

Tongues and Other Gifts of the Spirit

Many churches of the primitive or Pentecostal varieties rely heavily on manifestations of the Holy Spirit such as healing, speaking in tongues, etc. However, the Scriptural evidences regarding these things suggest that their use was designed for the establishment of fledgling Christianity and that their use now is an anachronism.

The primary Bible references regarding gifts of the Spirit are in the Book of Acts (where historical incidents of their use are recorded) and in chapters 12-14 of I Corinthians (where the Apostle discusses their function and purpose in the church). Perhaps, however, one of the most revealing texts on the subject is Romans 1:8-11.

Paul wanted to go to Rome so that he could give the Roman brethren a spiritual gift so that they might be "established." (Romans 1:11) We must remember that in the early days of the church there were no New Testament Scriptures. The early brethren (both Jews and especially Gentiles) had nothing as a guide for their doctrine, their organization, their behavior, or their responsibilities as Christians. God ordained the Apostles to set such things in order, and their writings (the New Testament Scriptures) EVENTUALLY formed the basis for learning all of these necessary things. But what were they to do meanwhile?

God Himself gave two (and ONLY two) baptisms of the Holy Spirit—one on the day of Pentecost to show the acceptance of Jewish Christians (Acts 2), and the other 3-1/2 years later in the house of Cornelius to show the acceptance of Gentile Christians (Acts 10).

Others (not in these two eventful accounts) had to receive the gifts of the spirit ONLY BY THE LAYING ON OF THE HANDS OF THE APOSTLES. These gifts were for the very purpose of giving the church much truth quickly in order to establish its beliefs and practices with authority until there were Scriptures which could do this work. This is why Paul wanted to go to Rome. He could not send the gifts; he could not pray that they would receive them; he had to BE THERE IN PERSON to give them these gifts. This was well-known at the time. This is why one man was (mistakenly) desirous of BUYING from Peter the power to give the gifts! (Acts 8:8-20)

Because of this, it is manifestly clear that the gifts of the spirit could no longer be passed on once all of the Apostles died. There would be NO NEED to pass on the gifts after that BECAUSE THE CHURCH WOULD BY THEN HAVE THE NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE AS ITS GUIDE. It would have been established and could, from that point, carry on by faith (instead of by the visible miracles) and by the written Word (instead of by the gifts of prophecy and knowledge). It is SO IMPORTANT to realize that this is why Paul said the gifts WOULD PERISH. (I Corinthians 13:8) He didn't mean sometime after Christ's second advent; he meant they would perish when the Bible was complete. This is what he

means when he says, "We know in part (we have the partial knowledge that comes from the miraculous gift of knowledge), and we prophesy in part (we teach based on the partial miraculous gift of prophecy). But when that which is perfect (whole) is come, (when the New Testament is finished) then that which is in part (the gifts) shall be done away." Why? Because Christian character and faithfulness never can be built on miracles. They must be built on faith and character development ("faith, hope, charity"). I Corinthians 13:9, 10, 13)

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Three I Corinthian chapters give some additional insights regarding these miraculous gifts of the spirit. I Corinthians 12 makes it clear that gifts were apportioned among church members to unify the early church (verses 12-27). Gifts included the Apostles (verse 28) who, like the miracles, healings, and tongues, were given all for the same purpose—to establish the church. Verse 31 shows that gifts were (at that time) to be desired, but that there was something much better, much more lasting, "a more excellent way."

Chapter 13 is used for the purpose of preparing the church to look for and to want the "more excellent way"—character development. In the first three verses Paul establishes the fact that gifts in themselves are "nothing." Then, through verse 7, he explains the objectives of developing perfect love as our characters. Beginning in verse 8 he explains that our character, if perfected, will never fail, but that the gifts will, indeed, vanish BECAUSE they are PARTIAL, incomplete—they do not result in true Christian character. In verse 11 he likens the church's experience to his own growing up. He plainly is saying that the early church with the gifts is like a child who would have to put away the toys (the gifts) that help educate him in his youthful years.

As the lesson passes into the 14th chapter, Paul returns to the then-prevalent gifts showing what should and should not be done with them:

verse 2: If tongues are not understood, they only make things mysterious.

verse 3: Prophecy (the gift of teaching) is very valuable at all times because it builds up others and gives them comfort.

verses 5-19: Any gift that does not make things clear and build character is being used unfruitfully.

verse 22: Tongues were given to help UNBELIEVERS understand, not as a witness to the believers!

verses 23-33: Any unruly or boisterous noisiness is not approved of God. Confusion is not of God; therefore, inappropriate use of tongues is contrary to God's will. (Verse 32: Those who have the gifts CAN and SHOULD control them!)

All of these items of Chapter 14 must be interpreted in the light of Chapter 13. In other words, Chapter 14 contains rules for when the church HAD the gifts. But they have long since passed away once the Apostles died. Chapter 14 no longer applies.

WHAT ABOUT GIFTS TODAY?

While many might feel offended, it seems, based on the Scriptural evidence as presented, that the so-called gifts or manifestation of the Spirit prevalent today must be fraudulent. We would not say that the people who experience them are less than honest; nor would we suggest that these "gifts" don't actually happen. It is, rather, that we suggest that the SOURCE of these manifestations is not God. Any number of Scriptures warn against deceptions, particularly in the last days. Our conclusion is that these manifestations are indeed predicted deceptions. They are designed by our adversary NOT to affect the eternal destiny of those who are deceived, but rather to keep them from progressing in truth.

(See Matthew 24:24, 25; II Corinthians 11:13-15; II Thessalonians 2:9-11; Revelation 16:14.)