so that He now lives in you?
- Are you living a Spirit-filled, Spirit-led life? Is the flesh or the Spirit victorious in your decisions?
- Is it your daily prayer to be filled with the Spirit in every part of your life? Do you ask Him to search you, lead you and fill you, or have you shut off some parts of your life to Him? Why not make that your prayer today?

Of course, we must not think of the Spirit only in terms of our own individual lives, but also in terms of our life together as a church, but that must wait for part two of this series in two weeks time!

## TEACHING PART 2 – The Manifestation of the Spirit

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2006

3.	God has given spiritual gifts to all believers according to His grace. These gifts should be used in love and humility for the building of the body of Christ. We believe that the gifts of tongues, prophecy and healing are still possible today as God determines.	1 Corinthians 12,13 Romans 12v3-16 Ephesians 4v7-16
4.	We do not speak against tongues and do not seek to forbid their private use. However, the gift of tongues should not be used audibly in any of the meetings, groups or events of the Church.	1 Corinthians 14v13-23 1 Corinthians 14v39
5.	Prophecy is revelation of truth from God. If anyone believes that they have a prophecy, they should consider carefully when, to whom and in what setting it should be spoken, and should avoid dogmatic statements, for example "Thus says the Lord" or "This is the Word of God". Prophetic statements should not be treated with contempt but should be tested against God's Word and weighed as to their application.	1 Thessalonians 5v20-21 1 Corinthians 14v29-33
6.	Healings and miracles are always possible in the will and power of God. They can never be guaranteed, and cannot be "claimed" from God by the use of certain forms of words. We do not accept the idea that physical healing is the right of all believers in the present age on the basis of the atoning death of Christ. When God heals it is a gift of His grace, and the absence of healing does not necessarily imply a lack of faith.	1 Corinthians 12v7-11 2 Corinthians 12v7-10

### Readings:

- 1 Corinthians 12:7-11
- Acts 4:23-31

### 1. Comment on the Charismatic Movement

#### *The Definition of "Charismatic"*

In the first part of this two part series I made a distinction between BCCC's theological position as regards the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the alternative view held by Pentecostal churches. In this second part I will be mentioning the "Charismatic movement". I need to make a clear distinction here between the meaning of these two terms, since some confusion exists in the mind of many Christians. Pentecostals believe that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is an event distinct from regeneration, which can happen at a later date than conversion and which ushers the believer into a life of greater fullness and blessing in the Holy Spirit. Many Pentecostals believe that the Spirit is received by the laying on of hands (although some would suggest that only sincere prayer is necessary) and many teach that the baptism is evidenced by speaking in tongues (although others will say that the outward evidence can be any form of praise and is not necessarily in tongues).

The Charismatic movement is a movement of Christians with a particular focus on the Holy Spirit and certain gifts of the Spirit (*charismata* is the Greek New Testament word for "spiritual gifts"). Whilst many Pentecostals are Charismatic, not all would identify with the movement, and it is certainly true that not all Charismatics hold to the Pentecostal view of the baptism in the Spirit. The common feature of Charismatics, irrespective on their view of when the baptism in the Holy Spirit occurs, is a great desire to see the Holy Spirit moving in power in our generation. As a result, many Charismatics encourage believers to seek for the gifts of the Spirit which have been absent from many Christian churches throughout large periods of Church history. In particular there is an emphasis on the gifts of tongues, healings and prophecy. The movement is, in many ways, a reaction against the tendency in some reformed churches to under-emphasise the Holy Spirit and over-emphasise the Scriptures as if God was no longer active today and the Spirit can no longer speak to

the Church today. The accusation from some Charismatics is that some churches have worshipped the trinity of Father, Son and Holy Scriptures! Charismatic churches, therefore, are more likely to allow times of less structured worship, to encourage the open use of tongues in church services and to seek words of wisdom, knowledge or prophecy directly from God applicable to the lives of the Church and the individuals within it.

### *Positives results of the "Charismatic" movement*

It is my belief that the Charismatic movement has had a helpful, and perhaps necessary, impact on the Church. In particular, God has used this movement to reawaken the Church to the facts that:

#### **a) Christian faith is about Spirit as well as word**

I believe that it is true to say that some churches since Reformation times over-emphasised the written word of God at the expense of the Spirit of God. This was due to a heavy influence from Modernity, a pattern of thinking that began with the Renaissance and dominated Western culture until the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Modernity places great emphasis on rationality and fact, and is suspicious of emotion and sceptical about anything apparently supernatural. The effect of this kind of thinking on Christians led them to place great emphasis on the study of the Bible and the need for pure doctrine, and also led to a high degree of scepticism about the supernatural among many. The Christian faith was in danger of becoming purely rational and neglecting the emotional – evangelicals in particular were at risk of making a confession of agreement to a list of beliefs the defining characteristic of faith. The Charismatic movement came as a wake up call reminding Christians that they needed to experience God with their emotions as well as the mind. While Modernity said "love the Lord your God with all your mind", the Charismatics said "don't forget to love Him with your heart too!" The Christian life should be about the will, heart and mind together surrendering to and experiencing God. A faith without emotion would be dull and unsatisfying just as faith without the mind is weak and unstable. As evangelicals we are wholly committed to the Bible as the authoritative word of God, but we must not forget that without the Spirit of God enlightening it's meaning it will not live in our lives. The living word of God transforms our minds and hearts as the Spirit writes it on them. He inspired the words of Scripture, and He continues to reveal God's truth in our lives. There is no conflict here – a Spirit-filled believer will have a greater respect for and desire to read and apply Scripture, and a believer who has truly understood and applied Scripture will be Spirit-filled. The Spirit will lead us often through the words of Scripture, and never contrary to them. His revelation of truth to us as individuals is not so much a revelation of new truth but the unfolding in us of God's eternal truth and plan as recorded in Scripture by men who were carried along by the Spirit.

