



wisdom
knowledge
miracles healing
tongues prophecy
interpretation
faith discerning
spirits

the gifts
of the
Holy
Spirit

brian brodersen

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

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Published by Back to Basics
a resource ministry of Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa
3800 South Fairview Road
Santa Ana, CA 92704

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ISBN 0-97000218-1-X

Printed in the United States of America

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

To the church in Corinth the apostle Paul wrote, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant” (1 Corinthians 12:1). Yet, there is perhaps no greater area of ignorance and confusion 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:

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

¹ *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary 1 Corinthians*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1984, pp. 297–298.

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This statement is representative of the view held by a large number of Evangelical leaders today.

You find the other extreme 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 some Charismatic meetings today, you can find people “laughing” like hyenas, “barking” like dogs, “clucking” like chickens, “mooing” like cows, and “roaring” like lions; all of these supposedly under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Some are falling down, claiming that they are “drunk in the Spirit.” Others are claiming that people are being “divinely” sprinkled with gold dust during worship; or that precious gems like diamonds are mysteriously appearing around the worship centers. There are even reports of angel’s feathers floating down from heaven upon the worshipers! All of this stuff is crazy! How anyone could attribute these bizarre behaviors to the Holy Spirit is beyond me.

As much as I reject the claim that God is getting His people 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 served to hinder 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 by attributing obviously foolish behavior 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.

My wife Cheryl and I were doing a Q & A session awhile back where a person asked how they should respond to some Christian friends who were claiming all kinds of bizarre activity was the work of the Holy Spirit. Cheryl gave the right answer, saying “Tell them if it’s not found in the Scriptures, don’t get involved in it.” That’s the best counsel to be given. The Bible marks the boundary of where we go in the realm of spiritual experience. If we remember that, we’ll avoid getting sucked into bizarre and unhealthy spiritual activities.

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 through their lives. Since the gifts are given for the profit

of all, we should “earnestly desire the best gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:31).

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 are not the permanent possession of any believer, but rather the potential experience of every believer. The one exception might be 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 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 to have 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 3:34). To each of us however, “a measure of faith” (Romans 12:3) 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 the gift of prophecy. All believers are potential recipients and vessels of these gifts. They are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and since we, the church, are “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19a), we can expect that He will manifest Himself through us.

The word of wisdom

This gift is the impartation of divine wisdom by the immediate intervention of the Holy Spirit. I have experienced this gift operating many times in the course of pastoral counseling. A good way to define this gift is “God’s solution to a seemingly impossible problem.”

We can see this gift in operation during the ministry of the apostles in chapter six of the book of Acts. A very sensitive dispute had arisen between two different cultural groups: the Hebraic Jews and the Hellenistic Jews. The Hellenistic Jews felt that they were being discriminated against so they took their complaint to the apostles. The apostles came up with a plan, a plan so brilliant that it was obvious that God had intervened and had given them the wisdom to resolve the problem between their two cultures.

Recorded in Acts 15 is another difficulty over the relationship of the Gentiles to the Law of Moses. Once again, we see God giving wisdom to the apostles to settle the differences in the church. As the conflict was resolved, verse 31 says that the believers “rejoiced” and they were encouraged. This is the result of divine wisdom!

Just as those in the early church were often faced with problems beyond their natural ability to resolve, so we are faced with similar problems today. Whether they are difficulties in a church, which call for divine wisdom, or problems in our everyday lives relating to our families, our health, our jobs, or our finances, we can depend on God to give us wisdom.

How does the word of wisdom function? You can receive a word of wisdom directly by reading the Scriptures; God may speak to another Christian to tell you something that He wants you to know, or the Holy Spirit can impress a solution to the problem upon your own mind. Quite often, the word of wisdom comes right from the pulpit as the pastor is teaching the Word of God. Let me give you an example of what I mean. Let’s say that you have a problem without an obvious answer. You may be praying about it, you may be searching the Scriptures, but you just cannot resolve what seems to be an impossible situation. Then you go to a meeting where the Scriptures are being taught. The pastor asks the congregation to turn

to a text in the Bible. As you read it, you think to yourself, “Oh, this isn’t what I need to hear. I know this passage, and it is not relevant to my situation. Lord, I was really hoping to hear from You.” At this point, your hope of ever resolving the problem fades. Yet, as you listen, suddenly the message begins to go in a direction that you never anticipated. Before you know it, it seems like everyone has left the room and it is just you and God. He is giving you the exact information you need to deal with your problem. This is often how we receive the word of wisdom.

