

# **Spiritual Gifts: Are they all still given today?**

**By James Moriello, December 28, 2009**

*“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant” (1 Corinthians 12:1)<sup>i</sup>*

There was much confusion in the early Corinthian church with regard to the proper use of the spiritual gifts. There was so much confusion, in fact, that the Apostle Paul devoted two entire chapters of 1 Corinthians to the subject. In the American church today, we are faced with a similar challenge. Like the Corinthian church of AD 55 to which 1 Corinthians was addressed, the American church has to deal with the same kind of worldly mentality that led to sharp rebukes by Paul. Many churchgoers today attend church services for the purpose of what they can get out of it and not what they can give—namely worship due the Savior Jesus Christ and sharing His love with others in the church according to the gifts God has given them (1 Cor. 14:4). One of the ways this is manifested is in placing the desire of ‘feeling good’ emotionally ahead of the desire to truly draw nearer to God through worship, prayer, and responding to the Word of God and the preaching of it (Jas 4:8-10; Heb 4:12). As a result, such people have accumulated for themselves teachers, churches, and entire denominations that for all intents and purposes place emotional experience on a plane equal to or higher than, and usually in opposition to, Scripture. Such errant doctrine is often based upon a misunderstanding or ignorance with regard to what the Bible teaches about the Work of the Holy Spirit and how such Work is operable today. The problems with such an emphasis on human emotion and experience are obvious. The Bible itself claims to be and is the inerrant Word of God on the basis of its divine origin (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21, Rom 9:17). Human emotion and experience is just that—human. We are all sinners and therefore our emotions and experience are filtered through the sinful human condition, as opposed to the sinless divine one (Rom 3:10-23; Heb 4:15). True Christian revival begins with a recommitment to the Bible as the authority of our faith, and not emotional experience as many in the modern day Charismatic movement today proclaim (John 17:17; 2 Chr. 34:18-28).<sup>ii</sup>

Let us now turn to the Scripture and identify what the spiritual gifts are, who gives them, who receives them, and for what purposes. No less than nineteen gifts are identified in five different texts in the Scriptures. They are apostle, prophet, miracles, healings, tongues, interpretation of tongues, pastor, teacher, discernment, wisdom, evangelism, encouragement, faith, ministry, administration, leadership, helps, mercy, and giving (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10; 1 Cor. 12:28-30; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 4:11). This list is by no means exhaustive, but other spiritual gifts identified in other places of Scripture—music, for instance—can be generally categorized under one or more of the aforementioned gifts. The Apostle Paul informs us that *“the*

*manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all*" (1 Cor. 12:7). We learn from that text that it is God the Holy Spirit who dispenses spiritual gifts. While all men and women have God-given natural gifts, only believers—those who have the Holy Spirit living in them—can have spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph 1:13). They are given for the purpose of edifying others, particularly other Christians in the local church in the context of the chapter (1 Cor. 12). The spiritual gifts are to be used in a spirit of love. It is no accident that sandwiched between the twelfth and fourteenth chapter of First Corinthians is the thirteenth chapter, which is perhaps the greatest discourse on love ever penned.<sup>iii</sup> As we have already alluded to, the spiritual gifts are part of the Work of the Holy Spirit. His Work will always be consistent, and we know that His Work also entails convicting the world of sin, pointing sinners to Jesus Christ the Savior, and leading believers into a deeper walk with God through daily spiritual guidance (John 16:8-15). His guidance will always agree with the will of God as revealed in Scripture and will never contradict anything affirmed in the Bible in any way (John 16:13, 17:17). Neither are any of the gifts to be used in any way or for any purpose contrary to God's revealed will as recorded in the Bible. Bearing these things in mind, we will begin our study of the spiritual gifts with those gifts that were temporary in duration and are no longer active today. Then, lest we be discouraged, we will look at the gifts that are still active today and pray that the Holy Spirit will guide each of us in the way we should use our gifts for the Glory of God's Kingdom.