#### **b) Our worship together should be Spirit led and not merely ritual or tradition**

Ritual and tradition can have value in the Christian life and in church life. There is a great deal of value in Christian communities repeating creeds and liturgy together, and this was particularly so in the past when many believers were illiterate. However, the early church had times of open worship when many different believers could contribute depending on their gifting and as the Spirit led (see I Corinthians 14:26). The Charismatic movement has reminded the Church of the importance and richness of times like this in public worship.

#### **c) Service in church depends on spiritual gifting not merely human ability**

The emphasis on spiritual gifts in the Charismatic movement led to a greater general awareness of spiritual gifting. Although the Charismatics have tended to emphasise a few gifts (the more obviously miraculous ones), their focus on gifting from the Spirit has led to a greater awareness among Christians that spiritual gifting is essential for ministry in the church and that every believer has been gifted in a unique way for service in his or her local church.

#### **d) We should expect God to do something new in our generation**

Charismatics emphasise a hunger for God and a desire not to settle for anything less than everything He has to give to His people. This is a welcome reminder that churches should never be static and self-complacent, but should always be seeking God and His purpose for our generation.

### *Some Concerns with the "Charismatic" Movement*

Despite the fact that I believe that the Charismatic movement has brought some benefits to the wider Church, I would not be happy to describe myself or this church as "Charismatic", and I hope in this section to explain

some of the reasons why I have concerns about the movement. I must preface what I am about to say by saying that the Charismatic movement contains a wide range of different individuals, churches and groups, and therefore these remarks will not by any means apply to all Charismatics. My intention is simply to highlight some of the more worrying trends that have developed in some branches of a diverse movement.

### **a) A wrong understanding of the person and nature of the Holy Spirit**

Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son (John 14:16, Titus 3:6) to empower the Church in their witness to Christ (Acts 1:8). The Spirit's role is to remind the Church of Christ's teaching (John 14:26), to testify to Christ (John 15:26) and to convict the world of truth (John 16:13). Never in the New Testament did Christians pray to the Holy Spirit or sing in praise specifically of Him. The danger for the Charismatic movement is that in rediscovering the vital role of the Spirit the focus of praise, prayer and hope will be in the Spirit rather than the Father and Son. I am not suggesting that we cannot worship the Spirit, since He is equally God, but that our prayer and praise should reflect Biblical language and that we should have an awareness of how the three persons of the trinity relate to one another. The Spirit will always make Jesus known and glorify Him rather than glorifying Himself.

Another issue related to spiritual gifts that I want to mention at this point is the idea among some Charismatics that some spiritual gifts or blessings can only be received by laying on of hands by an anointed person or by visiting a church or place where that gift is already in evidence. There seems to be a tendency to see some people as particularly anointed or "experienced in the things of the Spirit" and therefore to seek out that person as a channel of God's blessing. This is dangerous because it can lead to too great a dependence on, and even a kind of worship of, some leaders. In Scripture the only people who seemed to have this kind of authority to be the conduits of God's blessing in the Spirit were the apostles, and there are no apostles in this sense in the Church today. God is sovereign in His Church, and the Holy Spirit is sovereign in His choice of which gifts to give to which individuals within the Church (I Corinthians 12:11). Therefore, I have concerns about some of the advice I have read and heard given to young Christians about seeking the gift of tongues or about where to go to really tap into what the Spirit is doing today. I believe that when a person sincerely and honestly surrenders themselves to God, He will give them every spiritual gift and every experience He wants to give them. They don't need to seek out a guru or a certain place to receive what God has for them. This will be directly given to them by God through the Spirit. For example, if you want to know if God wants you to have the gift of tongues why not ask Him? There is a danger here of establishing a kind of priesthood through whom God's blessings are mediated, when in fact Christ is the One High Priest (Hebrews 7:26) through whom all God's blessings in the Heavenly realms are ours (Ephesians 1:3).

Sometimes it seems that these ideas stem from a fundamental misconception of the very nature of the Spirit. By focusing on anointing with the Spirit (which was an experience known even to people in Old Testament times) there is actually a neglect of the more profound reality of the constant indwelling of the Spirit (a distinctly New Covenant blessing as we saw in part one of this series). The Spirit is not poured out on God's people through anointed people, but has been poured out on all God's people (as Joel's prophecy quoted by Peter in Acts 2 says). He indwells you just as He indwells all believers, and the real issue is not whether you can have more of the Spirit but whether He can have more of you. Some recent songs and some Charismatic books and sermons seem to suggest that it is possible to have more of the Spirit or that we should seek a fresh anointing from Him. Whilst I would agree that our experience of the Spirit needs to be fresh and progressive, the distinction in terms is important. The Spirit is already resident in us, and our desire should be less about Him coming on us again and more about Him welling up in us like living water so that He overflows into the lives of others (see Jesus' words and John's inspired commentary on them in John 7:38&39). This is the amazing New Covenant community. Instead of seeing the Spirit as a thing we can seek more of, we should learn to see Him as a constantly present companion, a person who we can deepen our relationship with and to whom we should yield more fully. The person who is surrendering their life to the Spirit will keep on being filled by Him and will overflow in blessing to others. Above all, we should not so much seek the blessing of the Spirit as seek what He wants, which is for God's perfect will to be done.

