

SPIRITUAL GIFTS, Part 2

By way of review we said that every believer receives at least one spiritual gift, and some receive more than one. These spiritual gifts are for the purpose of executing God's plan for your life to His glory. In the exercise of your spiritual gift(s) you will be executing the work that God has for you to do. The product of this "work" will be "divine good" as opposed to "human good". We define human good is work done in the power of the flesh for the purpose of personal glorification. It is neither initiated by God nor does it glorify God even if the results are positive. Divine good, on the other hand, is work that is done by the believer in the leading and the power of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of furthering God's plan and glorifying Him. Divine good builds up the Church (1 Cor 12:7).

These spiritual gifts are the main function of the believer's spiritual life. They are what God is calling each believer to do for Him. Each gift is sovereignly issued to the believer, according to God's will, not according to your desires. It is the function of your spiritual gifts that will be the main topic of discussion between you and God at the Bema judgment after resurrection. How you used the logistical assets that God supplied to you for the function of your spiritual gifts and their results will be what gets evaluated. Wood, hay, and straw (human good) gets burned as useless. Gold, silver, and precious stones (divine good) passes the fire test and is rewarded in eternity (1 Cor 3:10-15).

Understand that divine good is not limited to only the product of the believer's spiritual gifts. A believer can perform works that would qualify as divine good that are totally apart from the function of his spiritual gift. The qualifier for divine good is always motivation; was it Spirit-led and enabled?

In our last session we looked at a list of spiritual gifts and briefly defined them. As I previously mentioned, there were some spiritual gifts not among those we discussed. I held them back because I felt they deserved special attention. Why I felt that way will become evident shortly. They remaining gifts are:

Apostle – (Apostolos) - A delegate or ambassador of the gospel. A messenger, he that is sent. It is the gift whereby the Spirit appointed certain Christians to lead, inspire and develop the churches of God by the

proclamation and the teaching of true doctrine. See Acts 12:1-5, Acts 14:21-23. We generally take the position that those who had this gift were limited to the 12 during the first century.

Knowledge – (Gnosis) - Primarily a seeking to know, an inquiry especially of spiritual truth. It is the special gift whereby the Spirit enables certain Christians to understand, in an exceptional way, the great truths of God's Word and to make them relevant to specific situations in the church. These so gifted would have great perspicacity regarding revealed spiritual truths. (Ephesians 3:14-19)

Prophet – (Prophetesia) - Signifies the speaking forth of the mind and counsel of God (pro - forth, phemi - to speak). Primarily FOREtelling in the O.T. and FORTHtelling in the N.T. Edifies, exhorts, consoles. Also to edify the church. It is the special gift whereby the Spirit empowers certain Christians to interpret and apply God's revelation in a given situation. It may be in regard to some future event, such as say the rapture or end times, but I can also be simply the interpreting some revelation from God (1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 1 Corinthians 14:30-33, 1 Corinthians 14:37-40)

Effecting of Miracles - (Energema) - An effect, operation or working. (Dunamis) - Force, specific miraculous power not produced by natural agents or means. A sign gift. Miracles were acts performed by Christians that were well beyond the limits of natural phenomena or explanation. To be a miracle, it must have been something that could not have happened by any normal or logical means.

Healing – (Lama) - A cure, the effect. Signifies a means of healing. Plural in 1 Cor. 12:9. Another sign gift. It is the special gift whereby the Spirit employs certain Christians to restore health to the sick. Such healing is accomplished apart from any human intervention beyond touching or a command to be healed. (James 5:13-16, Luke 9:1-2)

Tongues - (Glossa) - A language that is unlearned. A special gift whereby the Spirit enables certain believers to speak in human languages that he does not know, does not speak, or even understand.

Interpretation of Tongues - (Hermenia) - Translation. Explaining the meaning of words in another language. In our context, this is a special gift

that allows a believer to understand and explain what is being said by another who is speaking in tongues (Glossa).