While the majority of the gifts are still being given today, some are no longer given because they were temporary in nature in that their purpose was to authenticate the Christian message prior to the completion of Scripture (Heb 2:3-4). The temporary gifts, also known as 'sign gifts', are those of apostle, prophecy, miracles, healings, tongues, and interpretation of tongues.<sup>iv</sup> We will expound upon each gift in turn.

First, we will look at the gift of apostle (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph 4:11). When we find this gift listed, it is listed as 'apostles' (not apostleship), which taken in conjunction with the language of "appointed" and "gave", leads us to conclude that the texts are speaking of an office. The qualification for an Apostle are that one had to be appointed by Jesus Christ and a witness to His Resurrection (Mark 3:13; Acts 1:22). After the initial appointment of the twelve, only Matthias and Paul were called to that office (Acts 1:22-24; Rom 1:1). After that, no more apostles were called and none were replaced when they died. Nobody today can call themselves an Apostle or successor to one except by their own pride and/or human tradition. There is simply no biblical basis for it. Moreover, Apostle is not listed as a New Testament office—only Elder and Deacon are listed (1 Tim 3:2-13). Some would argue that what is meant by this gift is apostle is the general sense of the word, which means a commissioned one. However, all Christians are commissioned under the Great Commission and therefore no special gift is needed (Matt 28:18-20). Finally, we note that both times we find the gift of

apostle listed in Scripture and when we find it in early church writings, it is in connection with prophecy—to which we now turn our attention.<sup>v</sup>

The gift of prophecy is listed four times (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor.12:10; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph 4:11). There are two types of prophecy in the Bible. First, there is foretelling of an event that will happen at some time in the future. A good example of this is Isaiah's prophecy of the virgin birth (Isa 7:14 fulfilled in Matt 1:23). Second, there is forth-telling which is the speaking forth of the very Words of God by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. A good New Testament example of this is Paul's teaching on the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26). The spiritual gift of prophecy was active in the early church to confirm the Word of God and proclaim it publicly prior to the completion of the Canon of Scripture (the New Testament). Every true prophecy was always in agreement with the Apostolic witness (1 Cor. 14:37). Prophecy, like the gift of apostle, was foundational. Our faith is said to have *"been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone"* (Eph 2:20). Jude speaks of the *"once for all"* faith; that faith which requires neither repetition nor refinement. Since we now have the completed Canon of Scripture, there is no need for any more prophecy. In fact, there are dire consequences for any who presume to add or subtract from God's completed written revelation (Rev 22:18-19).

We will take the spiritual gifts of miracles and healings together (1 Cor. 12:9-10; 1 Cor. 12:29-30). Before commenting on these gifts, we will make a disclaimer. God is able to both perform miracles and to miraculously heal in accordance with His own Will and Purposes (Mark 10:27; Psalm 78:41-42). He will sometimes use prayer and/or human beings to do so (James 5:16-18). We thank Him and praise Him when he does work miracles and heal. However, God does not give the gifts of miracles and healings to individual Christians today. The purpose of miracles and healings in the New Testament was always for the purpose of confirming the gospel message. Note the use of *"confirmed"* (past tense) in Hebrews 2:3-4 in connection to the sign gifts—particularly that of miracles--which implies that the sign gifts had already ceased by the time the Epistle to the Hebrews was penned, which was prior to 70 AD. Without exception, healings and miracles in the Gospels and in Acts were always performed for the purpose of validating the fact that Jesus is the Son of God and/or the Resurrected Christ (Mark 2:10; John 2:11; John 20:30-31; Acts 2:22). Never was a miracle or healing performed for any other purpose in Scripture. In fact, many people in Israel were not healed in the days Jesus walked the land of Palestine and Paul did not use his gift of healing to heal devout Christians on at least two occasions (1 Tim 5:23; 2 Tim 4:20). Our modern day 'faith-healers' and those who trust in them fail to comprehend this truth out of ignorance. Worse, many perform their 'work' out of impure motives to their own eternal detriment (Matt 18:6-7).