### **b) Lack of discernment and control in use of spiritual gifts**

Not everything that is apparently supernatural comes from the Holy Spirit. Whenever a Christian experiences something apparently supernatural he or she must discern what its origins are. This is entirely biblical, as Scripture constantly tells us to discern between different kinds of spirits (I Corinthians

12:10) and to test everything and only hold on to what is good (I Thessalonians 5:21). Some Charismatics seem to suggest that when we try to discern what is happening when faced with an apparently supernatural phenomenon we are depending on our own reason and therefore resisting the Spirit. I have seen videos of leaders who encourage people to “switch off your mind” to be “slain in the Spirit” (when the person receiving the “blessing” falls to the floor unconscious). This is completely unbiblical. In Scripture there is no conflict between Spirit and consciousness. The Spirit actually brings wholeness to our minds and part of His fruit is self-control! When Paul speaks to the Corinthian church about spiritual gifts his concern is that they will use the many gifts God has given them in the “most excellent way” (I Corinthians 12:31). He shows them in Chapter 13 that the most excellent way is love, and then goes on in Chapter 14 to set limits on how gifts are used in the church to ensure that they are always used lovingly and for the common good. Paul does not see the presence of spiritual gifts (and certainly not of tongues) as the evidence of the Spirit at work – his concern, as always, is with Christ-like character and the edification of the church. Unfortunately, in many Charismatic churches and groups the guidelines that Paul laid down in Chapter 14 for how tongues can be used in a way that edifies others and does not cause confusion to non-believers are completely ignored. I have witnessed Charismatic meetings where several people (often many) are speaking at once in tongues without any interpretation being offered (verse 27). Worse still, some Charismatic meetings degenerate into a disorderly “free for all”, with everyone “worshipping God in their own way” without any thought for the others around them. This is absolutely contrary to what Paul is saying in Chapter 14 – his concern is that our worship together should reflect the character of God, who “is not a God of disorder but of peace” (verse 33). That is why he forbids anything to be said in the church that is unintelligible to the hearers (verses 18&19). Some phenomena that have been evident in some Charismatic circles have been very far removed from the peace and order that Paul sought – in particular I am thinking of the so called “Toronto blessing”, which included people making noises like animals and laughing uncontrollably. Some Charismatic leaders suggested that God was humbling His people through this, teaching them to care only for His honour. Whilst it is true that we constantly need to be humbled before God, phenomena like this should not be sought as the evidence of that – rather a lifestyle of dedicated service and lips that bear intelligible praise are the evidence of a humble spirit. When God’s people become highly emotional or lose control those who are leaders in the church must exercise wisdom. We should not clamp down on what could be an expression of high emotion stemming from an encounter with God, but we must help the church to realise that there is a better way, and sometimes this will mean controlling excesses.

Some Charismatics have tended to go one step further than this and to see the presence of certain phenomena, perhaps tongues or some of the “Toronto” phenomena, as evidence that an individual or group of people are true believers. This has led to the inclusion of some people who hold very different beliefs about salvation or Scripture. This is highly dangerous. The New Testament holds up several tests of the authenticity of faith, and I John is a good place to begin a study of these. John shows that true believers live transformed lives of obedience to Christ’s commands (2:4), love for other Christians (2:9), and rejection of worldliness (2:15). In addition they testify to certain facts on which their faith is based, including the identity of Christ as the Son of God (4:13-16) and the Christ (5:1), and His death as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (4:10). If we accept people as Christians based on the presence of any phenomenon without considering their lifestyle or doctrinal beliefs we are in great danger of compromising the Gospel itself. If Moses had done this then Jannes and Jambres, the Egyptian magicians who counterfeited God’s miracles, may have been brought on side as fellow-spokesmen of God! We must be discerning and realise that some apparently supernatural phenomena can be counterfeits by evil spirits or simply a psychological phenomenon caused by an excessively heightened emotional state. If they are the latter they are not necessarily harmful or to be rejected, but they are not to be seen as a marker of closeness to God, filling with the Spirit or even the Spirit’s presence in a person. Likewise, the absence of these phenomena should never be seen to mean that a person or church is not in tune with the Spirit! The controlling presence of the Spirit will be evidenced by His fruit, which is Christ-like character (Galatians 5:22) and controlled, wise, thoughtful living (Ephesians 5:15-21).

### c) Neglect of truth and Scripture

Amongst some Charismatics there is a tendency to spend more effort seeking new words from the Spirit than seeking to understand and apply His words as recorded in Scripture. As a result, some Charismatic churches neglect Bible teaching, or in some Charismatic preaching there can be a tendency to make

experience rather than Scripture the basis for their teaching. Scripture is the inspired word of God, and it is by God's revelation of His truth in the Bible that we must test everything else. Scripture is, as DC Carson often describes it, "the norming norm" of the Christian faith – in other words it is both the standard for right belief and practice and the means through which we move closer towards right belief and practice. Scripture cannot be understood properly and can certainly not be applied effectively without the Spirit, but likewise the Spirit will not operate in isolation from the word He inspired. The analogy of honey and honeycomb may be helpful here. The meaning (or Spirit) is the honey, and the text (Scripture) is the comb. It is the honey that is sweet and which nourishes, not the comb, but without the comb there can be no honey. The two are inter-dependent on one another. Pastors must preach the word, as Paul told Timothy (II Timothy 4:2), because we are confident of its usefulness to teach, rebuke, correct and train God's people (3:16&17). Some Charismatics give the impression that there is a conflict between the intellect and faith – that to really be surrendered to God means to switch off your intellectual faculties. Whilst the Bible warns us sharply about the dangers of depending on human reason (Proverbs 3:5 and I Corinthians 1 stand out as prime examples), the aim of the New Testament is a mind that is renewed and transformed so that it thinks in a godly way (see Romans 12:2 for example).

