

THE
Holy
SPIRIT

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:4–7).

The gifts that were given by the Holy Spirit are not to be confused with the “gift” of the Holy Spirit. The “gift” (Gk.: *dorea*) of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit Himself (Acts 10:44, 45; 11:17), but the “gifts” (Gk.: *chrisma*) were divinely imparted supernatural powers given by the Holy Spirit (Romans 1:11; 12:6; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). *Chrisma* can also refer to gifts (translated also “favor”; 2 Corinthians 1:11) which are not supernatural in nature (Romans 5:15, 16; 6:23; 11:29; 12:6–8; 1 Peter 4:10, 11).

Paul said, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:4). Paul’s point was that having different gifts did not mean that the Corinthians had different spirits. Instead of division (1 Corinthians 1:10–12), the diverse gifts of the Spirit should have brought about “the unity of the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:3). Paul illustrated the truth concerning oneness by comparing a human body comprised of many members to the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12, 13).

THE VARIETIES OF GIFTS

Paul listed nine gifts in 1 Corinthians 12: “word of wisdom,” “word of knowledge” (v. 8); “faith,” “gifts of healing” (v. 9); “effecting of miracles,” “prophecy,” “distinguishing of spirits,” “various kinds of tongues,” and “interpretation of tongues” (v. 10). None of the Corinthian Christians had all of these gifts. F. W. Grosheide correctly observed, “The idea is one of distribution and this implies that no one gets everything.”¹ Perhaps the apostles received every gift, but no one else did.

The miraculous gifts in the Corinthian church came from the same source and were given according to the will of the Spirit. Paul was careful to emphasize this fact: “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills” (1 Corinthians 12:11). Gordon Fee commented, “The repetition of ‘same’ with each divine Person seems to emphasize that the one Spirit / Lord / God manifests himself in a great variety of gifts and ministries. Thus the unity of God does not

¹F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), 283.

imply uniformity in gifts; rather, the one and same God is responsible for the variety itself."²

Instead of jealousy or division arising because of pride, unity should have resulted from having the gifts. The recipients of the various gifts should have realized that they were not obtained through self-merit or ability, but that all glory and honor were due to Jesus who (through the one Spirit) had given the gifts.

Paul emphasized the fact that each Christian at Corinth had his own individual gift, rather than each one having every gift:

All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? (1 Corinthians 12:29, 30).

As Robert Bratcher pointed out, ". . . these two verses are made up of seven rhetorical questions, all of them expecting the answer 'No.'"³ Miraculous gifts were not given for the purpose of endowing every Christians with the same abilities.

THE PURPOSE OF GIFTS

The purpose of gifts was for the building up of the church in order to benefit the collective whole, not for the benefit of the ones who received the gifts. Paul made sure the Corinthians would not overlook this truth.

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7).

. . . But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:24, 25).

The purpose of prophecy, like that of every other gift, was edification of the church: "But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification

²Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 586.

³Robert G. Bratcher, *A Translator's Guide to Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1982), 124.

and exhortation and consolation" (1 Corinthians 14:3); "So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church" (1 Corinthians 14:12); ". . . Let all things be done for edification" (1 Corinthians 14:26). The phrase "all things" would mean that in the Christian assemblies tongues and all other gifts were to be used for the building up of the church and not for personal edification.

Frederick Dale Bruner commented,

Paul looks at gifts from the paramount perspective of the congregation and from this view he does not value any gift simply in its existence but only in its understandable communication to others for their upbuilding. Indeed, it is questionable if, in Paul's thought, a gift can be said to "exist" for the individual if it is not employed for the church.⁴

THE RECIPIENTS OF GIFTS

Spiritual gifts were given to help Christians grow to spiritual maturity, not because they had already arrived at perfection. Gifts were given to recent converts (Acts 8:14–18; 19:6), not to those who had attained a depth of superior spirituality. The Corinthian church was made up of new Christians who needed to grow.

