

a study of the *Holy Spirit*

Special Study: Do Spiritual Gifts Exist Today?

1. This study is important to those who are seeking to follow the Will of God.
 - a. ☞ Many are confused about speaking in tongues.
 - b. ☞ Many claim that in order for one to be saved s/he MUST demonstrate that they do in fact possess at least one of the spiritual gifts (often "tongues").
 - c. ☞ However the Bible indicates that Christians possessed the spiritual gifts in the first century for the purpose of maturing the church and revealing the will of God. ☞ The Bible is clear in stating that these gifts were designed to be temporary – they were never intended to last indefinitely!
2. Some introductory observations:
 - a. ☞ It is an established fact that miracles (supernatural events) were evident in the first century.
 - b. Nine spiritual gifts were given to the church by the Holy Spirit (i.e. wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues).
 - 1) Such powers were necessary in the early church, otherwise the proclaimers of the gospel message could not have convinced unbelievers of the genuineness of their doctrine.
 - 2) These "signs" were miraculous acts performed so that those who heard would know that the message was from God.
 - 3) ☞ Since the miracles of the New Testament period were to confirm the Word (Mark 16:20), for one to insist that miracles are needed today is a serious indictment of the Word of God – an allegation that it is not sufficient to produce faith (John 20:30, 31; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17).
 - c. In this paper we do not question the sincerity or honesty of anyone. We only seek to examine the issue and come to a simple and consistent understanding of it.
3. Before we can establish anything we must decide upon ☞ the standard that we will use – ☞ How are we to follow God today? ☞ How is God to communicate with man today so that man can know what God desires him to do?

- a. 📖 Emotional experiences are not a suitable standard.
 - 1) Emotional feelings are unstable (flighty and whimsical).
 - 2) Feelings do not always record actual facts. You may feel like a millionaire but you had better have the "cold cash" to support that feeling before you begin spending like a millionaire!
 - 3) It is obvious that we need something better to anchor our faith in than unstable feelings.
 - b. 📖 The Bible is the only stable standard upon which we can gain the proper instructions in order to follow God (Luke 16:17).
 - 1) 📖 1 John 5:13 – Knowledge, not feelings, is what assures us of our salvation. And this is knowledge in God's Gospel!
 - 2) 📖 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 – We are "called" by God THROUGH the Gospel. This is conclusive that God's call is not some mystical and emotional experience!
 - 3) 📖 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Psalms 19:7; James 1:25.
 - c. Concluding thoughts:
 - 1) 📖 It is amazing how many will guide their religious faith in a totally different manner than they do in other actions—WHO is willing to allow feelings and emotions rule EVERY aspect of life? Yet far too many do that in their religious lives! 📖 They are not consistent in behavior.
 - 2) 📖 God has given us a 📖 sound, logical, objective standard by which to direct our religious practices. This 📖 standard is easy to read, simple to understand, and complete in every needed detail (Ephesians 3:1-6; 2 Peter 1:3).
 - 3) We need to follow the Bible and not our feelings (emotions)!
4. A discussion on the purposes of spiritual gifts.
- a. This is a crucial point in our present study.
 - 1) 📖 The reason why spiritual gifts were given is because they were necessary for members of the church to function in a proper manner (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Romans 12:3-8).
 - 2) 📖 The crucial question rests on whether or not this overall purpose has been filled. 📖 If the purposes have *not* been filled then there still exist needs for these spiritual gifts. However, IF all the purposes have been filled then there remains no logical

- reason why these gifts should remain. ☞ If the gifts have completed their purposes then it logically follows that they were only temporary and have consequently vanished.
- 3) Again let it be stated that I am not denying that miraculous gifts existed in the first century. It is understood that God did perform miracles in the first century and that the spiritual gifts were used to accomplish supernatural events.
- b. ☞ The purpose of spiritual gifts discussed.
- 1) To **CONFIRM** the word of God (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3).
 - 2) To **REVEAL** completely the will of God (John 14:26).
 - 3) As a **SIGN** of an Apostle (2 Corinthians 12:12).
 - 4) To **ASSURE** that the unity of "THE FAITH" in Christ be achieved (Ephesians 4:11-13).
 - 5) To **ENABLE** believers to be mature spiritually (Ephesians 4:11-13).
- c. ☞ A discussion of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 is necessary so that we will gain the proper understanding of God's plans regarding spiritual gifts.
- 1) Paul is stating a principle. In essence he is saying: "When the purpose for which something has been designed is accomplished, then that thing is no longer needed and will be done away."
 - 2) ☞ How does this principle generally apply? Whenever a person is sick the doctor will prescribe medication to counter the illness. When the illness has been cured the medication ceases.
 - 3) How does this principle apply to spiritual gifts? ☞ If all the above purposes have been fulfilled, it then follows that miraculous gifts are *not needed today*.
- d. ☞ An examination to see if ALL the purposes have been accomplished.
- 1) ☞ Has God's Word been confirmed (Hebrews 2:3-4; Jude 3)? ☞ YES! It has been "once for all delivered"!
 - 2) ☞ Has God's complete will been revealed (2 Peter 1:3)? ☞ YES! "All" has been given!
 - 3) ☞ Do we need Apostles today? ☞ NO! Their function is no longer needed and no one today qualifies as an Apostle. (See Acts 1:15-20 for the qualifications of Apostles)