Another danger in some quarters of the Charismatic movement seems to be a feeling that there is a special knowledge available only through certain "miraculous" gifts. There appears to be a genuine fear for some that if we don't allow tongues to be used we might miss out on what God is saying to the Church. Again, I fear there is a danger here of limiting God. If God's people genuinely desire to hear His voice and are truly humbled before Him then He will speak and we will have ears to hear. The problem with those who missed out on God's word to them was never that God made it difficult for them to hear (although at times He did, for example in Jesus' parables, veil the truth), but because they did not have ears to hear. The only heart to which God will not speak is a hardened heart. Now it is possible that some believers have hardened their hearts to God, and that a reluctance to allow tongues to be used could be a sign of this, but it is equally true that there are some very godly people who are genuinely seeking His truth who have reservations about the use of tongues in the church. In I Corinthians 14:13 Paul tells those who speak in tongues that they should seek the interpretation of their words from God. Presumably if they received the interpretation they would speak this in the church in the language everyone understands rather than in the tongue. My question is really this: if the person who speaks in tongues prays to God for an interpretation and God does not give it to him, does this mean that the individual or the church has missed out on God's voice? I would say of course not – it simply means that either the words spoken in tongues were not intended to communicate anything from God to the church or that God will communicate this truth in another way. For this reason it does not concern me if this tongue is only spoken privately rather than being spoken in the church where there may be no interpreter, and the apostle Paul would certainly agree that if there is no interpretation then the gift should only be used in private prayer and not audibly in the church (I Corinthians 14:28).

I am aware that a section like this potentially sounds quite negative, since it is written in reaction to some of the excesses I have personally observed in a broad movement. Many Charismatics, in fact, may say that I have been unfair and have chosen to focus on extreme examples. However, I believe that these three core concerns raise key questions for Charismatics as a whole. So, in conclusion of this section, I want to simply restate these three points in positive terms that I might use in advising a young believer:

- Surrender yourself to the Holy Spirit and seek God's Kingdom and His righteousness. Expect God to give you many wonderful spiritual experiences, but above all seek to know Him more and to glorify Him in your life by being obedient to His will and transformed into the likeness of Christ by the Spirit.
- Use whatever spiritual gifts God decides to give you in the most excellent way – the way of love. Whatever you contribute to the public meetings of the church, let it be intelligible (other people can understand it) edifying (it will help others to grow spiritually) and orderly (you take your turn and do not speak too long or without considering the others who may need to contribute).
- Seek God's truth in His word as well as from His indwelling Spirit. Be transformed in your mind, heart and will so that in all things you will grow to be mature, like Christ. Test everything you hear or see against the standard of God's revealed truth in Scripture, and let it rebuke, teach, correct and train you so that you can do every God work. As you seek to understand and apply Scripture to your life do so in the power of the Spirit rather than by your own human effort.

## 2. "Miraculous gifts" – tongues, prophecy & healings

Time does not permit us at this point to enter into a detailed discussion of a biblical theology of miracles, but before we consider the role of the more obviously miraculous gifts in the life of the church today I want to make a couple of points which are the bedrocks on which I will base this section:

- a) *Miracles are not the biblical norm for God's operation throughout human history* – in reading Scripture some sceptics struggle with what they see as frequent references to miracles, but as a believer in God and in the miraculous we might have the opposite struggle. Why did so many of God's faithful servants experience so little of the miraculous? Why are miracles entirely missing, or almost entirely missing, from large chunks of the Bible? In fact, if you examine the Biblical record you will see that miracles are only common in three sections of history, each lasting around 40 years:
- i. Moses and Aaron (around BC 1446 – 1406)
  - ii. Elijah and Elisha (second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> Century BC)
  - iii. Jesus and the apostles (around AD 27-67)

These three periods of salvation history are remarkable for two reasons:

- i. God was instituting something new
- ii. The people of God were particularly hard hearted

Miracles by their very nature are events that are out of the ordinary. Usually in salvation history God works through the ordinary circumstances of life.

