

The Gifts of the Spirit

- Perhaps the most direct way we experience the work of the Holy Spirit is through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Concerning the gifts of the Spirit, let us plainly acknowledge a few facts about them from the Scriptures.
- First, every believer at least possesses one spiritual gift.
 - 1Peter 4:10 – As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:
 - 1Corinthians 7:7 – I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.
 - 1Corinthians 12:7 – To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
- Yet, it is possible for a person to possess more than one gift. For example, Paul was an Apostle, prophet, teacher, etc. However, it is clear that no one person possesses all of the gifts. Paul rhetorically asks.
 - 1Corinthians 12:29-30 – Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

What Are the Gifts of the Spirit?

- What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit?
- Well, the Scriptures give varying lists, which indicates that the lists are not necessarily meant to be exhaustive.
- There could be gifts not mentioned in the lists, such as discernment.
- We will quickly look at a few of the lists just to get a general idea of what gifts are mentioned.



What Are the Gifts of the Spirit?

- Romans 12:6-8 – Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7) if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8) the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.
- 1Corinthians 12:4-11 – Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5) and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6) and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7) To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8) For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9) to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10) to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11) All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

What Are the Gifts of the Spirit?

- Ephesians 4:11 – And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,
- 1Pe 4:10-11 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11) whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies--in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

What Are the Gifts of the Spirit?

- Some of these gifts sound like they can be talents.
- I suppose this necessitates a definitive distinction between the two.
- H.L. Willmington said it well when he wrote, "A talent is a human and natural ability given at birth.
- It may be in the area of music, speech, organization, etc. But no natural talent, however great it may be, can be used by its owner to glorify God until it is sanctioned by the Holy Spirit.
- When this occurs, the talent then may become a gift."
- In other words, talents come natural to us, but they are not special endowments from the Holy Spirit.
- Often some of the talents we were born with can be turned into gifts of the Spirit when we become Christians.
- However, there are many more abilities that we never had, but then receive at the Spirit's discretion. In these instances, the Christian knows the ability is a gift from the Holy Spirit.

Purpose of the Gifts

- We are not given the Spiritual gifts to simply have as play toys.
 - In fact, they are given to glorify the God since they are part of His creation.
 - Revelation 4:11 – "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."
- They are also given for the edification of the church.
 - Eph 4:11-13 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12) to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13) until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,



Purpose of the Gifts

- The gifts are given by the will of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with the purpose of God.
 - 1 Corinthians 12:11 – All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apports to each one individually as he wills.
 - Hebrews 2:4 – while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.
- This fact will be very instructive for the discussion that comes next.



Are the Sign Gifts Still Around?

- Much debate centers on specific gifts mentioned in the Scriptures.
- There are generally two groups of Christians in the controversy.
- There are those who believe certain gifts have ceased and no longer exist in the church today, and there are those who believe all gifts are still present in the church even today.
 - Cessationism vs. Continuationism.
- Those who argue for the ceasing of certain gifts separate the gifts into two categories: temporary sign gifts and permanent stationary gifts.
 - Of the former, there are seven: apostleship, prophecy, miracles, healing, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and special knowledge.
 - They justify the notion of these gifts as ceasing by stating they were meant to serve a purpose to the early church since they did not have the full Scriptures.



Continuationism

- Those who argue for the continuation of the seven sign gifts even to our day simply direct the inquirer to Acts 2, 8, 10, and 19.
- The use of the sign gifts was frequent throughout the first decades of church history.
- It could be argued that it is dangerous to claim arbitrarily that certain parts of the New Testament do not apply to believers today.
- Another argument stems from experience.
 - Many Christians today will fall back to their own experience in which they claim to have spoken in a tongue or been prophesied to.
- Finally, nowhere in the Scriptures do we see it forbidden.
- Instead, desiring the sign gifts of the Spirit are encouraged by 1 Corinthians 14:39.
 - 1 Corinthians 14:39 – So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.



Rebuttal to Continuationism

- Yet, the other side offers strong rebuttal arguments.
- When looking at the chapters cited in Acts concerning the gifts, the common denominator in each of them is the presence of an Apostle.
- In fact, three out of the four times we see the person of Peter.
- Therefore, these sign gifts may have been something that were given only to the Apostles and used specifically for the purpose of building the church. A few passages corroborate this line of reasoning.
 - 2 Corinthians 12:12 – The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.
 - Ephesians 2:20 – built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,
 - Hebrews 2:3-4 – how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? 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.