- 4) 🙏 Has the unity of THE FAITH been achieved (Jude 3; Ephesians 4:5)? 🙏 YES! There can be "oneness" in religious matters if all follow only God's Word!
- 5) 🙏 Do believers need spiritual gifts today in order to be mature spiritually (1 John 2:5; Hebrews 5:11-14; Ephesians 4:15)? 🙏 NO! Believers need to study only God's Word (the Bible)!
- 6) 🙏 Do we need spiritual gifts today for any of the reasons they were given in the first century? 🙏 NO!

e. Concluding thoughts on this point.

- 1) 🙏 All of the purposes for spiritual gifts have been accomplished. 🙏 We do not need miraculous gifts today to accomplish what has already been accomplished.
- 2) Since the New Testament was not written and since there were few apostles and prophets around, God revealed Himself and His Truth through the miraculous gifts. 🙏 Once the New Testament was completed and circulated, the purposes of these gifts were removed.
- 3) 🙏 The fact that spiritual gifts were to be temporary is illustrated further by Scripture. God indeed planned for spiritual gifts to cease (See 1 Corinthians 13:8-10; James 1:25; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Psalm 19:7).
- 4) 🙏 There is Scriptural evidence that the use of miraculous gifts began to disappear even during the first century.

Note the following outline of Bible facts arranged in chronological order:

- a) James 5:14-15 – Written about 60 A.D. healing was practiced.
- b) 1 Timothy 5:23 – Written about 64 A.D. Timothy was sick. WHY was he not healed by some Christian possessing gifts?
- c) 2 Timothy 4:20 – Written about 65 A.D. Trophimus was left by Paul sick. WHY was he not healed?
- d) 🙏 There is NO RECORD of any miracles being performed (healings, tongues, etc.) following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.
- e) 🙏 The books of the New Testament written about 70 A.D. (including 1,2,3 John written about 90 A.D., and Revelation written about 96 A.D.) do not record any miracle being performed—EXCEPT for the spirits of demons working "signs" in Revelation 16:14!

It seems clear that miracles had become limited, or even ceased, during the latter part of the first century.

We may conclude that ☞ after the death of the last apostle and the death of the last person upon whom an apostle had laid his hands, there has never been another miracle performed.

- 5) ☞ The question is not whether God is ABLE to send miraculous gifts—He is able. The ☞ question is whether or not it is God's purpose and plans to use miraculous gifts today.
 - a) 2 Corinthians 5:7 – We are to walk by faith and faith comes through the Word of God (Romans 10:17). We do not need miraculous gifts to direct us (1 John 5:13).
 - b) ☞ It is consistent with Scripture, and common sense, to understand that miraculous spiritual gifts were designed to be temporary, to be used by the early church until the "perfect" New Testament could be supplied.

5. In order to demonstrate that spiritual gifts ceased whenever the New Testament was complete or the early church had reached an appropriate point of maturity at the end of the apostolic era, note the following points.
 - A. ☞ The blanket statement that "tongues shall cease" (1 Corinthians 13:8) points to the fact that God intended them to cease.
 1. There is no historical fact that demonstrates that gifts were exercised in the second century.
 2. ☞ If spiritual gifts were intended to be permanent then they would have to occur in EVERY generation of EVERY century up to the present!
 3. Scripture states that when gifts cease they will cease permanently – not to be resumed in several centuries!
 - B. ☞ "That which is perfect" refers to the New Testament that was completed in the latter part of the first century and was the climax of the maturing of the church.
 1. "TO TELEION"—Literally perfection, completeness, or maturity. This refers to a system of maturity.
 2. Whenever God's revealed Will was complete the spiritual gifts would cease.
 3. "TELEION" fits the concept of progressive revelation in the New Testament (John 14:25-26; 16:12-13; Colossians 1:25) that ended with the book of Revelation being written.

