



Lesson 10 – Spiritual Gifts, Part 2

Key Verse: 2 Corinthians 12:12

“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.”

Overview

In theology, there are two views regarding the gifts of the spirit, the *continuationist* view and the *cessationist* view. The continuationist view asserts that the miraculous and revelatory gifts are still in operation today. The cessationist view asserts that the sign gifts (e.g., the performing of miracles, gifts of healing, speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues) and the revelatory gifts (i.e., the reception and proclamation of new revelation from God) passed away when the foundation of the church was laid.¹ In this study we will look at the cessationist view and a biblical defense for it.

Spiritual Gifts

1 Cor. 12:8-10	1 Cor. 12:28-30	1 Cor. 13:1-3	1 Cor. 13:8-9	Romans 12:6-8	Ephesians 4:11	1 Peter 4:10-11
	Apostles*			Leading	Apostles*	Speaking
Word of Wisdom	Prophets*			Exhorting	Prophets*	
Word of Knowledge		Knowledge	Knowledge		Evangelists	
	Teachers			Teaching	Pastor-Teachers	
Prophecy		Prophecy	Prophecy	Prophecy		
	Helps	Giving		Giving		Serving
Distinguish- ing of Spirits						
	Administra- tion			Service		
Faith		Faith		Mercy		
Working of Miracles	Miracles					
Gifts of Healing	Gifts of Healing					
Various Kinds of Tongues	Various Kinds of Tongues	Tongues	Tongues			
Interpretation of Tongues	Interpretation of Tongues					

* This gift has ceased.

¹ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, gen. eds. *Biblical Doctrines: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017). 804.

As you can see, no two are identical which shows they are representative, not exhaustive. Some lists speak to both gifts and gifted offices (1 Corinthians 12:28–30 and Ephesians 4:11). The permanent gifts are given above the black line (except for those with an *) and the temporary sign gifts are given below the black line.

How do we know there are no more apostles and prophets?

Ephesians 4:7 states, “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” Paul goes on to tell us some of the gifts Christ gave to His church. In Ephesians 4:11 he says, “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.” However, Paul told us earlier in Ephesians 2:20 that the church has been “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.” Paul is identifying those two offices/gifts as those which laid the foundation of the church, therefore limiting them to the early stages of the church.

The apostles and the prophets declared the revelation of God’s Word (Eph. 3:5; cf. Acts 11:27–28; 21:10–11) and confirmed their message with miraculous signs (2 Cor. 12:12; cf. Acts 8:6–7; Heb. 2:3–4). Just as the superstructure of a building rests on its foundation, so all subsequent generations of the church have been built on the revelatory foundation laid by the apostles and prophets in the writing of the New Testament (cf. 2 Pet. 1:19–21).² To state that apostles and prophets are still around would obliterate the meaning of Paul’s metaphor in Ephesians 2:20 (“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets”) and would imply that the foundation of the church is still being established today. If these offices/gifts are still in operation, those who claim to be apostles and prophets today could also add their “authoritative” words to the Bible. However, the canon is closed, which indicates to us that these offices/gifts have ceased.

There were also qualifications to be an apostle. First, an apostle had to be a physical eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 10:39–41; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:7–8). Second, an apostle had to be personally appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 3:14; Acts 1:24–26; 26:15–17). Third, an apostle had to be able to authenticate his apostolic appointment with miraculous signs (Matt. 10:1–2; Acts 2:43; 5:12; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3–4).³ These qualifications demonstrate there are no apostles in the church today for no one has seen the risen Christ with his or her own eyes. Paul also states in 1 Corinthians 15:8 that the risen Christ appeared to him “last of all.” For these reasons above, we not only conclude that the gift of apostle and prophet has ceased, but we also conclude that there are gifts in the early church that ceased.

Church history also testifies to the fact that office/gift of apostles and prophets has ceased. The earliest church fathers, those who lived shortly after the New Testament age ended, did not view themselves as apostles or prophets, but rather as “disciples of the apostles.”⁴ Nowhere does Paul or Peter say anything about the continuation of apostleship, but they do say a lot about the organization of the church under the leadership of qualified elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1–13; 5:17–22; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Pet. 5:1–4).

