

Spiritual Gifts

While there is great debate and differences in thought and practice regarding this subject, that never before stopped us from entering the fray, so to speak. So it shall be with this subject, as well. Volumes have been written, and more volumes will be written on the subject of spiritual gifts. Since this is basically a position paper, we will try to keep our comment concise and focused, so as not to bore or confuse the reader.

The phrase “spiritual gifts” occurs, I believe three times in scripture. All three times are in the book of First Corinthians, about whom Paul says:

*I Cor 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto **carnal**, even as unto babes in Christ*

It appears that the Corinthian church was agog with manifestations that they considered spiritual gifts, but their problem was that they were carnal, and might not be able to recognize a spiritual gift if, in fact, it were to manifest itself. The exercise of these gifts had caused problems in the church, which Paul was attempting to rectify.

I Cor 12

⁴ *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*

⁵ *And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.*

⁶ *And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.*

⁷ *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

⁸ *For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;*

⁹ *To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;*

¹⁰ *To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:*

¹¹ *But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.*

What is the purpose of spiritual gifts?

I Cor 14: 12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

Spiritual gifts are for the church – the local, visible assembly. The Spirit decides who gets the gifts, and what gifts they get (I Cor 12:11). It appears that spiritual gifts fall into the following categories:

Word of Wisdom

Word of Knowledge

Faith
Healing
Working of miracles
Prophecy
Discerning of spirits
Diverse kinds of tongues
Interpretation of tongues

Paul also indicated, while writing in the apostolic age, that:

I Cor 13: 8 Charity never faileth: but whether [there be] prophecies, they shall fail; whether [there be] tongues, they shall cease; whether [there be] knowledge, it shall vanish away.

So it would appear that some gifts were not meant to continue forever.

We know, then, that spiritual gifts were administered by the Spirit of God for the use of the recipients in the edification of the assembly. They were not for personal gain, an ego trip, or so one church member could say they had something that someone else didn't get. There is no indication that any of these gifts were requirements for, or evidences of, salvation. In fact, the opposite is true:

I Cor 12: 30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

The implied answer to these questions is an obvious "no."

Paul chides the Corinthians for their carnality and says:

I Cor 13: 11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Becoming a man is a growing process that results in completion. In this regard, he also said:

I Cor 13:10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

Since he is talking about a more excellent way than the spiritual gifts that shall pass away, many people (of which I am one) believe that gifts such as direct revelation are no longer needed now that the Word of God is completed. Many folks today seem to have revelations (which they may call a Word of Knowledge or Prophecy) which are found to contradict the Word of God. Such cannot be the case, for God never contradicts himself – He is the end from the beginning, the same yesterday, today, and forever.

So let's simply take these gifts one by one and see how we should apply them:

1. Word of Wisdom and Word of Knowledge.
Since the Word of God is now complete, and comprises all the wisdom and knowledge of God that He has seen fit to reveal, this sort of direct revelation is no longer necessary and, in fact, quite dangerous.
2. Faith
Faith is always necessary. We are saved by grace through faith, and faith is a gift of God (Eph 2:8-9)
3. Healing
Healing was done in the Bible by those given the power to do so. In the church age, we are told how to obtain the healing power of God:

James 5:14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

We are also reminded that it is not always God's will to heal even the most spiritual among us:

II Cor 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

4. Miracles
Although the saving of a soul is the most awe-inspiring miracle of today, the things that people call miracles do not seem to be recorded in the Bible after the book of Acts, nor do they seem to have appeared in history until at least the 19th century. God, however, is still a God of miracles, and I have seen many miracles performed through prayer – but not many through men – especially those who took credit for it. John, the last living apostle, does not seem to mention miraculous things such as we see today.
5. Prophecy
The Greek word for prophecy signifies the speaking forth of the mind and counsel of God. This was necessary in the New Testament churches before the Word of God was complete. However, we now have the mind and counsel of God, and prophets seem to have been replaced by teachers.

II Peter 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

In a sense, we still have the gift of prophecy at work today in telling forth the mind of God, as long as we derive the mind of God from the Word of God. There were prophets and teachers at Antioch in the book of Acts (Acts 13:1), but by the time Peter wrote his epistle, the ministry seems more devoted to teaching.

6. Discerning of Spirits

We don't see much emphasis placed on this gift either directly in the New Testament or today. One would think that with as much emphasis as is placed on tongues today, there would be at least as much interest in spiritual discernment, but that does not seem to be the case. It may well be that spiritual discernment is lacking today because we are too interested in the lowest gifts, as were the church members at Corinth. Spiritual discernment comes with spiritual growth, and today, spiritual growth comes with the study of the Word of God. We are to try the spirits (I John 4:1). The only way we can do that today is by the Word of God. John says we need to do that because many false prophets have gone out into the world. If that was true in John's day, it is true in our day.