- b) *Miracles are evidence of the breaking through of the "age to come" into the "present age"* – the world as it is today is not how God originally created it to be. Nor will the eternal condition of mankind be the same as it is today. In Scripture there is a tension between the current age, where all things are subject to corruption and decay, and the age to come, in which there will be no corruption. The prophets looked forward to the age to come, and the promised Messiah was to be the one who ushered in this new age of universal blessing and knowledge of God. With Jesus the new age finally came as he established God's Kingdom among His disciples. However, that new age (and the Kingdom of God) has not yet been revealed in all its fullness and it will not be until Christ returns. When the Kingdom of God is finally perfectly revealed in the new earth and new heavens there will be no more need for miracles of healing, as there will be no sickness or death. In the current age we will still be subject to death and illness. The miracles of Christ and His apostles were evidence that the age to come was breaking into the present age – proof that Jesus was the Messiah, the promised King – but we should not necessarily expect that miracles are to be common place now in our current time, although they are certainly possible in God's sovereign will. Some Charismatics have a different view of this tension between the present age and the age to come and follow "restorationist" theology – the belief that the Church will grow in numbers and influence until the day when it ushers in the age to come in its fullness, after which Christ will return in person to take up His throne (post-millennialism). I do not believe that this view fits with the biblical expectation, which is that Christ must return personally first and that if anything the present age will become darker, with increasing persecution of believers towards the end (see for example Matthew 24).
- c) *All spiritual gifts are supernatural, not merely the "miraculous" ones* – it is really a misnomer to describe certain spiritual gifts as "miraculous" and not others, since all spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit and His operation is always supernatural in the strict sense of the word. It is a distinctly human trait to be more impressed by those things we cannot explain than by those which seem more mundane. I seldom hear of people seeking the gift of helps, but often hear of people being fascinated with tongues!

With these three principles in mind I now want to focus for the remainder of this section on the three gifts that are most closely associated with the Charismatic movement, and which have led to the greatest debate among Christians – tongues, prophecy and healings. All references are from I Corinthians unless otherwise stated. I should say first that my starting point is (and the BCCC statement clearly says this) that these gifts are still possible and may still exist in the church today. There are some believers who would say that these gifts are not possible today (called the "cessationist" position), but their arguments are based mainly on Church history (the fact that these gifts have apparently been absent from the majority of churches throughout most of Church history) and a reading of I Corinthians 13:8-12 which sees "perfection" (v10) as the completion of the canon of Scripture (in other words, when the canon was completed there was no further need for prophecy or tongues and so the gifts ceased). I cannot support this reading of I Corinthians

13, since the “perfection” Paul is speaking of is to do with seeing the Lord face to face and knowing Him fully as He knows us, a definition which can surely only refer to the future return of the Lord. The argument from Church history is more significant since there seems to be some validity in the claim that these gifts have not been core elements of Church life in many periods, but the best we can say from this is that there may be times when God in his sovereign purpose does not pour out these gifts in the same measure as others. It would be pushing this argument too far (especially in the absence of any explicit Scriptural reference to the ending of these gifts) to say that it is impossible that these gifts have resurfaced in the Church today. The elders of BCCC are agreed that these gifts are therefore at least possible in the Church today, and this is clearly stated in our Statement.

## A] Tongues

- Tongues are not expected to be for all believers – some Pentecostals and Charismatics expect that all believers should be able to speak in tongues. This is not biblical, any more than it would be correct to say that all believers should be able to teach or should have the gift of helps (12:30)
- Tongues are not to be sought – Paul specifically tells the Corinthian church to seek the “greater gifts” (12:31) and to “try to excel in gifts that build up the church” (14:12). In the second case, the context specifically refers to seeking prophecy rather than tongues. It appears that the Corinthians were placing more emphasis on those gifts that seemed more spectacular, and had lost sight of the fact that spiritual gifts are always intended for the benefit of the whole body. Hence, Paul tells them not to seek gifts like tongues which are of less benefit to the whole body.
- Tongues can be used privately – Paul tells people who have this gift that if there is no one who can interpret what they say they should remain quiet in the church and speak only to God (14:28). This indicates that Paul did not see any problem with the use of tongues in personal devotion and prayer to God, which is presumably where he used the gift himself (14:18).
- Tongues must never be used in the church without interpretation – this is very clear in Chapter 14, where Paul gives two reasons why this rule must be followed:
  - Because un-interpreted tongues may cause confusion for unbelievers (v23)
  - Because un-interpreted tongues are not edifying to believers (vv16&17)
- Tongues used in church must always be used in an orderly way – in particular, Paul says that only one person should speak at a time and not more than three should speak in one meeting (14:27).

These are the five or so rules Paul laid out for the use of tongues in the Corinthian church, and therefore in every church. However, some practical concerns remain for church leaders who would try to guide their congregations according to these principles. Not least among these is the question of how to ensure that tongues is not used without translation in the church. This is not easy to resolve, and it could be argued that it is better to face this issue if and when it arises – in other words, if someone speaks in a tongue in a church meeting we should seek a translation at that time and if it is not forthcoming then ask the speaker to stop speaking. This would, however, be quite difficult to practise, and may lead to great confusion and disruption in the service. The elders of BCCC have therefore decided to take a different approach, which is to say that “the gift of tongues should not be used audibly in any of the meetings, groups or events of the church”. This is our preferred stance on this issue, and because it goes beyond the restrictions Paul lays down in I Corinthians 14 I should explain what we do and don’t mean by it and what it means in practice:

- *This is not necessarily a prohibition once for all time* – the Statement we have made is not to be incorporated into the constitution of the church, thus leaving freedom for a future Pastoral Team to revise it should the need arise or for the current Team to revisit it if we become convinced that it is excessively restrictive.
- *We clearly say that we do not speak against tongues or seek to forbid their private use* – as I have said above, Paul did not forbid the private use of tongues in the devotion of the believer, and told the church in Corinth not to forbid tongues. We would encourage any believer who has this gift to use it freely in private prayer, and our restriction is only on its audible use when the church is gathered together.
- *We feel that this restriction, although it may go beyond the restrictions Paul gives in I Corinthians 14, is appropriate for our church at this time* – BCCC is already a multi-lingual church, and as such we are highly aware of the difficulties of untranslated speech in another language. The position we have taken is in keeping with the current practice of the church and with the views of most people in the church