Bruner pointed out, "Spiritual gifts (or to use Paul's expression, graces) are not confined to a select few who, perhaps, can exhibit extraordinary manifestations as a result of their deeper dedication or greater nearness to the Spirit."⁵

The church in Corinth is evidence that special spiritual gifts were no assurance of spiritual superiority. According to Paul's appraisal, the church at Corinth was lacking in spiritual maturity. He wrote concerning those Christians,

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? (1 Corinthians 3:1–3).

Through baptism in the Holy Spirit, special powers were given as signs of apostleship

⁴Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), 290.

⁵Ibid.

(2 Corinthians 12:12; see also Acts 1:8; 2:1–4). God also used these signs to show His acceptance of the Gentiles for salvation (Acts 10:44, 45; 11:15; 15:7–9). Through the laying on of the apostles' hands, the Spirit was given to others to endow them with special gifts (Acts 8:14–18; 19:5, 6; 2 Timothy 1:6). Baptism in the Holy Spirit and gifts given through the apostles' hands were completely separate events.⁶

Some use Paul's statement to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6 as proof that the apostles were not the only ones who could give the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote that Timothy had received a gift, *chrisma*, "through the laying on of" his hands. Earlier he had written that Timothy had received a gift "with the laying on of hands by the presbytery" (1 Timothy 4:14).

Timothy received a gift "through" or "by" (*dia*, a Greek preposition which, when used with the genitive, means the *agency of means* by which another acts) the laying on of Paul's hands (2 Timothy 1:6). This was most likely the gift that was given "with" (*meta*, a preposition which with the genitive, means "in accompaniment with") the hands of the presbytery (1 Timothy 4:14). For good reason, Paul apparently used two different prepositions in describing how Timothy received the gift. Jesus, through the *agency* of Paul's hands and *accompanied* with the hands of the presbytery, gave a gift to Timothy. Paul's hands were the agency by which the gift was given, and along with Paul the presbytery laid on their hands to assign to Timothy the use of the gift.⁷

The laying on of hands had various purposes: (1) to confer a blessing on another (Matthew 19:15), (2) to provide the contact power in healing (Luke 4:40; 13:13), (3) to impart the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14–18; 19:6; 2 Timothy 1:6), and (4) to commission people to special responsibilities or offices (Acts 6:6; 13:3). The last two purposes occurred to prepare Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. "Through" the hands of Paul, a special gift was given to Timothy (2 Timothy 1:6). Along with Paul's hands, the presbytery laid on their hands to commission

Timothy for the exercising of that gift (1 Timothy 4:14).

Only certain people had spiritual gifts: (1) Except in the cases of the apostles and the first Gentile Christians, spiritual gifts were given through the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 19:6). (2) The apostle through whom the gifts were being conferred had to be present in order to give a gift (Gk.: *chrisma*; Romans 1:11). (3) The nature of the gift each received depended on the will of the Holy Spirit, not on the desire of the one receiving the gift (1 Corinthians 12:11). (4) The presence of gifts within a church was an indication that an apostle had visited that congregation (1 Corinthians 9:1, 2).

The church at Corinth, for example, was "not lacking in any gift" (1 Corinthians 1:7). This was true because Paul, an apostle, had been in Corinth. Other apostles could have given them gifts as a sign of their apostleship, even as Paul had done while he was in Corinth (2 Corinthians 12:12); however, the others had not been there. Based on this fact, Paul could use the Corinthian church as evidence that he was an apostle:

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord (1 Corinthians 9:1, 2).

The Corinthian church was the seal of Paul's apostleship because they were not lacking in any gift, but had the full spectrum of gifts that apostles were able to give. If anyone questioned Paul's apostleship, he could point to Corinth and say, "They are the seal of my apostleship." Since only apostles could give the gifts—and since no other apostles had been in Corinth—the Corinthians' possession of gifts was proof beyond a doubt that Paul was an apostle. Based on this truth, we can conclude that only apostles could give gifts; for if non-apostles could give spiritual gifts, then Corinth could not have been used by Paul as a seal of his apostleship.