We will now look at the spiritual gift of tongues and its counterpart, the spiritual gift of interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:10; 1 Cor. 12:30). These gifts are the last two of the six which we classify as sign gifts which were temporary in nature because their purpose was to confirm the message of the early apostles and prophets (Heb 2:3-4; Eph 2:20; Jude 3). The gift of tongues was given to the early church beginning at Pentecost (Acts 2:4). The gift of tongues in the New Testament always refers to known human languages and never idle babbling speech or sounds (Acts 2:5-11). In the context of First Corinthians 14, Paul is correcting the misuse of the gift of tongues in the Corinthian church in 55 AD. Paul gives seven guidelines for its use which are the only specific guidelines for the use of tongues in the assembly that are given. These guidelines are very rarely if ever adhered to in the Charismatic American churches today. First, the use of tongues had to involve known languages (1 Cor. 14:9-11). Second, it had to be for the profit of others not oneself (1 Cor. 14:16-17). Third, it was a sign for unbelievers to warn them of impending judgment (1 Cor. 14:21-22). Isaiah 28:11-13 is alluded to here which represents a national judgment upon Israel for rejecting their God. In the context of the use of tongues in Acts Chapter Two, the sign gift of tongues is linked to Israel's rejection of their Messiah (Acts 2; Matt 23). The national judgment would come in 70 AD with the sacking of Jerusalem prophesied in Luke 21. These things taken with the past tense of Hebrews 2:3-4 present strong, if not conclusive, evidence that the gift of tongues had already ceased by 70 AD. Fourth, tongues had to be used one at a time (1 Cor. 14:27). Fifth, there must be an interpreter present (1 Cor. 14:28). Sixth, women were forbidden to exercise this gift in worship services (1 Cor. 14:34). Finally, the gift was not to be forbidden to be used, so long as it was done in the prescribed ways (1 Cor. 14:39-40). This commandment not to forbid was made because at the time, the gift was still actively given. The principle behind it is that we not restrict each other of the use of our spiritual gifts in the assembly in general. To put the biblical use of tongues in the early church in practical terms, the scenario would go something like this. An unbeliever who speaks only French walks into an English speaking assembly. The gifted man (remember, women were not permitted to exercise this gift in the assembly) requests the opportunity to exercise his gift by giving a signal to whoever is presiding over the service. This gifted man who does not know a single word of French speaks a 'prophetic word'—if we apply our scenario hypothetically to today; having the completed Canon of Scripture it would have to be a direct quotation of Scripture and nothing else—in French which is clearly understood by the unbeliever and confirmed that it was in fact heard in French by a third party interpreter in the congregation. The question arises as to what the spiritual source is in churches today where tongues are practiced—for instance in a congregation where everyone speaks English. The source in such a case is surely not God but is instead demonic or at least a demonically influenced psychological or hypnotic condition. Beware of entering into such an assembly. *"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them"* (Eph 5:11).

In addition to the judgment aspect of the sign gift of tongues and past tense use of its confirmatory purpose noted above, there are other evidences that the spiritual gift of tongues is no longer given. We read that *“whether there are tongues, they will cease”* (1 Cor. 13:8). The important word here is “cease” which is *pauso* in the Greek, meaning to cease abruptly with finality and not to be restored. This is the same word used to speak of the storm being calmed by the Lord Jesus in Luke 8:24. *Pauso* is also used in relation to the Old Testament sacrificial system in Hebrews 10:1-2, speaking of the fact that if a once and for all sacrifice is performed—which it finally was by Christ—there is no need to continue the Old Testament sacrificial system and such sacrifices would therefore cease. Likewise, the gift of tongues would no longer be needed after its purposes as a sign to validate the gospel message and point to impending judgment of unbelieving Israel has been fulfilled. It should also be noted that prophecies will fail, or gradually disappear from the scene of human history until they are no longer necessary because Scripture is complete, whereas tongues will quickly and abruptly disappear (1 Cor. 13:8-10; Rev 22:18-19). Further evidence that tongues have ceased are their conspicuous absence in any other of the later Epistles of Scripture. Neither did any of the early church fathers mention that tongues were still in use; they are always mentioned in the past tense. Throughout church history, we find the gift mentioned sporadically but always in connection with heretical movements.

