

### Maplewood Leadership's Approach to "Sign Gifts"

Dear ones of Maplewood Church – the many who call Maplewood Church their home . . . the Elders write to you to clarify some issues on which we do not feel we have spoken clearly. We do so in the utmost humility and love for all of our Maplewood Family.

Philippians, more than any other single book, stresses the essential and foundational necessity of unity in the Church. At the basis of unity of spirit, the Holy Spirit shows that there must be humility and caring for the wellbeing and joy of others (Phil. 2:1-4). Opposed to unity of spirit is self-centeredness and selfishness and seeking one's own way (Phil. 2:21).

Before God, your Elders seek to hold to our convictions in humility, and we recognize that others may hold a contrary position. This need not diminish our love for one another. It must not, for the Lord Jesus prayed in His "High Priestly Prayer" of John 17 that His Church would be one, even as the Father and the Son are one. He prayed knowing that there would be differences of opinion among His people. The Unity of the Body of Christ is precious to the Lord, and He effected that unity by his death for the Church and by our union with Him in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), a ministry of the Spirit to every believer, at salvation, through faith in the person and work of Jesus. We are one with every believer who confesses the Lord Jesus, having faith in Him and in His finished work on the Cross.

There are doctrinal issues that are called "cardinal" doctrines – that is, they are essential to an orthodox or scriptural system of belief. Cardinal doctrines are issues like the Deity of Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity, the Inspiration and Authority of the Bible, Justification by Grace through Faith alone. Issues like these separate various Churches (denominations) from groups referred to as Cults – those groups denying one or more of these essential doctrines.

But there are many other doctrines and practices that account for the differences in one local church and another. These involve teachings each group seeks to base on the Scriptures, but they are teachings over which godly Christians differ. They are sometimes referred to as "non-essentials." Examples are the mode of baptism, the understanding of election and predestination, the security of the believer, and positions on the continuance or cessation of the "sign gifts" such as speaking in tongues, gifts of healing, prophecy, apostleship, and a few others over which there is difference of opinion and understanding. The issue is not whether a Christian can hold a contrary position on these topics. Christians *do* hold differing opinions, but they must hold these differences in love.

Satan seeks to divide, and there are numerous issues over which the people of God divide. Unity in a local church is fragile, and it is maintained as God's people walk with Him and seek the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to produce the Fruit of the Spirit in them. When the Spirit is at work, He produces love for one another (Gal. 5:22-23). With all the differences of opinion represented at Maplewood Church Satan would have us focus on our differences. Grumbling and disputing detract from the call of the Lord upon us to shine with the light of the Gospel in a dark culture (Phil. 2:14-16). Our Lord wants us to focus on our commonality—the Great Commission and the Great Commandment (Matt. 28:18-20 and John 13:34-35).

For once and for always, as pleasing to the Lord of the Church—with God's help, Maplewood Church will prosper as it humbly and lovingly "keeps the main thing the main thing."

The Elders feel a burden to lead the flock of Maplewood Church in a spirit of prayer and of dependence on the Lord. We seek to do so in a spirit of humility since we do not have all wisdom or understanding of Scripture. We urge upon our church family that same spirit of humility and love, gentleness and meekness, as we seek, together, to walk with the Lord in a manner pleasing to Him.

The Elders feel that it would be helpful further to seek to clarify our approach to the issue of the Gifts of the Spirit that are sometimes referred to as "Sign Gifts" – that is, gifts that provided indisputable proof from God that the message of the Apostles was the Word of God (Heb. 2:1-4). In addition to this, we want to underline our unified belief in a series of affirmations.

- God can do anything with anyone, anytime He desires.
- The Holy Spirit routinely intervenes in our lives bringing discernment, thoughts, insights, prompting ways and occasions to minister.
- God heals in answer to prayer. He does so miraculously and immediately as He chooses, and we believe He also heals through medical means daily and regularly in our church family.
- No one today can speak absolutely and authoritatively for God. In Old Testament times the Prophets spoke and wrote the Word of God, and in the New Testament, the Apostles and Prophets did as well. To complete and finalize His Word for all ages He led the Apostles and their company in the writing of the inspired Word of God.

To preserve the unity of spirit within the fellowship at Maplewood Church we feel we must make clear the position of the teaching of Maplewood Church on this issue. We believe that certain gifts, often referred to as "sign gifts," were given by God to establish His Church (Eph. 2:20) and to authenticate (2 Cor. 12:12) the written message of the Apostles as the Revelation (the Scriptures) which we call the New Testament.

### The Position of Maplewood Church Regarding the "Sign Gifts"

#### Definitions of these gifts:

Tongues - The ability to speak a language known to the hearer that is unknown to the speaker (Acts 2:1-11; 1 Cor. 12. Both Paul and Luke use the same terms for this phenomenon).

Healing - The ability, through touch or vocal command, to cause another person to be immediately and sustainably healed of a physical or emotional illness or demonic influence. This gift is not to be confused with the merciful and gracious acts of a loving God in answer to the prayers of Christians (Luke 8:47; Acts 5:12; James 5:14-15).

Prophecy - The ability to communicate, without error, an event or fact which could not previously have been known to the prophet by natural means. (Acts 11:28-29; Deut. 18:20-22). This gift is not to be confused with the gifts of teaching or discernment or with God revealing His will or an insight to believers through prayer or the scriptures.

**Purpose of the gifts:** A sign to unbelievers that validates the message of God which always accompanied the exercise of the gifts in the scriptures (1 Cor. 14:22; Heb. 2:1-4).

### Regulation of the gifts:

Tongues - Must have an interpreter present if done in the church (1 Cor. 14:27-28).

Must be a known language and not an ecstatic utterance (Acts 2:1-11). The New Testament gift of Tongues (or "languages") are not to be forbidden, which points to the "more excellent way" of love in chapter 13 and the previously mentioned regulations of chapter 14. (1 Cor. 14:39-40; 1 Cor. 12:31)

Healing - The healing must be immediate and sustained as a result of the command or touch of the one with the gift.

Prophecy - Must concur with the canon of scripture. Must be without error (Deut. 18:20-22).

All - Must be a sign to an unbeliever of the validity of the accompanying message of God, and does not edify or draw attention to the one with the gift.

Are not practiced by all Christians. (1 Cor. 12:29-30)

### Importance of the gifts:

- Not a component of the gospel, salvation, or sanctification.
- Not as important as love (1 Cor. 12:31).
- Not as important as unity in the body of Christ (John 17; Phil. 2:1-16).

### Evidence for the presence of the gifts in the local church:

Our leadership has never seen credible evidence of the gifts being practiced as described in the scriptures.

While the leaders of Maplewood Church have made a careful study of the scriptures to arrive at this position, we recognize that other godly men and women will have other positions. Therefore, we will practice grace and love to those who have beliefs that differ. Each person must make a careful study of the scriptures to decide what he or she believes.

For the purpose of preserving unity and order as we worship, grow, and serve together, our only requirement is that no one teach, practice, or otherwise promote the practice of the sign gifts at Maplewood Church, and that we respect and love one another in our differences over these non-essentials.

As Elders of Maplewood Church, we want to express our sincerest love and appreciation for other believers who hold differing positions, and we want to hold to our doctrinal beliefs in charity toward those who differ with us. We appreciate the expression of Rupertus Meldeniis.

"In essentials, unity; in doubtful things, liberty; in all things, charity."

The Elders of Maplewood Church October of 2018