4. "TELEION" is used in James 1:25.
 5. "TELEION" is used of the church in Ephesians 4:13 when Paul discussed gifts of leaders given for the express purpose of developing the church into maturity.
 6. NOTE: "TELEION" ("that which is perfect") is never used in the New Testament to refer to the second coming, the millennium, the eternal state, or Jesus Christ. Also since "TELEION" is set in contrast to "in part" it must refer to the culmination of a process!
- C. 📖 Paul's two illustrations (1 Corinthians 13:11-12) serve as the third point that demonstrates that spiritual gifts ceased when the New Testament was complete.
1. 📖 Progressive development from infancy to maturity is a good illustration for the development of the church—Paul agrees that infancy included spiritual gifts but maturity does not. Maturity renders the spiritual gifts inoperative!
 2. The mirror represents imperfect knowledge and "face to face" stands for the complete knowledge.
 - a. By looking into a partial revelation man received a partial picture.
 - b. But by looking into a complete revelation man could see himself exactly as God saw him. In the complete New Testament man can see God's purposes completely revealed and thus understand (See Ephesians 3:1-6).
- D. 📖 In books written after 1 Corinthians, dealing with problems in the church, there is NO mention of tongue speaking.
1. 📖 Elders and Deacons are not required to have spiritual gifts (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). Is it not strange that if these were to be permanent, God would overlook requiring the church's leaders to possess them?
 2. 📖 The churches in Revelation were rebuked for various things, but there is no mention at all of spiritual gifts.
 3. We need to respect the Scripture's silence in regard to these things and not force our interpretations!
- E. The 📖 contemporary confusion indicates their temporary nature.
1. If the miraculous spiritual gifts were to be permanent God would have given us permanent instructions regarding them. In the present time there are numerous definitions and regulations ALL supposedly given by God but which contradicts one another!

2. In view of the fact that they disappeared so speedily and so completely, we must regard them as the gift of God for the church's infancy.
 3. Even those who claim to possess miraculous spiritual gifts today cannot agree to the exact nature, reception, and use of the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation. Would God permit any such misunderstanding and chaos?
- F. Some concluding thoughts on this point.
1. Whenever the "perfect" (TELEION) has come, the partial "shall be done away," never to be resumed.
 - a. The Bible is the "perfect" (TELEION). It is complete, and those who follow it are complete and mature (Psalm 19:7; 2 Timothy 3:16ff).
 - b. Therefore, the partial (miraculous spiritual gifts) have been done away.
 2. ☞ When one considers the logical consequences of failing to regard the Bible as God's complete, revealed Will, it should become obvious that spiritual gifts have ceased.
 - a. If one miraculous gift continues then all miraculous gifts exist. There is no logical reason for just one gift to continue.
 - b. ☞ If all spiritual gifts continue then inspiration continues, and we have inspired individuals walking around today.
 - c. ☞ If inspiration continues today, then the New Testament IS NOT "perfect"—it is not God's final revelation.
 - d. ☞ If the New Testament is not God's final revelation, it is not "perfect" or complete, then how do we know what is God's will for man today? We are in a hopeless condition having to rely upon a subjective standard of feelings or emotions.
6. ☞ Do we limit God's power by saying that He does not work miracles today?
- A. This question is often asked in response to the facts presented above. It is a question asked in honesty and sincerity. Yet this question easily answers itself.
 - B. The argument stated – "God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Therefore His gifts must be available today (Mal 3:10). The position which claims that miraculous spiritual gifts have ceased is opposed to the sovereign will of God who can do today what He did in the past."
 - C. Reply to this argument.