I have been on both the giving end and the receiving end of this gift. Sometimes the one on the giving end will have no idea what is taking place, but the one on the receiving end certainly does! At other times, the person extending this gift may sense the presence of the Holy Spirit in a special way and feel that He is moving them as they are speaking. Not only does this happen with pastors from the pulpit, it also happens with individual believers as they fellowship, admonish, and pray for one another. This is how the gifts of the Spirit operate.

The Word of Knowledge

This gift is not divine assistance in the accumulation of knowledge, but rather knowledge previously unknown which is supernaturally

and instantly imparted to the believer by the Holy Spirit. Jesus often manifested the word of knowledge. In chapter 1 of the Gospel of John, Philip brought Nathanael to Jesus and He said to Nathanael, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” Nathanael responded by saying, “How do You know me?” Jesus said, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you” (John 1:47-48). Now, Jesus had not actually seen Nathanael, but He had knowledge of him. It was information about something that could not have been known naturally.

On another occasion, Jesus manifested the word of knowledge when He sent Peter down to the Sea of Galilee. He told Peter that the first fish he caught would have a coin in its mouth, which would pay the taxes for both of them. (See Matthew 17:27.)

In Old Testament times, we see this gift operating in the ministry of Elisha the prophet. He was able to tell his servant the very things that he had done, although he had no natural knowledge of them. (See 2 Kings 5:1–27.)

He was also able to foil the plans of the king of Syria to such an extent that the king was convinced that he had a spy in his midst. A man in the service of the king said that his men were not spies but that Elisha, the prophet in Israel, knew what the king said in his

bedroom. (See 2 Kings 6:12.) This was a manifestation of the word of knowledge.

Some people argue that the gifts of the Spirit did not operate in the Old Testament for the Holy Spirit had not yet been given. It is true that the Spirit had not yet been poured out upon all flesh, which was the promise of the New Covenant (Acts 2:17), but He certainly came upon individuals. How else could they have been categorized as prophets?

The word of knowledge manifested in the Old Testament through Elisha, and in the ministry of Jesus, is a gift that believers can experience today. I have received the gift of knowledge on several occasions while teaching the Word of God, as the Holy Spirit suddenly illuminated to me the exact meaning of a difficult text. I once received a word of knowledge concerning a strange illness that was afflicting one of my children. The moment I looked at him, I knew what was wrong and I phoned the doctor and told him. He was very skeptical. Nevertheless, he wanted me to bring him into the office to run some tests. Sure enough, the diagnosis the Lord gave to me was accurate, and it saved my son from what could have become a chronic and potentially fatal condition.

My wife also has experienced many times when the word of

knowledge has come through her to benefit others. While leading in prayer at a conference for women, she suddenly had an image in her mind of a small, black bag in which someone was storing bitterness. After describing what she had seen, a woman approached her in tears, saying, “I am the one you were referring to. My mother died recently, and I have been bitter toward God. I have been keeping her ashes in a small black bag!” God used this word of knowledge to assure this woman that He was aware of her pain. It was the knowledge of His concern for her that set her free.

Faith

The gift of faith is not the same as saving faith. All believers in Christ have saving faith, or they would not be Christians. The apostle Paul says concerning this, “to another [is given the gift of] faith” (1 Corinthians 12:9) [emphasis mine], indicating that not all have this gift. If the gift of faith is not the same as saving faith, then what is it? I think a good way to describe the gift of faith is that it is “special faith” or “faith to accomplish the extraordinary.”

We have an example of this kind of faith in the Old Testament in the behavior of Jonathan, the son of King Saul. One morning, Jonathan awoke with the thought that the Lord did not need the entire Israeli army to conquer the Philistines. He said to his

armorbearer, “For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few” (1 Samuel 14:6). This conclusion led Jonathan to take a step of faith that resulted in a great victory over the Philistines. The important thing to remember is that this was an extraordinary event. Jonathan did not go out alone against the enemy on a regular basis, but on this occasion, he had the gift of faith.

In the New Testament, we find this gift working through the apostle Peter. As he fixed his eyes on a lame man, Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6). This was not a regular occurrence; it was an extraordinary event. In an instant, Peter was given the faith to take that lame man by the hand, pronounce him healed, and pull him to his feet.