What are the sign gifts that have ceased?

The sign gifts that have ceased are working of miracles, the gift of healing, various kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues (see chart above). Throughout redemptive history, God has authenticated His messengers by empowering them to perform signs and wonders. Men such as Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha. In the New Testament, the ministry of Jesus was also confirmed by miracles and healings (Acts 2:22). The signs and wonders Jesus did proved that He was who He claimed to be. The birth of the church was also marked out by various signs and wonders performed by apostles and prophets. These signs and wonders validated the message they proclaimed.

² Ibid, 755.

³ Ibid, 92.

⁴ John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2013), 98.

However, now that the written Word of God is complete, it no longer needs miraculous confirmation. It is authoritative and self-sufficient and stands alone as its own self-authentication. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:19, “So we have the prophetic word made more sure.” It is *more sure* than the most extraordinary eyewitness experiences that Peter had. Once the apostolic age ended and the New Testament canon was complete, the gifts associated with the offices of apostle and prophet were no longer needed and passed away.

The Working of Miracles

A *miracle* might be broadly defined as an extraordinary work of God in which He suspends or overrides the normal courses of nature so that the result cannot be explained by any natural cause.⁵ Those who had this gift were empowered by God to perform signs and wonders (Rom. 15:19). This validated them as spokesmen of God (cf. Acts 2:22; 14:3; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3–4) because the church did not have the complete canon of Scripture. Jesus’s miracles demonstrated his power over nature (e.g., turning water into wine, creating food, calming the wind and waves), demons, disease, and death and affirmed His message. While the New Testament does not record any of the apostles performing miracles over nature, they did exhibit power over demons, disease, and death⁶ (cf. Acts 9:41–42; 20:7–12) which also affirmed their message.

Regarding the apostles, it is in that first sense, authority over demons, that the word “miracles” is being used in 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28–29. The Greek word for “miracle” (*dynamis*) means “power” and is frequently connected in the Gospels with the casting out of demons (e.g., Luke 4:36; 6:18–19). Jesus gave his disciples power over demons (Luke 9:1; 10:17–19), and the apostles continued to demonstrate that authority after Pentecost (e.g., Acts 13:6–12; 16:16–18).⁷ This miraculous power was given as a sign to validate the preaching of the gospel during the apostolic age only.

There are also three major periods which God performed miracles through men:

1. Moses and Joshua (ca. 1450–1390 BC)
2. Elijah and Elisha (ca. 860–800 BC)
3. Christ and His apostles (ca. AD 30–60)

Miracles were not the norm even in these periods. Even John the Baptist, whom Jesus said, “Among those born of women there is no one greater than John” (Luke 7:28) performed no sign (John 10:41). Christ later authenticated John’s message by His miracles, but miracles have not been the norm throughout redemptive history. Supposed miracles being done today do not match the biblical standard and are not done for the purpose of validating the preaching of God’s Word, but to glorify the so-called “miracle worker.”

The Gifts of Healing

If the working of miracles is directly related to the casting out of demons, the gifts of healing are related to the supernatural power over disease. Miraculous healing served to authenticate the messenger of God (John 10:38; Rom. 15:18–19), not merely to restore the sick person to physical health. Paul did not heal himself (Gal. 4:13). He also did not heal some of his closest friends (Phil. 2:27; 1 Tim. 5:23). When Peter brought Tabitha to life, many believed (Acts 9:41–42). When Paul healed the lame man in Lystra, it was to authenticate the message they were preaching (Acts 14:15). Paul also did not heal Trophimus in 2 Timothy 4:20 (ca. AD 66–67). The sign gifts were coming to an end and there is no evidence of any apostles performing miracles of any sort during their later years. While this gift ceased at the end of the apostolic era, we can still pray and ask God for healing today (James 5:14–15).

⁵ *Biblical Doctrines*, 808.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 809.