- *We do not believe that the church will suffer if this gift is not used publicly* – Paul's words in I Corinthians 14 are less than favourable towards tongues in the public life of the church. He encourages prophecy, but only permits tongues. The tone of his words throughout the chapter suggests that he could see little value for tongues in public use. We would follow Paul's advice to any person who has this gift to seek the interpretation of their tongue (14:13), and welcome them to bring the interpretation before the church for the edification of the church. This can be done without having to repeat the utterance in the language of the tongue.
- *Our intention is to be faithful to Paul's overall desire to see order in the meetings of the church* – this is our over-riding concern, as it was Paul's (14:33), and we believe that this restriction is helpful in ensuring this key aim. We encourage every believer to use every spiritual gift God has given them, but to do so in a way that is appropriate to the body.

There are two further questions about this particular spiritual gift which are of great importance, but which are not covered in BCCC's statement, and which I cannot deal with in full here:

**a) What is the nature of the Biblical gift?**

There is much debate about this issue and I am not personally happy to be dogmatic about the correct position. In Acts 2 when the disciples first spoke in tongues it appears that they were speaking an intelligible human language, although it is unclear whether each disciple spoke only one language or if each could speak many languages or if each person heard the disciples speaking in their own language (in other words the hearers were also given a kind of gift of interpretation). In fact, we should realise that the word translated "tongues" is actually the word for languages or, even more specifically, dialects (the use of the word "tongues" can actually confuse this). This strongly suggests that the biblical gift was the use of other existing human languages previously unknown to the speaker. However, the common form of "tongues" among Charismatics today is not a human language. In fact, it appears to have no vocabulary, syntax or grammatical structure. It usually consists of highly repetitive usage of a limited number of syllables. This kind of speech has been called "glossolalia" (a transliteration for the Greek words for "tongues" and "speaking"). The following quote from the Wikipedia page on glossolalia summarises current opinion from linguists who have analysed the phenomenon:

The syllables that make up instances of glossolalia typically appear to be unpatterned reorganizations of phonemes from the primary language of the person uttering the syllables; thus, the glossolalia of people from Russia, the United Kingdom, and Brazil all sound quite different from each other, but vaguely resemble the Russian, English, and Portuguese languages, respectively. Many linguists generally regard most glossolalia as lacking any identifiable semantics, syntax, or morphology.

Of course, Charismatics may dismiss this as biased research from scientists who are committed to a naturalistic explanation of the world. Charismatics will often defend this kind of speech as a legitimate spiritual gift based on I Corinthians 13:1 where Paul speaks of the "tongues of angels" (the claim is made that this is a heavenly language spoken by the angels not a human language), but others have pointed out that Paul's words in that verse are hypothetical, and that this verse cannot be used as the basis for a doctrine of human beings being able to speak in angels' tongues, even if these do exist (Paul's words could be translated "Even if I could speak in all human languages and even the languages of angels but I didn't have love ..."). Furthermore, it has been suggested that this kind of unstructured verbal utterance is actually a feature of a highly emotional or ecstatic state, a claim which is often backed up by examples of similar sounds among practitioners of other religions. I do not have sufficient knowledge of languages and am not sufficiently sure based on Scripture to come down firmly on either side in this debate, and am content to say that the individual believer must seek the Lord's guidance about this issue. However, I would tend to be sceptical about an unstructured use of syllables being called a language and attributed to the action of the Holy Spirit.

**b) Who is speaking when a person uses tongues? Is it the Spirit speaking to the person or the person speaking to God?**

This is an interesting question. It is not immediately clear from the examples of the use of tongues in Acts what the speakers were saying, but the hearers described having heard "them declaring the wonders of God" (Acts 2:11). Presumably, therefore, in this instance it was the disciples who were communicating to the hearers using this gift. In I Corinthians 14:14 Paul says that when a person prays in a tongue his spirit is praying but his mind is not, again suggesting that tongues (which can be used in prayer to God) is the individual speaking to God rather than vice versa (verse 28 also fits with this

understanding). Some Charismatics, however, point to Romans 8:26 where Paul speaks of the Spirit praying for us “with groans that words cannot express” and suggest that this may refer to the Spirit praying for us through tongues. However, in Romans 12 Paul makes no mention of tongues, and the gift of tongues is actually something expressed in words (albeit in a language unknown to the speaker), hardly just unintelligible groans. It is not infrequent for Charismatics to speak about tongues as if it were a form of prophecy (a message from God) through which God is speaking to His people. I cannot find any definite biblical support for this view.

## **B] Prophecy**

- There is a difference of view among Christians about what exactly the New Testament gift of prophecy is. In I Corinthians 14:29&30 Paul equates the gift with a “revelation”, and it is therefore evident to us, as the BCCC Statement says, that “prophecy is a revelation of truth from God”. This is also true of Old Testament prophecy, where God’s messenger spoke God’s words directly to God’s people with immediate relevance to their situation.
- However, although prophetic messages contain God’s truth, the New Testament gift must be tested. Paul is also clear about this in I Corinthians 14:29 where he says that the others in the church (possibly limited to the other prophets) should “weigh carefully” what is said. This is to be distinguished from the process by which God gave the Scriptures to us, where the prophets wrote the inspired word of God without error (II Peter 1:20&21). There are two sense in which prophecies must be weighed:
  - a) *Truth (testing)* – is this genuinely a word from God? In this sense prophecy is subordinate to Scripture and must be tested against it (this is the meaning in I Thessalonians 5:19&20 where we are told not to treat prophecies with contempt but to test everything and only hold on to what is good). Not everything that is claimed to come from God is genuinely from Him.
  - b) *Application (weighing)* – even if a word is accepted as being a genuine prophecy from God the church must still carefully consider when and how to apply this truth. It is one thing to know what God is telling us to do, but to know how and when to do it takes wisdom and careful consideration. This is probably Paul’s meaning in I Corinthians 14 when he tells the church to weigh prophecies carefully.

