

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

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The apostle Paul said, *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant* (1 Corinthians 12:1). Yet, there is probably no greater area of ignorance within the church today than in the area of spiritual gifts.

The Two Extremes

Among Bible-believing Christians, there are generally two extremes when it comes to the subject of spiritual gifts. The first is to deny various present-day manifestations of some of the gifts of the Spirit. A quote from Bible commentator Dr. John MacArthur clearly states this position:

There were even reports of people who had allegedly found their amalgam dental fillings supernaturally replaced by gold fillings! Such “manifestations” are found nowhere in the Word of God.

As much as I reject the claim that people can become drunk in the Spirit, I also reject the assertion that miracles, healings, tongues, as well as the other gifts, are no longer in operation today. Both of these positions are incorrect and both have hindered the witness of the church. One viewpoint quenches the Spirit by insisting that certain gifts have ceased; the other grieves the Holy Spirit by ignoring biblical guidelines for worship, and

are not the permanent possession of any believer, but rather the potential experience of every believer. The one exception is the gift of tongues.

I make this point for two reasons. The first is the fact that there are many self-serving men who are anxious to take financial advantage of unsuspecting believers under the guise of being “God’s anointed.” They claim God has endued them with the power to heal, perform miracles, and to prophesy. There is no indication in Scripture, however, that anyone has ever had a permanent gift of healing or of miracles. When I say “permanent,” I mean that the person has the ability

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“The *temporary sign gifts* were limited to the apostolic age and therefore ceased after that time. Those gifts included miracles, healings, [tongues], and the interpretation of [tongues]. The purpose of *temporary sign gifts* was to authenticate the apostolic message as the Word of God, until the time when the Scriptures ... were completed” (emphasis mine).¹

This statement is representative of a large number of evangelical leaders today.

The other extreme can be found in what is known as the charismatic movement. This movement is identified by an overemphasis on experience, leading quite often to practices that contradict the clear teaching of Scripture. In many charismatic meetings today, you can find people “laughing” like hyenas, “barking” like dogs, “clucking” like chickens, and “mooring” like cows—all of these supposedly under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Some are falling down, claiming that they are “drunk in the Spirit.” A few years back, several of the British charismatic churches reported people being “divinely” sprinkled with gold dust during worship.

obviously foolish behavior is attributed to the third person of the Holy Trinity. The truth lies between the two extremes. All of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are available to us today, and *all things [are to] be done decently and in order* (1 Corinthians 14:40). Let’s remember that the Scriptures are our final authority on the subject.

The Purpose of the Gifts

God has given the gifts of the Holy Spirit to His people so that they might be used to build up the body of Christ. A mature and healthy fellowship will naturally have the gifts of the Spirit in operation. It is unfortunate that people hold the position that the gifts have ceased because they have robbed themselves of much of what God wants to do in and, especially, through their lives. Since the gifts are given for the profit of all, we should *earnestly desire the best gifts* (1 Corinthians 12:31a).

The Nature of the Gifts

Before we discuss the gifts of the Spirit individually, there is one important point I want to make. The gifts of the Spirit mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10

to exercise the gift at will. As great as the apostles were, not even they had the ability to heal or perform miracles any time they chose to do so. The only One who had the power to exercise the gifts at will was Jesus. That is what we would expect of the One to whom the Father gave *the Spirit [without] measure* (John 3:34b). To each of us, however, *a measure of faith* (Romans 12:3b) has been given.

The second reason is to encourage you to be open and available to however God might want to use you. Perhaps He would like to give to you the gift of healing or even the gift of working miracles. All believers are potential recipients and vessels of these gifts. They are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and since we are *the temple[s] of the Holy Spirit* (1 Corinthians 6:19b), we can expect that He will manifest Himself through us. ↩

In the next issue, we will begin to look specifically at the gifts themselves and their uses.

*Brackets in Scripture verses represent author’s paraphrase.
¹*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary 1 Corinthians*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1984, pp. 297–298.