Likewise, we can experience the gift of faith today. We may find ourselves suddenly filled with absolute confidence that God not only can do something extraordinary, but that He will do it. We can proclaim in confidence that it will be done, and it is! For instance, we may ask God to heal someone, and suddenly God fills us with the confidence to pronounce that they are healed, and they are. This is the gift of faith. We can ask so Christ might be glorified through this event. Even though what we ask for is humanly impossible, we can be filled with an unshakeable confidence that the things we ask for

by faith are ours, so we receive them. (See Matthew 21:22.) These outbursts of faith are not the normal experience of the believer, but instead they are occasions where our sovereign God fills us with faith and then honors that faith to bring Himself glory.

Healing

The gift of healing is probably the most sought after of all the spiritual gifts. At one time or another, we have all longed to be healed or to see someone we know healed. What exactly is the gift of healing? Does healing still take place today? Do all of the people who claim to be anointed by God to heal the sick have this gift? Has the rise in modern medical technology replaced the need for divine healing? These are all questions that must be addressed when considering the subject of healing.

Let's first look at what the word healing means according to the Bible. Healing is the restoration of the body from a state of damage or disease, to a state of wholeness. When the Bible refers to Jesus, or to one of the apostles healing the sick, it means that the sick were restored to health by the miraculous intervention of God. Jesus said to the disciples of John the Baptist, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind receive their sight and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear" (Matthew 11:4-5).

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Luke tells us in the book of Acts that when Peter said to the lame man, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk ... immediately his feet and anklebones received strength” (Acts 3:6-7). That is the gift of healing! Whether instant or gradual, when God heals, the sick are made well.

Does healing still take place today? There is certainly nothing in Scripture that would indicate otherwise. And since “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8), I think we can say with confidence that just as He healed people while He was on earth, He still heals people today. Sometimes He uses human instruments; sometimes He heals completely independent of any human agency.

This brings us to the issue of people being anointed by God to heal the sick. Are there people who have been given “healing ministries”? Are there people who can simply choose to heal anyone, anywhere, at anytime? I think all of the evidence is against this. As I pointed out earlier, there is no biblical basis for anyone permanently possessing any of these gifts, with the exception of tongues. Although some might have a more frequent manifestation of some of the spiritual gifts, there is nothing in Scripture that indicates someone could have a permanent gift of healing, which they could exercise at anytime they choose. Therefore, you do not need to make

special plans to go and see that self-acclaimed “healing evangelist.” Instead, you can “call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord . . . that you may be healed” (James 5:14, 16). As believers, we are all channels through which the gift of healing might work.

Some people say that the gift of healing is now being manifested through modern medical technology and that we should not look for supernatural healing to take place. The important matter when it comes to issues like this is, “What do the Scriptures say?” As far as I can see, the Bible says nothing about “the supernatural” being superseded by “the natural.” Medicine falls into the realm of the natural; the gift of healing is in the realm of the supernatural. Unfortunately, there are those in the church who seem to want to eliminate anything supernatural, but they do so in contradiction of the Scriptures rather than in agreement with them! Granted, medicine has made great strides since the days of Jesus and the apostles, but it is still a long way from eradicating sickness and disease. Although we thank God for modern medical technology, we recognize the ongoing need for divine intervention.

Be assured that God is still supernaturally healing people. Although I have never been miraculously healed, I have seen people healed through a simple prayer. I personally know of two

people who were instantly healed of terminal cancer. One is still going strong after fifteen years! We thank God for the gift of healing. Like all of the gifts, it is given for the edification of the people of God.

Miracles

A miracle is when God operates according to laws that are higher than the laws of nature. We have many examples of miracles in the Bible. In the book of Exodus, God parted the Red Sea for the children of Israel; He provided manna from heaven for them in the wilderness. As the Israelites continued to wander in the desert, the Lord led Moses to strike the rock and water gushed out for the thirsty people to drink. In the book of 2 Kings, Elisha brought the son of the Shunammite woman back to life; he also caused an axe head to float in the water! These are only a few of the Old Testament examples; the list could go on and on. As we look at the New Testament, we see Jesus turned water into wine, He multiplied the loaves of bread and fish to feed over five thousand people, and He also raised Lazarus from the dead. Our God is truly the God of the miraculous.

