

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

by Lance Shilton

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THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit."
1 Cor. 12:6.

Any Christian worth his salt wants to go on in the Christian life. He is most anxious to increase in holiness, to become more effective in service, and daily to become more conformed to the will of God. He realises his weakness and longs for new strength. He is conscious of constant failure and looks for victory. He acknowledges his ignorance of spiritual truth, and searches the Scriptures for more knowledge. He may easily turn to a passage like 1 Corinthians Chapter 12, read with interest what the Apostle Paul had to say to these early Christians, and apply it to himself. This earnest, sincere, dedicated Christian desires for himself the gifts of the Spirit mentioned there:

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills." (1 Cor. 12:4-11. RSV)

First, let us realise that there is a clear distinction between the gift of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost, and is given to every member of the Body of Christ without distinction. This gift is absolute and forever.

The gifts of the Spirit are special and bestowed personally and may become ineffective through disuse.

We should, therefore, discriminate between the gift and the gifts; between the operator and the operation.

2. THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Next, let us discriminate between the fruit and the gifts of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is set out in 9 qualities in Gal. 5:22,23 - "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." This fruit is not an addition to the tree from outside but is produced from within the tree. This fruit should be common to all Christians. It is the outworking of the Holy Spirit from within the believer. Fruit is mentioned in the singular because it is the total product of the whole man.

The gifts of the Spirit are also 9 in number, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10: - "utterance of wisdom, utterance of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues."

Gifts may be imparted from without. They are special and are distributed as the Spirit wills, (Verse 11) "who apportions to each one individually as He wills."

It is important to see the distinction between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. Paul mentioned that the Corinthian Christians came behind in no gift, and yet it is evident that they were far behind in the fruit of the Spirit. Spiritual fruit affords greater evidence of spirituality than the possession of spiritual gifts. The evil one can imitate the gifts of the Spirit but not the fruit of the Spirit.

Now let us distinguish between signs and gifts. In the New Testament signs are not gifts, though gifts may be signs; signs were temporarily used, but gifts are permanently available. In Mark 16:15 the final commission of Christ before His ascension is recorded, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; and he that disbelieveth shall be condemned. And these signs shall accompany them that have believed; in my name they shall cast out demons, they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall in no wise hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover."

With the exception of the reference to drinking deadly things,

these signs are known to have literally accompanied the message:

- Demons were cast out Acts 16:18; 19:12.
- Tongues were spoken Acts 10:46; 19: 6.
- Serpents were taken up Acts 28: 3-6.
- The sick were healed Acts 5: 15, 16; 19: 11, 12.

Graham Scroggie comments, "We conclude, therefore, that the miracles of the Apostolic age, which served during that period as signs, gradually ceased to be displayed, the need for them having been superseded; and that in the present age sensuous evidences have given place to spiritual evidences".

Signs and wonders were frequent only when God was saying a new thing or making a new approach to man. When God first spoke through Moses He did so with signs and wonders, but after Israel's redemption from Egypt into Canaan both the Word of the Lord and His wonders became scarce once again (1 Samuel 3:1).

Christ told His disciples before His death that His disciples were to wait for Him in Galilee. That command was to them then, not to us today. After His resurrection He told them that they were to remain in Jerusalem until they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. That command was to them, not to us. He told them that through their preaching those who believed would speak in tongues. This was literally fulfilled in their converts. On each of the three occasions in the Acts where we are told specifically that believers spoke in tongues, the sign immediately followed the receiving of the Holy Spirit. The waiting in Galilee, the Pentecost experience of the Holy Spirit, and the sign of tongues, were unique directions to the early disciples. Christians are in a different position today. Christ has risen from the dead. The Holy Spirit has already come. The signs of that special time are no longer necessary.

Now let us examine in more detail the gifts of the Spirit. Oswald Sanders says, "Two words combine to give us the teaching on the gifts of the Spirit. They are 'pneumatika' (1 Cor. 12:1), 'something of or from the Spirit', and 'charismata' (1 Cor. 12:4), signifying 'gifts of grace' 'unearned favours'. The two words together signify extraordinary powers and endowments of the Holy Spirit bestowed by Him upon believers as equipment for Christian service and for the edification of the Church. They

4. THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

are listed in four passages - Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 28-30; Ephesians 4:7-12.

They are bestowed for the edification of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7) and not for the self-glory of the recipient. They are available not so much for ministry to one's own soul, but for one's ministry to others, Ephesians 4:12, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ." The early Christians were not left unaccredited who, for the most part, were ignorant and unlearned men for God bore "them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit" (Hebrews 2:4). Once the Canon of the New Testament Scriptures had been established there was no longer necessity for the miraculous gifts, but, of course, the Sovereign Spirit could choose to use them today.

No one person has any monopoly of these gifts, and they are not imparted to all, for the Spirit divides to every man severally as He wills.

The Apostle Paul asks, "Are all Apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?"

At the beginning of Chapter 12 (1 Corinthians), wisdom, knowledge and faith head the list, and tongues and interpretation of tongues are at the end, so at the conclusion of the Chapter tongues and their interpretation appear at the end of another listing. The gift of tongues even in those early days was of lesser importance.

From this, and the discussion in Chapter 14, we learn that in the Corinthian Church some were extolling and exploiting these last gifts to the depreciation of those which were superior.