Because Scripture commands us to test and weigh prophetic messages in this way, we request that believers do not use dogmatic statements such as “thus says the Lord” or “this is the word of God” since these kinds of preface make it very difficult for the church to exercise discernment about what is shared.

- When a prophet speaks their words are still under their own control (I Corinthians 14:32) – therefore this gift, like any other can be misused and must be used in a loving and orderly way. Hence Paul can restrict the words of prophecy to a maximum of three per meeting and can remind the prophets that the purpose of their speech is to instruct and encourage the church (verses 29-31).
- If a person believes he has a prophetic message for the church, he should still consider carefully the appropriate way and time to share it and who it should be shared with. If the message is highly personal to one individual it should most probably be shared with that individual rather than the whole church. Again, it may be appropriate to share a message with the elders first so that it can be tested and weighed before you share it with the whole congregation. This kind of consideration is in keeping with the most excellent way of love for one another.

Before leaving the topic of prophecy I want to briefly touch upon a last point, namely what kind of things we should expect God to say in prophecy. This is not commented on in the BCCC Statement, and these comments reflect my own views rather than any agreed position of the elders. I have heard of situations where people claim to have had a word of prophecy from the Lord about specific life choices or changes other people are supposed to make. I believe that such comments must still be tested and weighed, but also that we should perhaps question whether this is really the kind of issue God will speak through prophecy about. In the Bible the words of prophets were almost always delivered to the community of God’s people, with a few notable exceptions when God had a particularly important message for an individual. We should expect that words from the Lord will generally have relevance to the gathered body of His people and will be about issues of significant importance. They will also be in keeping with God’s revealed purposes for His people in Scripture. The Old Testament prophets, for example, most often spoke in warning to God’s people, calling them back to faithfulness to the Covenant of God and challenging them to obedience to His Law.

Likewise, we might expect that prophets in the New Testament will speak with a similar challenge to the church to return to faithfulness to the New Covenant and to obedience to God's revealed word.

## C] Healings

- God is the Almighty One, and it is always within His power to heal those who are ill. However, based on the understanding of the present age and the "age to come" discussed above, we must appreciate that God will not and does not promise to heal all illness in the present age. This should be obvious from Scripture (the apostle Paul, for example, was not healed from his illness despite asking in faith three times – see II Corinthians 12:7-10) and from experience (have any of us now known of godly Christians who have not been healed, and have any of us seen a person who has experienced total physical healing in this age – if so, where are they today, since they cannot have died). Even those who are healed by God in the present age will become ill and die again, just as Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow of Nain, not to mention the son of the Shunamite raised by Elisha, finally died. These instances, and all instances of divine healing in this age, are breakthroughs of the age to come into this age. However, that age will not come in fullness until Christ returns to establish His kingdom in fullness. It is only then that our bodies will be redeemed and we will be set free from illness and decay (Romans 8:18-21). Despite this clear argument from scripture and experience, there are still a number of Christian preachers who claim that healing is the right of all believers in the present age because of the atoning death of Christ. They base this claim on verses taken out of context and promises of God given to specific groups at a specific time which are generalised to apply to all of God's people now (for example Exodus 15:26 "I am the LORD who heals you", Isaiah 53:5 "by His wounds we are healed" and Psalm 103:3 "who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases"). This is an example of the use of Scripture to find proof texts for our own ideas, and is dangerous in the extreme. Often these preachers claim that if we have faith we can claim God's promise to heal, and that physical healing is our right. Sometimes they encourage the use of specific forms of words (almost formulae) to activate this healing. This is unbiblical and seriously misguided. We clearly state that this is not our view of healing and that lack of healing does not necessarily imply a lack of faith. I have known personally of healings that were claimed (and which are still being spoken about as healings) where the diagnosis was never confirmed in the first place. We must be extremely careful about this, and not step beyond the position of Scripture. If we do we are playing into the hands of a sceptical world that will rapidly furnish examples of fraudulent "healings" or healings that did not last. When Jesus healed a person the healing was instant and complete. This is rarely true of "healing ministries" today. We can assure people that in Christ they will receive spiritual healing in this age but that this spiritual healing will only be complete and will be combined with complete physical healing in the age to come when they will enjoy their incorruptible new body (see I Corinthians 15:42-44)!
- Having said all of this, we do believe that God can and does heal some illnesses in some believers in this age. Therefore we would encourage believers to pray for healing, always surrendering to God's will, and the elders will happily come to pray with the sick for their healing.
- Interestingly, in I Corinthians 12:9 Paul speaks of "gifts of healing". This is the only case where a gift is listed in the plural rather than singular. Although the BCCC Statement does not comment on this, I believe that this is significant as it highlights the fact that each healing is an individual action of God in His sovereign grace. I do not believe that any individual has been gifted to heal all diseases in every person (even Christ did not do this, although He could), and therefore do not accept the idea that some people have a powerful healing gift and therefore can have travelling healing ministries. If God chooses to heal He can do this without any human agency or through any available Christian. James tells those who are ill to call the elders of their local church to pray with them (5:14), and this should be the first and (I would suggest) only port of call for those seeking divine healing (unless their local church elders will not come). It is stepping beyond Scripture to have mass healing rallies. Furthermore, I am concerned that often in the setting of large scale events where there are high expectations and high emotion, there may be many false claims of miracles. It would appear that most of those people who seem to have healing in that setting are afflicted with problems that have a high psychological element rather than things which are purely physical, and that the relief experienced is often temporary or incomplete. I am not saying that God has never, or never can, in His sovereignty heal in that setting, but only that it is not the most biblical or best way to seek divine healing. There is also the great danger of encouraging dependence or adoration of the "healer".