Do miracles still happen today? The Christian should say, “Yes, indeed, miracles are still taking place.” But, what if you have never

seen a miracle? Does that prove that miracles do not occur in our modern world? No, it does not! Just because you have not seen one, does not prove that they are not still happening today. My confidence in the miraculous is based on the inspired Word of God, not on limited human experience.

Prophecy

Prophecy is a direct word from God, resulting in “edification and exhortation and comfort” (1 Corinthians 14:3). When someone is prophesying, they are speaking under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Those who teach and preach the Word of God in reliance upon the Holy Spirit will quite often experience the gift of prophecy in their ministry. This does not mean that those who are not in a teaching position cannot receive the gift of prophecy. As we have already stated, any believer can potentially manifest any one of the gifts of the Spirit. Prophecy can come through someone simply quoting a Scripture or by passing on a phrase or an idea that God has impressed on his or her mind.

In my own experience, prophecy has often been God’s way of confirming something to me that He has already put upon my heart. Let me give you an example:

Some years ago, I felt that God was calling me to take a step of faith that could possibly change the course of my life. I was willing to do it, but I needed confirmation that it was actually God who was leading me, and not just my imagination or desire.

One Sunday morning I felt a decision had to be made, so before I left for church, I cried out to God and said, "Lord, You have got to show me what You want to do!"

At that time, we had three services on Sunday morning, and during each of the services, a few people would gather to pray for me while I preached. In between the first and second services, one of the men who faithfully prayed for me approached me and asked if he could talk to me privately. I said, "Sure." As we stepped aside to talk, he told me that he had a real struggle during his prayer time for me that morning and that God wanted him to tell me something. He was actually very nervous because he had never done anything like this before. Basically, God told him

to tell me to do what God had put upon my heart. The amazing thing is that this man had absolutely no idea what I was going through. In fact, after he shared with me, he asked, “Does this make any sense?” I assured him that it did, and I thanked him for being bold enough to come to me. That was prophecy in action!

Many years ago, my father-in-law met with the elders of a small church called Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, that had twenty-five members or so at the time. They were stunned when he told them that the first thing he would do if he were to become their pastor would be to remodel the platform in front of the church. The reason for the surprise and elation was prior to his coming, someone had received a prophecy that the pastor God appointed would want to remodel the platform at the front of the church! The Lord also said that this church would relocate onto a bluff overlooking the sea. That seemed strange because at the time the church was on a side street about five miles from the ocean. A few years later, the church outgrew its facility and moved to a building on a bluff overlooking the sea! It was also prophesied that from that little church, the Gospel would be spread all over the world. Forty-five years and 1,500 churches later, that prophecy has proven indeed to have been from God!

Prophecy is an incredible gift, and we can see why the apostle Paul said, “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy” (1 Corinthians 14:1).

As wonderful as the gift of prophecy is, there are those in the Charismatic movement who have given prophecy a bad name. I would be delinquent in my responsibility as a pastor if I did not address some of these issues.

Among the Charismatics, prophesying or being prophesied over is a great obsession. Everyone seems to be looking to give or to receive a word. A word is something that has come into the mind of a person, presumably from God, and is to be passed on to others. Sometimes it is a word for an individual; sometimes it is for an entire congregation, and sometimes for the church universal. Often, these alleged prophecies contradict Scripture; some refer to God’s plan to bring nations and kings groveling in repentance at the feet of a mighty spiritual army which will be raised up in these last days to usher in the kingdom of God. Of course, people in this movement are longing for a “piece of the action” and they are hoping for a word that they are one of the chosen members of this mighty spiritual army.

Not only that, we are presently hearing claims that God has raised up generals, or “mighty men of God” who are said to be a new

generation of prophets to lead this mighty army. Some even say that this new generation of prophets is superior to the original apostles of Jesus Christ! Prophets and prophecy are the “buzzwords” of the Charismatic movement as we enter the new millennium.

What conclusions are we to draw from all of this? Should we expect a word from the Lord every time we meet together in fellowship and in the study of the Word of God? Is there really a new generation of prophets being raised up today?

