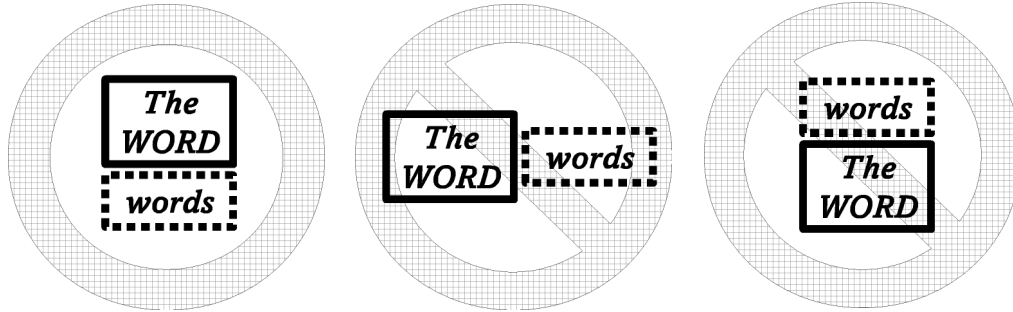


THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

How to handle the “words” He gives today in accordance with “The WORD”



A church's overall attitude toward the work of the Holy Spirit must be biblical and gracious. The questions surrounding His work sometimes become divisive as people deal with each other in the context of the community called the local church. Therefore we must keep in mind some key boundaries.

1 We must remind ourselves to:

- 1.1 Resist confusing the gifts of the Spirit and the offices of the church. Having a certain gift does not immediately make someone qualified to be a leader. The requirements given in the Bible, other than “able to teach,” are character and maturity based (see 1 Tim. 3:1-13 & Titus 1:5-9).
- 1.2 Understand the difference between commonly held responsibilities and spiritual giftedness in those areas (e.g. all must be involved in evangelism but some are gifted evangelists). This will help us not pressure people to “act” gifted but also not allow us to shirk our responsibilities.

2 We must avoid division by:

- 2.1 Remembering to allow for a measure of comfort that prevents individuals from being railroaded into something that they are not ready for. We must avoid any sense of spiritual manipulation.
- 2.2 Avoiding the sense of communicating that some “have arrived.” There is always more for all to receive.
- 2.3 Fostering the Judgment of Charity regarding each others’ motives. Understanding that many acts of immaturity come from a personal sense of insecurity (often a feeling of needing to have everyone value our gift(s) or our programs, projects, and experiences).
- 2.4 Lifting up the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26) as the real evidence of spiritual health, so that the gifts of the Spirit, by themselves, are not seen as tokens of maturity.
- 2.5 Being careful in our estimation of certain gifts, not running down others’ gifts or experiences and not patting ourselves on the back for ours. We must not allow there to be a “have’s and have-nots” mentality.
- 2.6 Avoiding statements such as, “If we were a ‘really spiritual’ church, we would . . .”

Specifically, the gifts of words often create special challenges in the local church. These include New Testament prophecies, speaking and interpreting tongues, and words of wisdom and knowledge and the like. Though there is debate on the exact parameters for the definitions of these terms, they can helpfully be grouped under the heading “words” This is in contrast to the “WORD,” which refers to the inspired Scriptures of the Bible. We must always keep **The WORD** over any words (see the illustration above).

As those who believe the Bible we must learn to walk the “knife edge” of the mountain's ridge of truth, without falling into the valley on each side. We are biblically told to avoid these two “valleys” and when we apply the principles below we can be confident that will will not slide down the slippery slope of extremism on either side. The guidelines below seek to live out the balance of the following texts:

- We are told to NOT DESPISE prophetic utterances but to TEST EVERYTHING (1 Thess. 5:19-21).
- We are told to NOT FORBID speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:39-40).
- We are told to KEEP ORDER in the gatherings and WEIGH CAREFULLY any prophetic words given (1 Cor. 14:29 & context).

Some of the common sense practices & guidelines that will keep us on the “knife edge:”

- We must not confuse Old Testament prophecy (***The WORD***) with New Testament prophecy (***words***). In the OT, a prophet's words had authority. Those whose words did not come true were not from God and were to be stoned to death (see Deut. 18:21-22). But even if there was a sign or wonder that came to pass, and they advocated going after other gods, they were to be put to death (see Deut. 13:1-5). In the NT, it seems that the revelation given by God (as it is called in 1 Cor. 14:30) is reported in the prophet's own, merely human, words. These words were not considered to be inspired. They were to be weighed, not merely obeyed.

- We should resist throwing harsh judgments at people in the valleys.
 - The two valleys can be thought of in terms of people's temperaments and relational preferences. Understanding ourselves and others can help us be more gentle and gracious.
 - ◆ People in the valley of the “hard side” tend to value clear objectivity. They do not want to be misled by deceptive feelings but want to stay faithful with the “hard facts.”
 - ◆ People in the valley of the “soft side” tend to value intimate subjectivity. They do not want to have a cold, hard relationship with God but want a “soft” closeness they can feel.
 - All of us must learn to connect both mind and spirit to God. We must not despise the rational nor the experiential, since God wants us to love Him with our whole being and worship Him in spirit and in truth.
 - We must not allow the formation of a chasm between the “ordinary” workings of the Spirit and the more “extraordinary.” God is the giver of ALL good gifts.

- We must avoid implying that ***words*** are equal to (or over) ***The WORD*** by . . .
 - Not using, “Thus says the Lord,” and similar phrases that would imply an authority that ***words*** do not have.
 - Not suggesting that ***words*** are more important than ***The WORD*** by the relative time given to responding to them, as compared to the Bible itself.
 - Giving context to ***words*** by verbally reinforcing your commitment to ***The WORD***.
 - Not exegeting ***words*** and thereby suggest that they are verbally inspired.
 - Not writing down and publishing ***words*** which tend to change them in people's minds from being informative to being seen as carrying a sense of authority, thereby even encouraging people to exegete them.
 - Not treating people's response to ***words*** as issues of sin, except where the ***words*** are clearly restatements of ***The WORD***.

- While avoiding equating ***words*** with ***The WORD***, we must not practically despise them either.
 - We must not discount the value of ***words*** even when they are given fallibly or with some error in them. If there is 5% truth in what they say, then we are 100% accountable to respond to that portion.
 - We must bear up with one another in love as we remain open to ***words***. Don't require ***The WORD*** quality for ***words***.

- Recognize that church health requires that we ALL use our gifts and that we make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (based on 1 Corinthians 14).
 - To do this we must protect both of the values of participation and order.
 - We must maintain the Biblical guidelines of limiting tongues or prophecies to 2 or 3, in turn. This means preventing some from “taking over” an open sharing time.
 - We must make sure that things that are shared are understandable and are stated in a way that edifies. Even when the secrets of hearts are exposed, it must be done in a way that people sense God is at work and that they are not just being manipulated.
 - The elders should take responsibility to guide the process of “weighing” what has been said so that the body can be ready to receive some of the different “verbal” gifts. The preferred practice is to bring what you believe to be ***words*** from the Lord to an elder before it is presented to the larger body. When this is not possible, it is important to be humble in receiving feedback (the “weighing”) on the ***words*** shared.

- Gerhard T. deBock, 2010