Some today fail to heed the warning of Scriptures and emphasise this gift so that it receives undue prominence. This is seen particularly in what has become known as "glossolalia".

Support for these views is claimed from the passage in Acts Chapter 2 when on the Day of Pentecost believers spoke in other tongues, "as the Spirit gave ~~them~~ utterance" (Acts 2:4).

There was good reason for this unusual manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit at that particular time in the history of the Christian Church and to these special people. Pentecost marked a new phase in God's approach to man. Just as God the Son in the Person of Jesus Christ was made manifest in the flesh through the miraculous virgin birth, so, too, God the Holy Spirit was made manifest in a personal, powerful way through the miraculous signs of wind, fire and tongues. It marked a significant new approach from God to man. That was the historical reason.

There was also a good local reason for this speaking in tongues. When the crowd heard about the experience of the disciples they were amazed and said to each other, "Look here, aren't all these who speak Galileans? How is it then that we hear them speak in our own native tongues?" (Verses 9-11). That was the local reason.

Naturally we are now led to ask, I can see an historical reason and I can see a local reason, but is there also a lasting spiritual reason? Should we as Christian believers be speaking in tongues today? Is this an essential sign for us of the fulness of the Holy Spirit? We have to recognise the fact that some Christians have always placed great emphasis upon this gift. More recently, some clergy and lay people of major denominations in other parts of the world have claimed this experience of 'glossolalia'. I believe that on the notice board of one Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States it has the words "Glossolalia spoken here." I was speaking to an Anglican clergyman of the Diocese of Chelmsford in England and he claimed that he had been speaking in tongues in his private devotions for many years.

Of course, it would be out of order to deny the validity of the experience of those who claim to speak in tongues today, but it is as well for us to heed the warnings of Scripture. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 12:30-13:1) - "Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal" (also 1 Corinthians 14).

St. Paul also said: "I thank my God I speak with tongues

6. THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

more than ye all: yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than 10,000 words in an unknown tongue." (1 Cor. 14:18-19).

Leon Morris, New Testament scholar of world renown, points to the obscurity of present-day understanding of the exact nature of some of the gifts, such as "helps" and "governments" (1 Cor. 12:28) - "We may make conjectures... But when we boil it all down, we know nothing about these gifts or their possession. They have vanished without leaving a visible trace." On tongues, he says, "Despite the confident claims of some, we cannot be certain of exactly what form the gift took in New Testament days" ('Spirit of the Living God').

From Acts Chapter 2 some may argue that the gift of tongues and their interpretation was limited to the Apostolic Age, but there is no definite confirmation for this. However, in 1 Corinthians Chapter 14 it does say three things plainly -
that tongues are inferior to prophecy in the Church (1-5);
that tongues uninterpreted are useless to the Church (6-15);
that tongues uninterpreted are positively an impropriety against the Church;

Then Paul lays down rules for the proper use of this gift in Verse 39, "Covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues".

Irenaeus, in the second century, makes reference to having heard persons speak in unknown languages. It is alleged that some of Wesley's converts did the same. In the Welsh revival of 1904-5 it was noted that young people who knew little or no Welsh prayed fluently in Welsh in public. Many in the Pentecostal Churches claim the reality of this experience today.

My concern is not the acknowledgment of the possibility of such an experience, nor doubting the Scriptural support for such an experience, but any attempt necessarily to associate it with superior spirituality, and any suggestion that this particular gift should essentially be experienced by all Christians. I am concerned also when the gift itself becomes the centre of a Christian's witness, rather than Christ Himself. I am concerned when it leads to excess emotionalism to which the psychologically

unstable are particularly susceptible. I am concerned most of all when it is associated with wrong doctrine. The claim is often made that it naturally follows the baptism of the Spirit. Were it true to say that speaking with tongues is the evidence of our having received the baptism of the Spirit as an experience subsequent to conversion, we would have to conclude that many of the saints throughout the ages had never received the baptism of the Spirit, that men and women used of God on the mission fields and in the home Church were never baptized by the Holy Spirit, that Billy Graham, who claims no such gift of speaking in tongues, has not been baptized by the Holy Spirit, nor was Wycliffe, Bunyan, Luther, Whitefield, or yourself as a Christian. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is identified with regeneration when a person is first converted and born again of the Holy Spirit - there is no special subsequent experience of the Spirit's baptism; it is identified with his conversion. Of necessity, there was an interval of time between the early disciples' belief in Christ and their Pentecost experience of the Holy Spirit. It could not have been otherwise. With us it is different. Our belief in Christ as Saviour is made possible by the operation of the Holy Spirit Himself. Regeneration and the baptism of the Holy Spirit are identical at the same time.

As a Christian you want to be worth your salt. You are anxious to increase in holiness, to become more effective in service and daily to become more conformed to His will, then "desire earnestly the greater gifts" - wisdom, knowledge, faith, and allow the Holy Spirit so to work through you that the fruit of the Holy Spirit will be manifested in love, joy and peace to the glory of Christ.

A PRAYER

O God, give me grace to use the spiritual gifts You have given me for the benefit of others and to the glory of Christ, my Saviour.

Amen.

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God our Creator has made each of us unique. He has also given to every Christian by His Holy Spirit, certain special talents or gifts, for that Christian to fulfil in the Church the role that the Spirit assigns him. This study by Lance Shilton encourages every believer to see what gifts he has received, and then to actively employ them for the common good.

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