Let me begin answering these questions by sharing my own experience. After thirty years of pastoral ministry, I have probably received no more than ten prophecies. By prophecy I mean, “a word directly from the Lord through an individual.” Now this does not mean that only ten people have ever approached me with “a word” presumably from the Lord. I have had that happen many times over the years. Unfortunately, most of these acclaimed words from the Lord turned out to be nothing more than the wild imaginations of man! I am certain that the majority of words given in Charismatic circles are just that. How do I know this? I know it because many of those in the Charismatic movement have a low regard for the written Word of God. They might deny this charge, but it is true. All you have to do is observe them in action to verify it. They will quote a verse here and there, but it is merely a springboard into their “pet”

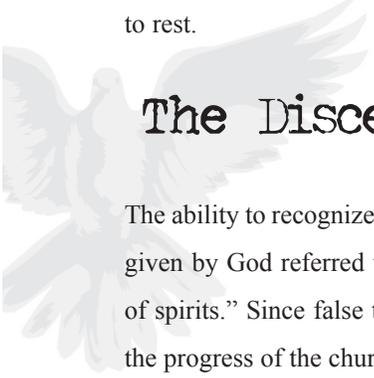
doctrines, generally those that emphasize miraculous power and material prosperity. Since they obviously have a low regard for the written Word and God says He has “magnified [His] Word above [His] Name” (Psalm 138:2), I conclude that God has nothing to say to people who have little interest in what He’s said in His Word! Lest you think that this is merely my opinion, read what God has to say through the prophet Isaiah: “But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who *trembles at My word*” (Isaiah 66:2) [emphasis mine].

“The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?” says the LORD. “Is not My word like a fire?” says the LORD, “And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?” (Jeremiah 23:28–29)

God certainly speaks to people today, but He does so, not exclusively, but primarily through His written Word. If we think God primarily speaks to us through other people, then we have totally misunderstood God’s main method of communication, and we are setting ourselves up to be greatly disappointed and even deceived! If we understand that God speaks to us primarily through His written Word, either expounded by His gifted servants or by the illumination

of the Holy Spirit as we meditate on it ourselves, then I believe we have every reason to expect God to speak to us daily.

Is there a new generation of prophets being raised up in these last days? I think we can safely conclude that this is not the case because those who are prophesying have already proven not to be prophets at all. Deuteronomy 18:22 makes it clear that a true prophet is accurate one hundred percent of the time. They have proved that they are false prophets by consistently predicting things that have not come to pass. (Great earthquakes at specific times and places; the collapse of specific governments; unprecedented revival at specific times and places. The many failed predictions from a variety of Charismatic leaders should be enough to put all of the confusion to rest.



The Discerning of Spirits

The ability to recognize false teaching and false teachers is an ability given by God referred to in 1 Corinthians 12:10 as the “discerning of spirits.” Since false teaching is one of the greatest hindrances to the progress of the church, God has given some believers the ability to discern error so that others might be warned and protected from being led astray. We desperately need the gift of discerning of spirits in these days of spiritual confusion. The apostle Paul had a strong

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gift of discernment in contrast to those who seemingly had no discernment at all, evidenced by the fact that some of the men in the Corinthian church welcomed as apostles were actually ministers of Satan. (See 2 Corinthians 11:12–15.)

In the book of Acts, we have a couple of examples of the discerning of spirits. The first is Peter’s discernment of the true spiritual condition of Simon. Although Simon had seemingly believed and was baptized, Peter saw that he was “poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity” and was seeking to use God to further his own agenda, as all false prophets do. (See Acts 8:9–25.) Another example is when Paul and the other disciples were in the city of Philippi, and a slave girl was following them shouting, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” The Bible says that she did this for many days and it greatly annoyed Paul so he turned to her and said, “I command [the demon] in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out that very hour” (Acts 16:16–18). Paul was exercising the gift of discernment because even though this girl was proclaiming truth, it was coming from the wrong source. Paul did not want Satan promoting him! With so many false prophets in the world today, how can we know the true from the false? By asking the Lord for the gift of the discerning of spirits and by staying in the Word of God!

Tongues

The gift of tongues is perhaps the most controversial and misunderstood of all the gifts of the Spirit. Some Pentecostal and Charismatics say that unless you speak in tongues, you have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit. A few even go to the extreme of saying that unless you speak in tongues, you are not even saved!