What makes these seven spiritual gifts extra special is that they no longer function in the Church today. While some denominations claim they remain functional and even “practice them,” that does not alter the truth that whatever so-called manifestations of these gifts they are experiencing is not legitimate, and in some cases are demonically driven. The reasons they are not legitimate today are somewhat varied. They all served specific functions in the early apostolic period of the Church., and most served the purpose of helping to establish the early Christian Church. Once they were no longer needed for that purpose they were removed.

Specifically, the gifts of apostles, prophets, miracles, knowledge, and healing were all gifts given to believers by the Holy Spirit during the apostolic period of the Church Age in the first century AD. They served specific first century needs as a transition from the interrupted Age of Israel to the mystery doctrines of the Church Age. This new Age of Grace represented a radical departure from the previous Age of the Law. Israel was to go under divine discipline for its religious apostasy, rejection of Messiah, and blaspheming the Holy Spirit by accusing Jesus of performing miracles in the power of Satan. They would be destroyed as a nation (70 AD), and be dispersed among the nations, which as of now is some 2,000 years.

God’s plan would go forward in spite of Israel’s failure. Their rejected Messiah was given to the gentiles instead. This new age or dispensation (the word means administration or stewardship in the Greek) represented a change from the way God dealt with mankind, which was a change from the Law to grace. The doctrines establishing what was being offered and required under the Age of Grace were not yet fully revealed much less disseminated among the rapidly growing Church. That process would take until about 96 AD or a little later when the last book of the canon of Scripture, Revelation, would be written and fully disseminated to the various churches. Until the canon of Scripture was complete, revealing all of God’s plan for the Church Age, and disseminated, there was a need for certain gifts to fill that void. Those gifts were apostles, prophets, miracles, healing, and knowledge.

In addition to these five gifts there are two more, tongues and interpretation of tongues, which also functioned for part of this early apostolic church period. Their function was quite different from that of the other five temporary gifts. Tongues served a specific purpose to evangelize Israel and warn them of their impending discipline. Once Jerusalem fell in 70 AD tongues ceased as a spiritual gift, as their purpose was no longer needed. More on tongues later.

The Early Church

By the time of his death, Jesus had been teaching for three and a half years, and the message that the Messiah had come was already being carried well outside of Israel. After Pentecost the Church was growing, but nothing existed in written form to satisfy all the new convert's thirst and need for information. There was a lack of information available of how to function under this new system. Paul calls this information the "mystery". The Greek word is *musterion* /*moos-tay-ree-on*/ and means a hidden or secret thing that is revealed to those who have a right or need to know. The rituals of ancient fraternal orders, for example, were a *musterion* revealed only to its members.

Eph 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— ² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the **mystery was made known to me by revelation**, as I have written briefly. ⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into **the mystery of Christ**, ⁵ **which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit**. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Col 1:24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, **to make the word of God fully known**, ²⁶ **the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints**. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are **the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**. ²⁸ Him we

proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, **that we may present everyone mature in Christ.** ²⁹ **For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.**

The Gospels and Acts are believed to have been written around 70 AD. Romans and Galatians are dated between 50 and 65 AD. First and Second Corinthians were written in 56 and 57 AD respectively. Ephesians is thought to have been written about 61-63 AD. Philippians around 55 AD, and the date of Colossians is uncertain. First and Second Thessalonians were written about 51 or 52 AD. First and Second Timothy and Titus were probably around 62-70 AD; Philemon between 61 and 63 AD. Hebrews, James, and 1 Peter were written before 70 AD. If Peter wrote 2 Peter it was before his death, which is believed to be between 64 and 67 AD. First, Second, and Third John were written after the Gospel, if indeed John wrote all of them. Jude is believed to have been written around 80 AD, and Revelation is thought to have been completed as late as 95-96 AD.

