

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

CHAPTER 52

GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: (PART 1) GENERAL QUESTIONS



EXPLANATION OF SCRIPTURAL BASIS

A. Questions Regarding Spiritual Gifts in General

A spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church.

A. Questions Regarding Spiritual Gifts in General

1. Spiritual Gifts in the History of Redemption
2. The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts in the New Testament Age
3. How Many Gifts Are There?
4. Gifts May Vary in Strength
5. Do Christians Possess Gifts Temporarily or Permanently?
6. Are Gifts Miraculous or Nonmiraculous?
7. Discovering and Seeking Spiritual Gifts
8. Gifts Are Tools for Ministry, and Not Necessarily Related to Christian Maturity

1. Spiritual Gifts in the History of Redemption

- We see less activity of the Holy Spirit in the OT vs. NT
- Joel 2:28-29 prophecies of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit
- John the Baptist tells of one who “will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire”
- Jesus returns in the power of the Holy Spirit – Luke 4:14
- *Jesus has come in the greater new covenant power of the Holy Spirit, and he has come to conquer Satan’s kingdom.*
- Jesus promises that same power to his disciples – Acts 1:8

2. The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts in the New Testament Age

- *Spiritual gifts are given to equip the church to carry out its ministry until Christ returns.*
- Gifts equip the church to preach the gospel and the building up of the church
- Spiritual gifts are imperfect

3. How Many Gifts Are There?

- Refer to lists on pg. 1020
- This list is not exhaustive
- Classifying the gifts:
 - Prophetic or Priestly
 - Kingly or Knowledge
 - Power
 - Speech

3. How Many Gifts Are There?

- *The point of all of this is simply to say that God gives the church an amazing variety of spiritual gifts, and they are all tokens of his varied grace.*
- *God has put us in the body with these differences so that we might depend on each other.*

4. Gifts May Vary in Strength

- Paul teaches that we use our gifts “in proportion to our faith” Rom. 12:6
- Paul exhorts Timothy not to *neglect, rekindle and stir up* the gifts he has been given.

4. Gifts May Vary in Strength

- Variation in strength comes from both divine and human influence
- Divine through the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit
- Human through experience, training, wisdom and natural ability

5. Do Christians Possess Gifts Temporarily or Permanently?

“Therefore it seems that in general the New Testament indicates that people have spiritual gifts given to them and, once they have them, they are usually able to continue to use them over the course of their Christian life.” Pg. 1025

5. Do Christians Possess Gifts Temporarily or Permanently?

- Sometimes it seems that some gifts are not permanent, i.e. healing, prophecy
- We can neglect our gift and its use, either seeing it diminish or be taken away

5. Do Christians Possess Gifts Temporarily or Permanently?

Gifts of the Holy Spirit are just that, gifts. The Holy Spirit distributes as he chooses, these gifts are given for the benefit of the body, the building of God's Kingdom and ultimately for his glory. We may see them sometimes diminish or increase for a season depending on God's will and purpose.

6. Are Gifts Miraculous or Nonmiraculous?

- Definition of miracle important:

“a miracle is a less common activity of God in which he arouses people’s awe and wonder and bears witness to himself.”

Chapter 17, pp. 355-356

6. Are Gifts Miraculous or Nonmiraculous?

- Miraculous gifts: prophecy, healing, casting out of demons, speaking in tongues, miracles
- Nonmiraculous gifts: serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing (giving), acts of mercy, helpers, administration, leadership, etc.

6. Are Gifts Miraculous or Nonmiraculous?

- All are still gifts of the Holy Spirit
- We should avoid the distinction supernatural vs. natural, *“The Bible makes no such distinction.”*
- A desire for the manifestations of the Spirit should be driven by the motive of building up the church, not the thrill of the manifestation itself

7. Discovering and Seeking Spiritual Gifts

- Paul assumes that Christians will know and be aware of their gifts
- Leaders must be sure to provide an environment of opportunity for the gifts to be used

7. Discovering and Seeking Spiritual Gifts

- How do you discover or come to know the gifts you have?
 - Seek wisdom from God, James 1:5-6
 - Self examination, reflect on your desires, interests and abilities
 - Counsel from the elders or other mature believers
 - Earnestly desire the gifts, ask God for them
1 Cor. 12:31

7. Discovering and Seeking Spiritual Gifts

- *It is a fearful thing to want spiritual gifts or prominence in the church only for our own glory, not for the glory of God and for the help of others. Pg. 1030*
- Small groups are a good venue to practice and exercise your gifts.