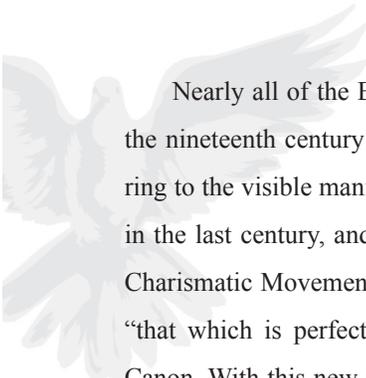
Those on the conservative Evangelical side say that those who speak in tongues are led by emotionalism, or that they are even being influenced by demons! With such extreme opinions, one might wonder if it would not, perhaps, be better to leave the whole issue alone and continue in the more important things of the kingdom. That might be an easier thing to do, but I do not think it would be the best thing to do. I think we would be at a disadvantage to disregard any of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, no matter how difficult the subject might be to approach.

What is the gift of tongues? Tongues is a language given by the Holy Spirit, unknown to the speaker, by which the believer prays to God. Paul describes this in 1 Corinthians 14:1–19. In the second chapter of the book of Acts we read, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). The text goes on to tell us that these people from a whole host of nations were confounded as they heard

the apostles speak in their own dialects. The miracle was that these Galileans were proclaiming in languages previously unknown to themselves the great things God had done. The word “speaking” in Acts 2:11 is translated from the Greek also as “preach” or “preaching.” Here we see a different operation of the gift of tongues. The apostles were preaching in an unknown tongue and in 1 Corinthians 14, the believers were praying in languages previously unknown to themselves. Although there are times when the gift is manifested like it was on the day of Pentecost, the more common manifestation seems to be the praying in tongues.

As we discuss the gift of tongues, a few misconceptions need to be addressed.

Are tongues for today? Much of modern Evangelicalism rejects the idea that tongues are for today, but they do so without any biblical basis. Scripture does not teach anywhere that tongues, or any of the other gifts of the Holy Spirit will cease before Christ returns. Paul the apostle said, “prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away ... when that which is perfect has come” (1 Corinthians 13:8, 10) [emphasis mine]. This means that the need for the gifts will come to an end when Jesus Christ returns to the earth, which has not happened yet!



Nearly all of the Bible commentaries written before the end of the nineteenth century interpreted “that which is perfect,” as referring to the visible manifestation of the kingdom of God. It was only in the last century, and largely as a reaction to the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, that many Evangelicals began to interpret “that which is perfect” as the completion of the New Testament Canon. With this new interpretation came the idea that certain gifts ceased with the death of the last apostle. Those who hold this view are known as “Cessationists” because of their belief that certain gifts have ceased with the death of the last apostle. Although they have put together a clever system of interpretation, they have completely failed to prove their position from a scriptural basis. Are tongues for today? In taking the Scriptures at face value, I have to conclude that yes, they are!

If tongues are for today, does that mean that every Christian is to speak in tongues? Not according to the apostle Paul. Many Pentecostals and Charismatics will tell you otherwise, but I would rather hold to Paul’s view inspired by the Holy Spirit. In the twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians, he asks a series of rhetorical questions, one of which is, “Do all speak with tongues?” Of course, the answer is, “No!” But just as the Cessationists have developed clever arguments to try to prove their view, so those from the Pentecostal and Charismatic persuasion have tried to deny Paul’s assertion that not

everyone will speak in tongues. If that is not what he meant, then he should have articulated more clearly, because that is certainly what he wrote.

The Holy Spirit has given the glorious gift of tongues for the edification of the believer and the Church. Paul clearly gives instruction in 1 Corinthians 14 on the purpose and proper use of this gift. If people would follow the teaching of the Scriptures on these matters, most, if not all of the confusion would be eliminated.

The Interpretation of Tongues

This gift obviously works in conjunction with the gift of tongues. Paul states that tongues are not to be exercised in the public assembly unless there is someone present with the gift of interpretation. (See 1 Corinthians 14:19.) Every time there is a public utterance in tongues, an interpretation should follow it.

A More Excellent Way

As we come to the end of our study of the gifts of the Spirit, a word about the supremacy of love is in order. As important as the gifts are, Paul says that if they are not exercised in love, they are meaningless! There is always the danger of putting the emphasis in the wrong

place and there are certainly times when this has happened with the gifts. We can get so interested in the gifts we want to exercise, that we lose sight of the Giver. Then, we are liable to become “as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1). Unless we keep Jesus at the forefront, pride will gradually take over; we will think we are more important than we really are, and people will get hurt. Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, [not by your wisdom, knowledge, faith, prophesying, miracles, or tongues, but] if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8).