If the Cross was in 30 AD, then we had a very long period of time between Pentecost and when the first of the books of the New Testament went into circulation — some twenty or more years. It would be 65 or more years from Pentecost before the entire canon of New Testament Scripture would be written and circulated. Since all of the New Testament that we take for granted today was not yet revealed, written down, or circulated until some 65 years after Pentecost, that left a huge doctrinal knowledge void that needed to be filled. Unbelievers needed to have the Gospel of Jesus Christ presented to them. Once converted these new believers understandably wanted and needed to know more. The Torah carried some of the weight, but much of what was to be the Christian Way of Life in the New Testament was not fully revealed and fully disseminated to all the Church for decades. Believers needed to know the doctrines necessary for them to fulfill the Christian Way of Life. God was obliged to get that information to them. He did that by using these specialized spiritual gifts to fill that void until the canon could be completed and disseminated. These five spiritual gifts were for the purpose of filling that scriptural void, to bridge the gap between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Once the void was filled by the completed canon of Scripture, these specialized gifts were no longer needed.

Meanwhile, this void left three specific problems that needed immediate addressing.

1. Get the mystery doctrines of the Church Age published. That is revealed to mankind by God.
2. Get them disseminated to the body of Christ as soon as possible. Lacking printing presses or email, this meant multiple hand-copied letters forwarded from church to church in cities all over the known world. The church at Corinth or Ephesus might receive a letter from Paul. A scribe there would make one or more hand copies of that letter, and those would be hand delivered to other nearby churches, and the process would be repeated until that letter to Corinth or Ephesus had made its way to all of Christendom. This was obviously a slow and laborious process.
3. Meanwhile, until that the New Testament canon was completed and fully disseminated, it was necessary to get enough information to the new churches for the Body of Christ to function properly as designed.

To those three we can add a fourth mission, and that is to grow the new church. All this was a tall order! It was these specialized spiritual gifts that God used to accomplish that mission and to fill the doctrinal void in the local churches until the completed canon became available.

How was that done? First the gospel needed to be spread. That responsibility fell first to the apostles (the 12) and some of the early disciples of Jesus. The gift of apostle was given to those who were charged with establishing the mystery doctrines of the Church Age and to develop and begin to build the Body of Christ by proclamation and the teaching of true doctrine. They were given special gifts of an impressive nature such as miracles, healing, knowledge, and tongues. These gifts of healing and miracles, in particular, functioned as their credentials. These gifts served the purpose of immediately drawing attention to them and establishing them as very special people, and most importantly, as someone speaking under the authority of God. That gave them a legitimacy that proved the divine source of what they were teaching. Apostles healed and performed miracles, or spoke in tongues – and unbelievers and believers listened! Wouldn't you?

Healing and Miracles

First, understand something about healing. It was never done for the purpose of healing alone, not even when done by Jesus during His

ministry. If that were its purpose, then Jesus was remiss in not healing the entire world. Think about it. Why did Jesus heal only some and not all? He certainly had the power to do that. Jesus used healing (and miracles) to establish His credentials as the Messiah, the anointed one from God—to draw the attention of the entire nation to himself and His message that the Kingdom was at hand and He was the promised Messiah.

The gifts of healing (and miracles) served the same purpose for those who were given those gifts during the apostolic period. Healing and other miracles performed by the apostles were solely for the purpose of establishing their credentials as one sent by God and to give their message that authority.

Acts 5:12 Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. ¹³ None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵ so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶ The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Acts 8:4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much joy in that city.

Acts 9:33 There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. ³⁴ And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. ³⁵ And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

Acts 28:8 It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on

him, healed him. ⁹ And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. ¹⁰ They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed.

Heb 2:3 It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Paul is said to have been a particularly gifted healer. He could heal the sick at will, often healing them simply by them touching items he had once used.

Acts 19:11 And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.

As he traveled from place to place among the gentiles, in each new location, this supernatural calling card established him as having authority from God. People listened to his message, the gospel spread, and the Church was rapidly being built.

Rom 15:19 Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

But as early as 62 AD, he could not heal even his dear friend Epaphroditus.

Phill 2:25 I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

In 2 Timothy we see reference to another failure by Paul to heal by the gift of healing.

2 Tim 4:20 Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick.

These gifts of healing and miracles were temporary. By that time, Paul's credentials were fully established, and the more spectacular gifts had been removed. Having served their purpose, there was no more need for them. HOWEVER, though the gifts themselves were removed (more on that later) God still performs miracles and healings today. While televangelists do not, God still does. Feel free to pray for healings and miracles.