Rebuttal to Continuationism

- Looking closely at these, Paul in 2 Corinthians identifies the signs, wonders, and miracles as the signs of an apostle.
- Why would it be important for only the Apostles to have these gifts?
 - Ephesians 2:20 indicates that it was to create a foundation for the church.
- Finally, Hebrews 2:3-4 seem to indicate together that the gifts of miracles distributed by the will of God were to given to “those who heard” Christ – in other words, the Apostles since they were witnesses of Christ’s ministry.
 - Some charismatic groups claim to have apostles in their fellowship and so they attempt to get around this argument.
 - The problem with that, however, is Acts 1:21-22 made it clear that to be an Apostle you had to be witness of Christ’s ministry from His baptism by John, and chosen by Him directly for the position.
 - This verse stems from the Apostles replacing Judas after he hanged himself.

Rebuttal to Continuationism

- Acts 1:21-22 – So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22) beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”
- A person can object to Paul’s apostleship, the fact of the matter is that Christ appeared to Him in person numerous times, directly called Him to be an Apostle in His physical presence, and personally taught Paul just as He did the other Apostles.
- To seal the deal, He then gave Paul the “signs” of an Apostle as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:12. There are no Apostles today.



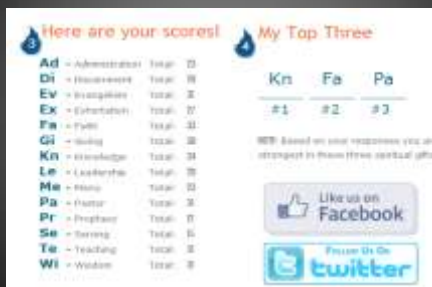
Rebuttal to Continuationism

- The argument from experience is a silly one to make.
- Experience is subjective, the Bible is objective.
- Often the people who claim to have these gifts completely misuse them, ignore everything the Scripture says about them, and falsely prophesy more than not.
 - How many times have I had a person make a prophesy to me that did not come true?
 - Each time this happened, they offered excuses for why it did not come to pass.
- Concerning tongues, contemporary studies suggest that Christian tongues do not display any characteristics of any known human language.
- Yet, every example given to us in the book of Acts demonstrates the tongues to be known languages.
 - A misinterpreted passage in 1 Corinthians 14 is what causes many charismatic believers to think their mindless babbling is tongues.

Rebuttal to Continuationism

- History also is against the continuation position.
 - The gifts disappear after the death of the apostles.
 - Only heretical groups claimed to have the gifts in the early centuries – Montanists and Novationists.
 - The same is true during the Reformation – Certain anabaptists.
 - The “gifts” only reemerged in the early 20th century in California, and the churches that come out of this movement do many unbiblical things like ordain women pastors.
 - Finally, the horrid chaos that takes place in many charismatic churches speaks volumes against this position. People bark like dogs, prosperity preaching occurs, and they offer classes on how to get particular gifts.
 - This is absurd since the Holy Spirit gives the gifts according to His will.
- In fairness, not all charismatic churches are like this.
- However, even the decent charismatic churches have to deal with the historical and theological arguments.

Spiritual Gift Tests?



Problems with Cessationism

- The claim that all sign gifts were only used by Apostles is a difficult claim to support since Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 indicates that the Corinthian believers were misusing such gifts.
 - He told them how to use them properly.
 - So prophecy and tongues were not just limited to the Apostles.
- Also, not all experiences of the gifts today are ridiculous like they are in the charismatic accounts.
 - I have heard of tongues where it was a human language used to preach to a person who otherwise would not have understood.
- Some reports from the mission fields also claim that miracles akin to the book of Acts are taking place as the church spreads rapidly in those lands.
 - Of course, no one I trust has substantiated these claims.

Problems with Cessationism

- The idea that the sign gifts have ceased is not a slam dunk case by Scripture, but requires “big-picture” reasoning.
 - Also it seems somewhat arbitrary to make two categories of gifts – the sign gifts vs. the service gifts. The Scriptures themselves never make that designation.
- For sure, the charismatics and Pentecostals completely misuse the sign gifts indicating that they do not truly possess them.
- Right now, I think the most scriptural and reasonable position is cessationism.
 - However, there is nothing in the Scripture that promised the gifts would cease during the church age. So I cannot be over dogmatic.

Conclusion

- The doctrine of Pneumatology is important and helpful.
- First, the Holy Spirit is God, and knowing God necessitates that we also know the Holy Spirit.
- Additionally, so much of the process of our salvation is wrapped up in the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Understanding how we grow spiritually, how we are able to serve diligently, and why our salvation is guaranteed from start to finish requires a thorough understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit.
- The Bible demonstrates that the third person of the Trinity has been active in the lives of men from the Old Testament times to now.
- Truly, this is a fascinating doctrine.