The birth of the Pentecostal Movement in America did not begin until 1906 with the Asuza Street Revival in Los Angeles, and that ‘revival’ had no resemblance to the biblical use of tongues or any other of the temporary sign gifts. ‘Charismatic Christianity’ was denounced by the conservative and fundamentalist mainstream churches in America up until the 1960’s at which time the euphoria of emotion rode into mainstream American Christianity. The result is that we now have churches and denominations that are considered mainstream that have their misunderstandings of the sign gifts either written right into their faith statements or implied in them by the lack of definition as to what the Work of the Holy Spirit is today. Many such churches draw a distinction between the new birth (salvation) and Holy Spirit baptism where no such distinction exists today. The alleged distinction is based upon the false understanding of Acts 2:4 that Holy Spirit baptism can still be attested to today by the sign of tongues. This causes many to seek this gift and they usually get some kind of ‘gift’ from some source other than God—either a demonic source or themselves. Even when the gift of tongues did exist, not everyone had it (1 Cor. 12:7-11; 1 Cor. 12:29-31). The passages in Acts that are sometimes misunderstood in which an already saved person received the Holy Spirit were in reference to the last of Old Testament believers, not New Testament believers, and the gift of tongues was given in each case for the purpose of verifying the gospel message (Acts 8:12-17; Acts 10:44-46; Acts 11:14-16; Acts 15:7-9). Baptism simply means identification with someone or something. Salvation and Holy Spirit baptism (or identification) come at the same moment for the New

Testament believer. All believers alive today are identified with the Holy Spirit the moment they are saved. The Holy Spirit comes to live in every saved person (John 5:24; Rom 8:9; Eph 1:13-14). Scripture says that faith and love are evidence of salvation, not spiritual gifts (2 Thes 1:3-5; 1 Cor. 13).

Having treated those gifts which were temporary in nature, we now turn to those that are active today. Each one of us has at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:7). Each local church is comprised of members who have the exact measure of the spiritual gifts needed to carry out its specific God-given call and ministry (1 Cor. 12). No one gift is more important than another. The idea of a professional clergy dominating the congregation and doing the vast majority of the work is foreign to the New Testament ideal. It is a sad commentary that in most churches, so many people simply attend services and never really develop and use their gifts that might so enrich the local assembly and the cause of Christ. The gift of pastor, although related to the concept of biblical eldership, is only one gift given by the Holy Spirit and is not necessarily more important than other gifts—giving or service for instance. Do you have the gift of faith? If so, then offer the vision God has given you for the direction of the church and give testimony to the faithfulness of God and how He hears and answers prayers. Do you have the gift of encouragement? Surely there are times when others are despairing. Lift them up on eagle's wings by empathizing with them, praying with them and for them, and rejoicing with them as they rejoice. Do you have the gift of mercy? Then do acts of mercy by listening to that woman who has just lost her husband or that child who feels that there is nobody in the world who loves him. We could go on forever cataloguing the myriad ways in which we can use our God-given spiritual gifts. The questions I pose to you the reader or hearer of this message are these: 'Which spiritual gifts do you have and are you using them?' Be honest with yourself before God and may He guide you in greater grace and knowledge of Him and His will for you. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> All Scripture quoted in this document is from the *New King James Version of the Holy Bible* (Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.)

<sup>ii</sup> The word Charismatic, from charisma, simply means gifts. The term 'Charismatic gifts' is redundant.

<sup>iii</sup> The early church commonly utilized 1 Corinthians 13 as a hymn of worship to celebrate God's perfect love.

<sup>iv</sup> The gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and discernment were also given in conjunction with the temporary sign gifts. They have ceased in their function in relation to the temporary gifts. However, one can argue that such gifts can exist albeit in different forms in harmony with Scripture—for instance by Apologists.

<sup>v</sup> For example, the Didache (or Teaching of the Apostles), the earliest known church manual which was probably written in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century, used apostle and prophet in reference to specific people interchangeably.