8. Gifts Are Tools for Ministry, and Not Necessarily Related to Christian Maturity

- Gifts are for every believer
- They are not signs of maturity

8. Gifts Are Tools for Ministry, and Not Necessarily Related to Christian Maturity

Caution: We cannot consider God's choice to give a gift or use someone in a special way for His purposes as an endorsement of their theology or lifestyle.

B. Have Some Gifts Ceased? The Cessationist Debate

Three basic views or 'camps'

- Full Gospel – all gifts are still available to believers today
- Middle of the road – nonmiraculous gifts still available, or just not sure
- Cessationist – the gifts were for validation of the apostles and are no longer available

B. Have Some Gifts Ceased? The Cessationist Debate

New Life Christian Church's leadership does not support the Cessationist view. We believe that the same Holy Spirit that raised Christ from the tomb is still empowering believers with gifts that can be used to glorify God. We do think however it important that we understand other views and that we can articulate and defend our position. Therefore, the information presented by Grudem is helpful in our understanding.

1. Does 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 Tell Us When Miraculous Gifts Will Cease?

a. The Purpose of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

“when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.”

1. Does 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 Tell Us When Miraculous Gifts Will Cease?

- b. 1 Corinthians 13:10: The Cessation of Prophecy When Christ Returns

Dominant theme is that love is superior to the gifts

1. Does 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 Tell Us When Miraculous Gifts Will Cease?

c. Objections:

This Passage Does Not Specify When the Gifts Will Cease

“When the Perfect Comes” in 1 Corinthians 13:10 Refers to a Time Earlier Than the Time of the Lord’s Return

1. Does 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 Tell Us When Miraculous Gifts Will Cease?

John Calvin said,

“It is stupid of people to make the whole of this discussion apply to the intervening time”

2. Would the Continuation of Prophecy Today Challenge the Sufficiency of Scripture?

a. The Authority of the Gift of Prophecy

- Prophecy is not on equal footing with Scripture
- Be cautious of prophecy that says, “thus says the Lord” unless Scripture is being quoted
- All prophecy must be submitted to scriptures authority, and must not contradict it



2. Would the Continuation of Prophecy Today Challenge the Sufficiency of Scripture?

b. The Question of Guidance

- Risk of abuse of a gift should not prohibit the gift altogether

3. Were Miraculous Gifts Limited to the Apostles and Their Companions?

- See Chapter 17 for a full discussion of this topic.

4. Did Miraculous Gifts Only Accompany the Giving of New Scriptures?

Other purposes for miracles:

- 1) They authenticate the gospel message throughout the church age
- 2) They give help to those in need, and thereby demonstrate God's mercy and love
- 3) They equip people for ministry
- 4) They glorify God

5. Is It a Historical Fact That Miraculous Gifts Ceased Early in the History of the Church?

- There are documented miracles throughout the history of the church
- Misunderstanding, abuse and fraud can confuse people and encourage a lack of trust or faith
- Paul's statement explains that these gifts, though imperfect will remain till Christ returns

5. Is It a Historical Fact That Miraculous Gifts Ceased Early in the History of the Church?

John Calvin states,

“Today we see our own slender resources, our poverty in fact; but this is undoubtedly the punishment we deserve, as the reward for our ingratitude. For God’s riches are not exhausted, nor has His liberality grown less; but we are not worthy of His largess, or capable of receiving all that He generously gives.”

6. Are Miraculous Gifts Today the Same As the Miraculous Gifts in Scripture?

- What is the motive or benefit of this view?
- Paul states that these gifts will be imperfect, so how do we compare?
- We must ask the Lord for more of his mercy and grace to be manifest

7. Is It Dangerous for a Church to Allow for the Possibility of Miraculous Gifts Today?

- This view seems to be birthed out of fear
- The question of balance comes into play, every church is in danger of imbalance in some form as they seek to follow God's word and act in faith
- It falls on the shoulders of leadership to walk the wall, protecting the church from abuse while encouraging the body to pursue all that God has to offer

7. Is It Dangerous for a Church to Allow for the Possibility of Miraculous Gifts Today?

- Balance is found in the Word of God and in obedience to the Holy Spirit.
- Study and know the Word of God, ask the Holy Spirit to be your teacher. Seek counsel from the Word, from faithful believers and prayerfully seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- Truth from the Holy Spirit will never contradict the truth of the Word.

8. A Final Note: Cessationists and Charismatics Need Each Other.

But it certainly is not helpful to the church as a whole for both sides to think they can learn nothing from the other, or that they can gain no benefit from fellowship with each other.