7. Diverse kinds of tongues and interpretation of tongues

These are listed as two different gifts, so I don't want anyone to accuse me of trying to wrest the scriptures by combining them. I recognize them as two gifts, but it will be easier to study them together.

Spiritual gifts, or "spirituals," the literal interpretation, comes from the Greek word "charisma." Perhaps you can recognize this as the root word for "charismatic," which is what certain groups are called today who believe in what they call "speaking in tongues." Please don't say harsh things about me when I say that Baptists should also be charismatics – that is, we should believe in the biblical gifts. We just believe differently about some of them. The gift of teaching is a charismatic – a grace gift from God.

As we have pointed out before, the distribution of these gifts is under the sovereign control of the Holy Ghost, and not all people have all the gifts. That means that to attend classes to learn to speak in tongues is to frustrate the grace of God. If God doesn't give it, you don't need it.

The term for the tongues movement is "glossolalia." That term comes from two Greek words meaning language (glossa) and speech (lalia). Literally, then, it means to speak in a language. The word "glossa" appears many times in the New Testament. It is used as the shape of the fires in Acts 2:3. It is used as the physical organ in James 3:5. The rest of the time it always means a language.

In Acts 2:4, Luke uses the term "other tongues." He means tongues other than those they normally used. Mark 16:17 uses the term "new tongues," which means the same thing. These were languages that someone could understand. The word tongue occurs several times in the book of Revelation, and always refers to a language. At Pentecost (Acts 2:7-8), the word language is "dialekto," from which we get dialect. That is an actual language. The purpose was to spread the gospel so that all could understand. This is the gift of speaking in tongues as God gave it.

There is some confusion of interpretation about tongues which results from the fact that, in certain passages of scripture, the term "unknown tongues" is used. If

you will look closely in your bible, you will see that, in every occurrence of the term “unknown tongues,” the word “unknown” is in italics. That means it is not in the original text. It was added by the translators for clarification but, as we all know, mankind will confuse it if at all possible. The word is simply “tongues,” and it means languages. All of the instances of Paul’s usage of the word mean “languages.” He gives rules as to how the gift is to be used. There does not seem to be, anywhere in scripture, an instance of tongues as being some unknown mumbling or gibberish.

Tongues are for a sign TO THEM THAT BELIEVE NOT.

I Cor 14:22 Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not:

If I delude myself into speaking in some unknown mumbo-jumbo to please myself, I am not using the gift of tongues. The gift was a sign to those that believe not – not to impress those that believe. The Corinthians had mis-used the gift, and Paul was correcting them. Paul even used Isaiah’s prophecy to prove his point about tongues (Is 28:11) and said it applied to the present situation. The Jews always required a sign (I Cor 1:22). We are not to require such signs.

Some say that tongues is a fruit of the Spirit, but the fruits of the Spirit are given to us in Galatians chapter five, and tongues is not mentioned.

Let us briefly make a couple of points about the instructions for speaking in tongues:

1. It was always done in a church setting (I Cor 14:12)
2. They were temporary (I Cor 13:8)
3. They were languages (glossa)
4. The rules for speaking in tongues required an interpreter

I Cor 14:27 If any man speak in an [unknown] tongue, [let it be] by two, or at the most [by] three, and [that] by course; and let one interpret.

Now let’s think about this one for a minute. In order for me to speak in an unknown tongue in the assembly, I ALREADY NEEDED TO KNOW THERE WAS SOMEONE WHO COULD INTERPRET, and I would need to know who it was. Otherwise, I was to keep silence. If that rule was enforced today, it would do away with almost all tongue-speaking in churches.

5. Women were not to speak in tongues at all

I Cor 14:13 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but [they are commanded] to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

You will find today in “charismatic” churches, that women do a lot of the tongue-speaking, in direct disobedience to the Lord’s command. This cannot be of God. It is an improper use of the gift.

If you insist on being carnal, you may speak in tongues between yourself and God, and will accomplish little, except perhaps the edification of yourself.

I Cor 14:4 He that speaketh in an [unknown] tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.

The purpose of speaking in languages is to edify the church. If I speak English (as I do, although poorly), and I am to preach in a congregation that speaks entirely Spanish (as I have several times), there must be an interpreter (which there was) or no edification will take place. If no edification takes place, the gift of tongues is mis-used, and is unscriptural. No mumbling, no mumbo-jumbo, no gibberish.

I have known many people who claim to have spoken in tongues when they were saved, and I have seen many of those people turn their back on the Lord and live like the Devil. Speaking in tongues is not evidence of salvation, spirituality, or service. It is evidence of carnality and will-worship. It can be self-induced, it can be group-induced, and it can be induced by those spirits that we have not tested.

If you have never trusted Christ, and nothing else, for your salvation, would you turn to Him now in repentance and faith, claiming His promise that His death on the cross was sufficient for your sins? Let Him worry about giving the gifts. He’s the one in charge of that.

God Bless,
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