### 3. Question: is BCCC a Charismatic Church?

If the question is asked whether or not BCCC is a Pentecostal church, the answer is a simple no, since our Statement on the Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts makes it clear that we do not accept the Pentecostal view of the baptism in the Holy Spirit (this is the defining doctrine of Pentecostal churches). However, it is much less simple to answer the question of whether or not BCCC is Charismatic. I would hope that we are Charismatic in the sense that we recognise the importance of spiritual gifting and the work of the Holy Spirit in the church, but I doubt if many people either within or outside the Charismatic movement would consider us to be Charismatic in the generally accepted usage of the word. I want to suggest that, as with any movement in the Church, there is good and bad in the Charismatic movement (I have attempted to explain this above), and we must test everything and reject what is bad while holding on to what is good. We must reject this movement outright, but we cannot accept everything without questioning.

In conclusion to this question, I would say that it is not particularly helpful for BCCC to either take or reject the label "Charismatic". I would prefer to say that BCCC aims to be a body of people who are truly responsive to, filled by, led by and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

### 4. Characteristics of a Spirit-filled church

I do not want to finish this series on the Holy Spirit without speaking briefly about what a Spirit-filled church would look like. In the first part I spoke about Spirit-filled living as individuals, but now my focus is on our life together as a church. Often people measure the degree of Spirit filling in a church by the feeling they have when they are there or the liveliness of the praise ("the Spirit was really moving here today"), but we must take our cue on this from Scripture. The best place to look for a Spirit-filled church is the early chapters of Acts, where the first Christians met and they are specifically described as being filled with the Spirit. This church was marked by at least six key things:

1. *Effective, bold, clear communication of Gospel* (2:11f, 47, 4:31)
2. *Devotion to the apostles' teaching* (2:42) – today this would mean a devotion to Bible teaching and study.
3. *Devotion to the fellowship* – they practiced sacrificial, selfless fellowship and evidenced a desire to meet together and to provide for each other (2:42, 44-46). They didn't need to be reminded to meet together or to support each other, they were fully committed to one another and served each other in love.
4. *Devotion to the Breaking of Bread* (2:42) – they were passionate about obeying the Lord's command to remember Him. This was a church of obedient disciples.
5. *Devotion to prayer* (2:42) – this was a praying church; one which sought God and depended in faith upon Him.
6. *Praise to God* – Christ was glorified and they naturally wanted to praise God in their words and possibly (although not necessarily) in song (2:47, 7:55). This was not something they did only when led to praise, it was a natural response from thankful hearts.

I would humbly suggest that if we wanted to measure whether a church was truly Spirit-filled today we would need to consider each of these areas of church life, rather than basing it simply on feelings or liveliness. I am not opposed to emotion in church or to lively praise (in fact I wish we could improve on this in our own church setting), but am wary of making this a central aim of the church. However, I am equally conscious that our own fellowship needs to improve in every one of the six areas listed above. So, then, to ask a different question, how does a church become Spirit-filled?

Of course, in one sense there is no such thing as a "Spirit-filled church" and we should truthfully speak of a church of people who are filled by the Spirit, but there is one defining activity that is associated in Acts with groups of believers who were filled by the Spirit: prayer. We see this before Acts 2 where the apostles and other disciples were praying in upper room (1:14) and again in Acts 4 (verse 31 reads, "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly"). So, then, if we want to see our church being truly filled by the Spirit we should be committed together to prayer. The prayer the disciples prayed in Acts 4 was not actually for them to be filled by the Spirit, but a prayer for God's honour and for boldness in witness. If we are truly depending on God in faith and crying out to Him then He will move in His power through us.

#### 4. A final plea for unity

The issues I have discussed in this series have often divided Christians. The elders of BCCC felt that it was necessary to define the position of the church on these issues since we had been asked to do so and we knew that people who are seeking a church often want to know these things in advance. However, we respect our brothers and sisters who hold different views on these issues, and we do not see these things as being core doctrinal issues, hence we have not sought to include this Statement in our constitution. We do not ask all members to agree with everything in the Statement, but this Statement will form the basis for our teaching on the topics of the Spirit and spiritual gifts.

Above all, we hope that this Statement will be helpful to the church and will not be a source of division. If you disagree with the elders on these issues we ask you to disagree graciously, and not to break fellowship with us over them, since those things that unite us are so much greater – our common Lord, love and mission. We long to see BCCC being a truly Spirit-filled church, or rather a church filled with people who overflow with the Spirit! May He always have freedom to guide, teach and shape us, and may we continue to progress in our relationship with Him.