Various Kinds of Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues

The Greek word for tongues is *glōssa* and is best translated “languages.” This gift is first introduced on the day of Pentecost when 120 were gathered in the upper room and began speaking fluently in foreign languages they had not previously learned (Acts 2:4–11). This was given as a sign (1 Cor. 14:22) to the unbelieving Jews to illustrate that the gospel was to be preached throughout the world (Acts 1:8). If this gift was used in the gathering of the church, an interpreter was required so that the whole church would be edified by the one speaking a human foreign language (1 Cor. 14:5, 27–28). The HCSB translates 1 Corinthians 14 in a way that helps to understand tongues as real human languages.

1 Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts, and above all that you may prophesy. **2** For the person who speaks in **another language** is not speaking to men but to God, since no one understands him; however, he speaks mysteries in the Spirit. **3** But the person who prophesies speaks to people for edification, encouragement, and consolation. **4** The person who speaks in **another language** builds himself up, but he who prophesies builds up the church. **5** I wish all of you spoke in **other languages**, but even more that you prophesied. The person who prophesies is greater than the person who speaks in **languages**, unless he interprets so that the church may be built up.

6 But now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in **other languages**, how will I benefit you unless I speak to you with a revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? **7** Even inanimate things that produce sounds—whether flute or harp—if they don’t make a distinction in the notes, how will what is played on the flute or harp be recognized? **8** In fact, if the trumpet makes an unclear sound, who will prepare for battle? **9** In the same way, unless you use your tongue for intelligible speech, how will what is spoken be known? For you will be speaking into the air. **10** There are doubtless many different kinds of **languages** in the world, and all have meaning. **11** Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the **language**, I will be a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker will be a foreigner to me. **12** So also you—since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, seek to excel in building up the church.

13 Therefore the person who speaks in **another language** should pray that he can interpret. **14** For if I pray in **another language**, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. **15** What then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with my understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with my understanding. **16** Otherwise, if you praise with the spirit, how will the uninformed person say “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? **17** For you may very well be giving thanks, but the other person is not being built up. **18** I thank God that I speak in **other languages** more than all of you; **19** yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, in order to teach others also, than 10,000 words in **another language**.

20 Brothers, don’t be childish in your thinking, but be infants in regard to evil and adult in your thinking. **21** It is written in the law: “I will speak to these people by people of **other languages** and by the lips of foreigners, and even then, they will not listen to Me,” says the Lord.

22 It follows that speaking in **other languages** is intended as a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers. But prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers. **23** Therefore, if the whole church assembles together and all are speaking in **other languages** and people who are uninformed or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your minds? **24** But if all are prophesying and some unbeliever or uninformed person comes in, he is convicted by all and is judged by all. **25** The secrets of his heart will be revealed, and as a result he will fall facedown and worship God, proclaiming, “God is really among you.”

Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 14 was to show the purpose of spiritual gifts was for the edification of the church, not the edification of self.

What's wrong with the so-called gift of tongues today?

In the charismatic movement today, those who claim to speak in tongues are not speaking a foreign language but are speaking with ecstatic utterances with no discernible code or linguistic pattern.⁸ This is called ecstatic babbling or gibberish. Regarding gibberish, *Biblical Doctrines* states:

The fact that Paul noted “various kinds of tongues” in 1 Corinthians 12:10 does not imply that some are real languages and others are merely gibberish. Rather, the Greek word for “kinds” is *genos*, from which we derive the word “genus.” *Genos* refers to a family, group, race, or nation. Linguists often refer to language “families” or “groups,” and that is precisely Paul's point: there are various families of languages in the world, and this gift enabled some believers to speak in a variety of them. In Acts 2, Luke emphasized that same idea in verses 9–11, where he explained that the languages that were spoken came from at least sixteen different regions.⁹

Most of what is called “tongues” today is gibberish which is far from the biblical definition of tongues. Virtually no tongue-speaking today fits the biblical depiction of tongues, since people are not speaking in discernible languages.¹⁰ There are also people speaking out of turn with no interpreters. This is not the biblical model Paul lays out in 1 Corinthians 14.