Knowledge

Prior to Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit as tongues of fire, the apostles were really quite ignorant. That sounds harsh, but that is exactly the way they depicted themselves in their own writings.

John 13:5 Then he (Jesus) poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I am doing **you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.**" ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

When Jesus washed their feet in the upper room and taught them about service to others and the need for the "washing away" of sin through the partial washing of confession after salvation. Peter didn't get it. When Peter protests that he needs a whole bath, Jesus replied that he needs only partial washing — "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean..." (John 13:10). He then points out that one of them is not clean, "For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'" (John

13:11) Jesus was pointing out the difference between the whole washing of regeneration, Peter was washed but Judas was not, and the partial washing for our daily failures.

In verse 7 Jesus said, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Pentecost was what Jesus was referring to when the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and His illumination ministry came upon them as tongues of flame, and they began to understand all that Jesus had been trying to teach them.

John 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

Their minds cleared of fog, and it all suddenly started making sense to them! As a result, they became a fountainhead of information.

But that wasn't enough. The church desperately needed the mystery doctrine and lots of it. That came first through the apostles and early disciples who were the first church planters, as they conveyed the doctrines by word of mouth or letters. But there were so few apostles! To help fill in the void God gave the gift of knowledge to members of the small groups forming as local churches. Those with this gift received direct revelation from the Holy Spirit concerning the mystery doctrines of the Church Age. They in turn communicated these revealed doctrines to their local churches. If a letter was received from Paul or Peter or John, these with the gift of knowledge had the responsibility of interpreting the doctrines in that letter and communicating them to the local church. These men were likely also gifted as pastor/teachers and functioned as such (multiple spiritual gifts). The apostles and writers of the Scriptures also had this gift.

Prophecy

God had taken care of getting the doctrines needed for the Christian way of life out to the new church, but He had much more to reveal about the future. There was a huge amount of eschatology that God planned to reveal to the Church. While the gifts of apostle and knowledge focused on revealing the many mystery doctrines of the Church Age, the gift of prophecy focused on future things, revealing all that God wanted them to know about what was coming. John was certainly gifted in this manner, but he was the last of those so gifted. Once the Revelation of Jesus Christ was given to John on the island of Patmos around 95 AD, this gift ceased to function. God had revealed all that He wanted to reveal. Mankind then had the complete and revealed plan of God in the fully revealed canon of Scripture. There has been no legitimate prophets since John died. Under the Law, the measure of a true prophet is 100% accuracy! Anything less was not a true prophet from God, and those without a perfect batting average were promptly stoned to death as called for under the Law.

Once the canon was completed, direct revelation from God ceased. And once the church became established and the apostles died off, that gift of apostle ceased and was completely replaced by evangelists and pastor/teachers to continue the spread of all the New Testament mystery doctrines already revealed.

Discerning Spirits

There is another spiritual gift called “discerning spirits.” There is some debate surrounding this one. Some say it was an apostolic period gift for the purpose of determining the source of doctrine as true from God or false from Satan and is not active today. A person gifted with discerning spirits could easily tell if the information was from the Holy Spirit or from some evil spirit. He was the “watchdog” of the local church who identified false teachers teaching false doctrine, and there were many such in those early days. We may be seeing it demonstrated in Acts 5 with the Ananias and Sapphira incident. Peter seemed to know that the two were not telling the truth.

Some commentators believe this gift still functions today, perhaps in a more limited form. I tend to side with the argument that it is an extinct spiritual gift whose purpose was to protect early churches from false doctrine. Today we have Scripture to which we can gauge the truth of the

teachings of someone. But we must be ourselves knowledgeable of what is in Scripture through diligent study in order to discern false teachings. We must weigh anything we hear by searching the Word ourselves to confirm its veracity.

Less spectacular but no less important are gifts that are still active today such as pastor, teacher, evangelist, helps, giving, ministering to others, and administration. Others not listed in Scripture are I believe created by God as the need arises. God has work for you to do and has given you at least one spiritual gift for that purpose.

We are not finished with our study of spiritual gifts. We still have tongues and the interpretation of tongues to go. More on this subject next session.