THE NATURE OF GIFTS

Each of the nine gifts was beneficial in the infant Corinthian church. At that time, God's revelation had not been completed; His Word had not been recorded. It needed confirmation. Therefore, gifts within the believing community

⁶Also, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit should be kept distinct from the miraculous gifts. The indwelling Spirit is received by all Christians as a confirmation of sonship, while the miraculous gifts were only given through the laying on of the apostles' hands.

⁷Owen D. Olbricht, *Baptism: New Birth or Empty Ritual?* (Delight, Ark.: Gospel Light Publishing Co., 1994), 141–42.

were useful for the instructing and strengthening of these new Christians.

The gift of the “word of wisdom” (1 Corinthians 12:8), which was divinely imparted through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11), is different from that which comes through human effort and ability. Paul emphasized this distinction:

And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory (1 Corinthians 2:4–7).

... not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, ... (1 Corinthians 2:13).

The “word of wisdom” Paul had in mind was not human wisdom, but God’s wisdom imparted by the Spirit.

“The word of knowledge” (1 Corinthians 12:8), like wisdom, was divinely imparted knowledge (Gk.: *gnosis*).⁸ This knowledge along with wisdom was hidden in Christ (Colossians 2:2, 3) and remained a mystery until it was revealed through the Spirit (Ephesians 3:3–5). Another kind of knowledge mentioned in the Bible is that which can be arrived at through human reasoning or human experience (Gk.: *sunioda*; Acts 5:2). Instead of human knowledge, the “word of knowledge” is the “knowledge of God” that, along with wisdom, can be known only through revelation (Romans 11:33).

The “faith” given by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9) differs from faith arrived at through the study of God’s Word (Acts 17:11, 12; Romans 10:17). It also differs from the body of teaching revealed through God’s Word (Galatians 3:23; Philippians 1:27; 1 Timothy 3:9; Jude 3). The Spirit gave this faith as a gift through which supernatural powers were made available to those who received such faith (1 Corinthians

⁸Luke 1:77; 11:52; Romans 2:20; 11:33; 15:14; 1 Corinthians 1:5; 13:2, 8; 14:6; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 4:6; 8:7.

12:11; 13:2).

“Gifts of healing” and “effecting of miracles” (1 Corinthians 12:9, 10) were also gifts of the Spirit. These gifts empowered the recipients to go beyond human ability in ministering to the sick.

“Prophecy” and “distinguishing of spirits” are related to the revelation of God’s Word (1 Corinthians 12:10). During the pre-Christian period, God revealed His Word by the Spirit through the Old Testament prophets (2 Peter 1:20, 21). God’s Word was not given to everyone for even in the New Covenant Age He limited His revelation through the Spirit to the apostles and prophets alone. Only by reading what they have written can others learn God’s revelation (Ephesians 3:3–5).

Those who could distinguish spirits were given that gift by the Spirit so that they could distinguish between true and false teachers (1 Corinthians 12:10; 14:29).

At the bottom of the list is “various kinds of tongues” and “interpretation of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:10). The recipients of these gifts could either speak in languages they had not studied or could interpret languages they had neither previously known nor learned.⁹

The purpose of the gifts was not the glorification of the Spirit or the ones to whom He gave the gifts. Jesus said concerning the Spirit, “He shall glorify Me” (John 16:14a). Any teaching or practice that brings more glory to an individual or to the Holy Spirit than to Jesus is inconsistent with the purpose and work of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

Spiritual gifts were given to the immature church so that it could grow to maturity, become established in the faith, and be edified. Gifts were entrusted with the apostles. They were distributed by the Spirit, according to His will, through the hands of the apostles. The gifts were given to infant Christians to help them mature in the faith. Glory was to be given to Jesus, rather than glorifying the Holy Spirit or the ones to whom the gifts were given. ■

⁹A discussion of tongue-speaking begins on page 37.