What was the purpose of tongues?

The gift of tongues had more than one purpose. First, it was given to signify the arrival of the New Covenant at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–11). Second, it was given to signify that all people groups (Jews, Gentiles, and Ephesians) who place their faith in Jesus receive the Spirit and are a part of one church (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6). It doesn't mean that every person who received the Spirit spoke in tongues. These groups spoke in tongues because there would have been some question about their inclusion as the people of God, but the gift of tongues demonstrated that they belonged to God. Third, it was a sign of judgment to unbelieving Israel (1 Cor. 14:21–22), showing that the church would encompass people from all nations and languages.¹¹

In 1 Corinthians 14, the issue Paul was addressing is that the Corinthians were desiring “the greater gifts.” In 1 Corinthians 12:31 it says, “But desire the greater gifts. And I will show you an even better way.” The word “desire” in the Greek can be translated as either an imperative (command) or as an indicative (statement of fact). The context of chapter 12 implies that this should be an indicative, “You are desiring the showy gifts, wrongly.”¹² The Corinthians deemed “tongues” as a greater gift, but Paul writes to show them that love is the more excellent way. In chapter 14, Paul then addresses tongues and shows that it is not the gift that they should desire, unless there is an interpreter so that the church may be edified (1 Cor. 14:5, 13). However, if there was a gift to desire, it should be prophecy (14:1) because the church will be edified by this gift.

⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are and Why They Matter* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2018), 124.

⁹ *Ibid*, 811.

¹⁰ *Spiritual Gifts*, 130.

¹¹ John MacArthur, *The New Testament Commentary Series, Acts 1-12* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 43.

¹² *The MacArthur Study Bible, 2nd Edition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2020), 1508.

The Conclusion about Tongues

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:8, “if there are tongues, they will cease.” The word “cease” means “to stop, to come to an end.” This Greek verb is in the middle voice, which when used of inanimate objects indicates reflexive, self-causing action. The cause comes from within. God gave the gift of tongues a built-in stopping place. What Paul is implying is that the gift will stop by itself. John MacArthur states, “Like a battery, it had a limited energy supply and limited lifespan. When its limiters were reached, its activity automatically ended.”¹³ This happened at the end of the apostolic age as it was a sign gift to authenticate the message and messenger of the gospel before the completion of the canon of Scripture.

The Dating of Letters and Miraculous Sign Gifts

Notice the chart on page 1, the gift of tongues is only listed in 1 Corinthians. Following the historical progress of the apostles who wrote about miraculous gifts, miracles diminished in scope as time moved onward. Of all the epistles that list spiritual gifts, 1 Corinthians is the earliest book written (AD 55). Romans was written in AD 56 in which Paul speaks of “signs and wonders” that God had accomplished through him (Rom. 15:19). Ephesians was written between AD 60–62, 1 Peter was written between AD 64–65. Although these later books mention spiritual gifts, none of them mention the sign gifts. In fact, James was written between AD 45–49 and he exhorted believers who were sick to call for the elders to pray over them rather than call for someone with the gift of healing. When the canon of Scripture closed with John’s Revelation, there no longer existed a divine reason for performing miracles through men. Therefore, such miracles ceased along with temporary gifts.¹⁴

Conclusion

The church’s foundation was the apostles and prophets and since the church has been founded those offices/gifts have ceased. This proves that spiritual gifts do cease. Along with those were the miraculous sign gifts of the working of miracles, the gifts of healing, various kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues which ceased at the end of the apostolic age. These gifts were given to authenticate the message of the apostles and prophets since the New Testament had not been completed. However, now that we have the complete and authoritative revelation of God in our hands, the miraculous sign gifts are no longer necessary. May we not look to miraculous sign gifts for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), but may we look to the authoritative Word of God.

¹³ John MacArthur, *The New Testament Commentary Series, 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 359.

¹⁴ *Biblical Doctrines*, 384.