1. ☞ First we are not denying God the power to perform miracles today. We are saying that ☞ God has chosen not to work with man in this manner!
 2. To ☞ say that God must work today as He has in the past is to limit God!
 - a. ☞ God chose not to work with Israel as He did with Abraham. As God worked with Israel He did so through Moses, not through the family heads. God chose to work in a different way.
 - b. ☞ Christ chose to send His disciples only to the Jews (Matthew 10:6). Later He chose to send them into the entire world. Should Christ have only sent His disciples to the Jews because that is what He did first?
 - c. ☞ Christians worshiped in the Temple (Acts 2:46; 3:1). Does this mean that we have to worship in a Jewish temple?
 - d. ☞ God chose to use the Apostles to direct the affairs of the early church. Does this mean that is the only method God has chosen by which His church is to be directed today? Is it not possible for God to choose another way?
 3. ☞ Certain things occurred in the early years of the church's existence that do not today. This was because they were never intended to become a permanent pattern.
 4. The ☞ characters of God and Christ are the same eternally (Hebrews 13:8), but this does not mean that their program for dealing with man has, or must, remain the same. In dealing with man, ☞ God and Christ do not change – their program does!
 5. ☞ God is immutable, but He is not immobile. ☞ It is not a question as to whether God CAN give the gift of tongues today; He still has the power. ☞ The question is whether it is God's purpose to continue the same phenomena that the apostolic church experienced. The claim that God must do today what He did then in response to the prayers of Christians is begging the question. ☞ The believer puts himself into the position of telling God what He ought to do.
- D. Concluding thoughts on this point.
1. ☞ We do not seek to deny God any power, but we do seek to give Him the total sovereignty which is His—to choose His own way to work with man as He designs.
 2. God has never worked with man in exactly the same manner. ☞ We need to be careful that we are following and responding to God in the program that He expects us to follow.
7. How can we explain the actual cases in existence today of individuals who practice "spiritual gifts"? Although no definite answer can be given there are three possibilities that do answer this question.

- A. 📖 There is a possibility of Satan. There is a very good possibility that such "gifts" today are actual manifestations, but they find their origin in the devices of Satan that ensnare sincere people.
1. Scriptures that indicate this possibility –
 - a. Matthew 7:21-23—These were able to perform many mighty works. Yet they were called "evil ones" by Jesus Christ!
 - b. Exodus 7:10-8:7—The magicians in Egypt were able to reproduce the divine miracles of Moses.
 - c. 2 Thessalonians 2:9—Those following Satan, either knowingly or ignorantly, are able to work with all power, and signs, and lying wonders. Yet this power comes from Satan and not Jesus Christ.
 - d. Revelation 16:14—Here the spirits of Satan are able to work signs to deceive and delude.
 2. Apparently professing Christians can do great things, even bring glory to Christ, but yet still do it in the power of Satan. This is why an experience or miracle, no matter how great, cannot be appealed to as the sole judge of the source of the event.
- B. 📖 The possibility that it is psychological. One noted psychiatrist said: "Obviously nothing can come out of each individual brain that was not once previously stored there. Materials stored may be altered, fragmented, confused, distorted but cannot be humanly created...Even if that person was not conscious he or she had heard those words, or that a memory engram was being recorded, these had nevertheless been previously deposited there."
- C. 📖 The possibility that it is artificial.
1. Sincere persons may have desired an experience but did not receive it. In an intense emotional atmosphere one may try to do what others are doing, or what he is told to do.
 2. There may be those who sincerely feel that if they do not share in this experience they will be outcasts. So in order to avoid the rejection they simply imitate others.
 3. There are others who know that speaking in tongues is a status symbol in a congregation and pretend to have the experience to gain acceptance and praise.
- D. Concluding observations on this point.
1. Of these three possibilities the first presents the greatest threat—turning one's mind and body over to Satan's control (2 Corinthians 11:14).

2. ☞ The present day manifestations of spiritual gifts are not in harmony with the written Word of God and can be explained in one of the three points above.

8. Conclusion

1. We have evaluated the topic of spiritual gifts in light of the teachings of the New Testament. The following are noted:
 - a. There is ☞ no historical continuity of the spiritual gifts from the first century to the present era.
 - b. One cannot rely upon an experience for the proof of this activity (present day miracles, tongues, etc.). Those who contend for modern day manifestations of spiritual gifts do so by placing experiences over the Word of God. "A religious experience in itself can never be the final test of its genuineness. The Bible must forever be the basis of faith and practice...The experience, itself, cannot be the test of its source."
 - c. The temporary nature of spiritual gifts was demonstrated by showing that the purposes of these gifts has been fulfilled and that God had planned for these gifts to cease.
 - d. ☞ The entire question is summed up: It is not whether God CAN give these spiritual gifts today, BUT whether God has purposed to do so.
2. ☞ In order to be consistent with the Bible and with a common sense interpretation of the texts, one is forced to see the temporary nature of gifts and that the Bible today is complete and provides all that we need.
3. ☞ "The purpose of the gifts of the Holy Spirit was to fill the vacuum that would occur between the establishment of the church and the ultimate maturity of the church ... Since the New Testament was not written and since there were few apostles and prophets around, God revealed Himself and His truths through these gifts. Once the New Testament was complete and circulated, the need and the purpose of these gifts were removed" (Robert G. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement*, Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., Co., 1967, 118).