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# SIGNS, WONDERS AND DISCIPLESHIP

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In His sovereignty God teaches different people, different things at different times; no one learns everything, and no church will ever learn or function in everything there is to know in the Kingdom. Just as all believers do not have the spiritual *ministry* of an evangelist, and all do not have the spiritual *gift* of discerning of spirits, neither do all churches have the same boundaries to their ministry callings. We do not necessarily specialize in the same things as do other churches.

Obedience and openness to whatever the Lord wants are the only assurances that we will end up knowing what we need to know. We must let Him decide our course of instruction. We cannot approach what God wants to teach us in the same way as college students read a course catalogue, simply picking out the subjects they think they need to know. First, we don't see and we don't even have words for most of the subjects there are to learn; and second, we do not know what sorts of ministry needs we will face as a church. Better to let the wonderful Counselor select our courses for us.

The point is for us to refuse any comparison between us and any other church. Such comparisons will lead only to *pride* (about what we know, that they do not know) or feelings of *inadequacy* (about what we do not know, that they do know). We are in the right class, on schedule, making excellent progress through our whole course study at Kingdom University. Second-guessing ourselves or feeling guilty for courses we have not yet taken will not help anyone.

The *thoughts* (plans, intentions, purposes, workings and makings) of God *are very deep* (*Psalms* 92:5). Foolish people do not realize this and they try to force things. We can rest in the assurance that those plans will unfold and come into the light in time. All we have to do is wait on Him, expectantly.

Openness to new ways and more public manifestation of the miraculous will not be a 3-month study. We will experience the gradual unfolding of His leading and guiding, in increased signs and wonders over at least the next 3 years. We cannot be in a hurry to "*get on with the power stuff*." If we try to rush or cram, we will not learn what we are supposed to learn.

The Spirit of Jesus who performs signs and wonders is the Spirit of Jesus who has been whispering truth in our hearts all these years. Jesus is gentle and humble in His heart. That is the fundamental posture of all that He is. His works, though mighty and miraculous, will touch and promote gentleness and humility of heart in people.

Simply put, in opening to new and different experiences and lessons He wants to teach us, we are *not* opening to a new or different Jesus than the One we have known and loved all these years!

## WITHIN OUR MINISTRY PHILOSOPHY

Just as there is no reason to expect the Lord to fundamentally change the basis of our relationship with Him, there is no reason to anticipate He will change our philosophy of ministry at The Coastlands. It isn't that I believe God must fit "*signs and wonders*" into our preconceived box of what we think ministry ought to look like. Rather, I believe the Lord has already told us what He wants our "*kind*" of ministry to emphasize; any further equipping by Him for our ministry effectiveness will fit within the parameters of the ministry philosophy to which He has called us as a church. We must be open to changes He may want to make in our philosophy of ministry, but I do not believe He is calling us to make a change at this point.

Consequently, we want to welcome miraculous manifestations *within* the context of our existing relationship with Him and *within* our understood philosophy of ministry as a church. Obviously, I am distinguishing between the sovereign *intervention* of God—to do whatever He wants, whenever He wants—and our obedient *participation* with God—aligning ourselves with what we understand He wants. With this in mind, let us look at why "*signs and wonders*" as they are manifesting in other places in our community, differ in emphasis, consequence and focus from what we at The Coastlands feel led to offer our sheep.

Most "*signs and wonders*" are the operations of spiritual gifts that have been given to individuals by the Holy Spirit. As such, the operations and the gifts themselves are subject to the people who have them. People prophesy, for instance, with their own voice, vocabulary and grammar. Apostles, evangelists and mercy showers can all have the gift of prophecy, but each will operate that gift according to their basic ministry calling.

How our congregation operates in the gifts will, likewise, differ from how other churches operate. When and how spiritual gifts are encouraged to operate in a church should be consistent with that church's overall philosophy of ministry. We should, therefore, be aware of how people can easily miss the point of miraculous intervention. Let me outline a few of my concerns:

1. Signs and wonders (spiritual gifts) do not, in themselves, disciple or mature anyone. They are sensational. Any meeting that centers around them will merely breed spectators. They do not cost me anything to operate or to receive. There are none of the

*dying for the sake of others for Jesus* in them for me personally. Disciples have to die daily; disciples grow alone in desert places, not in crowded halls watching miracles. For a spectator, the “*Spirit moving*” means another sign/gift in operation; for the disciple it means being led off into the desert to resist temptation.

2. People preoccupied with the miraculous “*move of the Spirit*” rarely think in terms of all of the things the Spirit wants to do in their lives. The main role of the Spirit is to communicate God’s truth. He leads us in truth, and He convicts us about what is right or wrong in our lives. He brings judgment and discernment to the issues of our heart. Thus, any real “*move of the Spirit*” will lead to increased confession and repentance.
3. Going to a meeting to experience the outwardly miraculous can tempt people to look too much for God moving outside of their hearts rather than inside. God wants to change us inside, so any move of God should work a change in our hearts. Spectators don’t get changed, they just get addicted to seeing the miraculous or to receiving a prophetic word.
4. Rather than stressing a relationship with God, such operations of the gifts can promote an observance of God! God is seen more as power source than as a personal Being. Jesus warns us that it is possible to move in the miraculous without having any relationship with Him.
5. I want to be intimate with Him more than intrigued by His power.
6. When the miraculous becomes our primary goal and diet, we lose our ability to function well in the day-in-and-day-out disciplines of life in Jesus for every believer.
7. Furthermore, when the operation of the gifts is done primarily by the one person leading a meeting, the concept of the “*ministry of every believer*” is not reinforced. I want all of our people to grow in their giftings so that over time we will see a greater number and a greater degree of the miraculous than we will if we rush off to watch another individual person move in their gifting. That is why I expect the ICUs will be the setting God most frequently chooses to confirm His word with “signs and wonders.”
8. The regular, weekly availability of a meeting focused primarily on the operation of spiritual gifts or “*signs and wonders*” breeds an unrealistic and unhealthy expectation of miracles happening every day. Christians can too easily become spiritual Lotto players, banking on striking it big at a public service, rather than concentrating on a life-long determination to follow Jesus.

9. The Book of Acts covers a period of roughly 30 years, not 30 weeks. The New Testament Church knew much about many things, and it did not live in a daily flow of the miraculous. Signs and wonders were mostly a part of evangelism, not discipleship.
10. The *operation of the gifts of the Spirit*, are not, in themselves, acts of obedience in the large sense of the word.