

Speaking in Tongues and Divine Healing

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Dedication

To Nancy Kay, Nadine Pearl, and Natalie Sue—God’s gifts to us.

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Speaking in Tongues and Divine Healing

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Foreword

Everything changed when William Seymour came to town. The year was 1906, and the place was Los Angeles, California. Seymour was an almost larger-than-life figure. This one-eyed thirty-four-year-old African American holiness preacher had been invited to travel from his home in Topeka, Kansas, to preach a series of messages at a holiness church in Los Angeles. The text for his first sermon was Acts 2:4 (“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”). The thrust of Seymour’s message was that all who receive the baptism of the Spirit will necessarily speak in tongues as an evidence of that baptism.

The message was not well received, and Seymour was asked to leave. So he took his preaching elsewhere, into the homes of like-minded Christians in the Los Angeles area. Over the next several months, under the influence of Seymour’s impassioned preaching, the small gathering began to speak in ecstatic, unintelligible speech. Eventually the gathering relocated to a church-turned-warehouse building on Azusa Street, and the Azusa Street Revival began. Thousands of people flocked to the church to hear Seymour’s preaching and to participate in what was ostensibly an exciting new movement

of the Holy Spirit. A participant described the revival in glowing terms:

Demons are being cast out, the sick healed, many blessedly saved, restored, and baptized with the Holy Spirit and power. . . . Jesus is being lifted up, His blood magnified, and the Holy Spirit honored once more. . . . Strong men lie for hours under the mighty power of God, cut down like grass. The revival will be a world-wide one, without doubt.¹

The *Los Angeles Times* was less sanguine in its assessment of the revival:

Meetings are held in a tumble-down shack on Azusa Street, and the devotees of the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories and work themselves into a state of mad excitement in their peculiar zeal. African Americans and a sprinkling of whites compose the congregation, and night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howlings of the worshippers, who spend hours swaying forth and back in a nerve racking attitude of prayer and supplication. They claim to have the “gift of tongues” and be able to understand the babel.²

As a result of the Azusa Street Revival, modern Pentecostalism (sometimes called the “first wave of the Spirit”) was born. Previous groups had had similar ecstatic experiences, but this was the first time since the Apostolic Era that the spectacular charismatic gifts were supposedly being manifested on a large scale.

For a time, those who held to this new doctrine were forced to establish their own denominations (such as the Assemblies of God, the Church of God in Christ, and the International Church of the Four-square Gospel), since preexisting Christian denominations viewed Pentecostalism with extreme suspicion. But in the 1960s, Pentecostal teachings began to gain traction in mainstream denominations. Led

initially by influential men like David du Plessis, Dennis Bennett, and Larry Christenson, the charismatic movement (the “second wave of the Spirit”) began. Spectacular charismatic gifts, like speaking in tongues and divine healing, began to be embraced by many in the mainline denominations.

Finally, in the 1980s, charismatic worship practices infiltrated evangelicalism via the Signs and Wonders Movement (the “third wave of the Spirit”). Peter Wagner and John Wimber were principally responsible for sparking this development. Although they disagreed with classical Pentecostalism on certain details, they wholly embraced the emphasis on unleashing God’s spectacular, miraculous power in the lives of believers and churches today. The influence of Wagner and Wimber can still be felt today in the ministries of teachers like Jack Deere and Wayne Grudem.

Looking back over the last century, we cannot help but be amazed by the swiftness with which Pentecostal and charismatic teachings and worship practices have swept across the landscape of Christianity. What was virtually unknown prior to Seymour’s day has now become commonplace. In fact, in some countries, Pentecostal or charismatic Christianity has become the most dominant form of Christianity available! Many of those who teach and practice these things are sincere believers who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, so we regard them as brothers and sisters. Nevertheless, we Baptists have typically rejected the validity of these teachings and practices. We regard them as spurious, and thus we regard those who practice them as well meaning but misguided.

There are many reasons to reject Pentecostal and charismatic worship practices. This book discusses several of them in significant detail. Regular Baptist Press first published *Speaking in Tongues and Divine Healing* in 1965, when the charismatic movement was in full swing. The book quickly became a classic in the field. Now, five decades later, we are pleased to rerelease it in a revised and expanded edition. Despite the many developments that have occurred over the

past fifty years, the arguments first expounded in this book—now updated and expanded by the author—are still compelling and cogent. In his typical irenic style, Dr. Lightner lovingly and carefully examines the Biblical teaching pertaining to speaking in tongues and divine healing, and demonstrates why these spiritual gifts have ceased to be operative in this age. Our sovereign, miracle-working God, Who is no less active today than He was two thousand years ago, has chosen to order His church in a certain way and after a particular pattern. It behooves us to heed that pattern and to return again and again to the Scriptures as we seek to discern the will of God for believers today. *Soli Deo gloria.*

David Gunn
Director of Regular Baptist Press

Endnotes

¹ Roberts Liardon, ed., *Frank Bartleman's Azusa Street: First Hand Accounts of the Revival* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2006), 65–66.

² Quoted in Diarmuid O'Murchu, *In the Beginning Was the Spirit: Science, Religion, and Indigenous Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 173.

Preface

God's most costly gift to mankind was the gift of His Son. The benevolence of God did not terminate at Calvary, however. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and based on Calvary, God the Father continues to bestow spiritual gifts upon His own.

This book is written as a testimony that God equips each of His own with abilities to serve Him—with spiritual gifts. It is my firm conviction that some of the gifts of the Spirit were of a temporary nature and that these temporary gifts ceased with the passing of the apostles.

Even though human experiences often seem convincing or perplexing, they must never determine our faith. Only the Word of God may be trusted as our supreme guide for faith and practice. It is upon this foundation that this study is based.

No attempt has been made to deal with each of the gifts of the Spirit mentioned in the Bible. Rather, I have tried to deal only in a general way with all the gifts and have singled out the gifts of tongues and healing for special attention because of widespread interest in them.

No malice or fun-poking is intended from these pages. The majority of those who believe in the presence today of what I present as temporary gifts are sincere individuals in love with Jesus Christ.

I have no intention of belittling them. On the contrary, I would befriend them, for I share their love for the Savior. Having been involved in the very atmosphere that emphasizes these temporary gifts, I approach the subject with understanding and love for those who believe they still exist.

It is my earnest prayer that it will please God to use these words to bring glory to Jesus Christ.

Chapter 1

The Gifts of the Spirit

Serving the King of Kings is a royal and noble task requiring supernatural enabling. The Holy Spirit of God provides this divine assistance for every believer, since His requests are always accompanied by divine enabling. The Bible teaches that the Spirit's ministry is as essential for service as it is for salvation. Indeed, it is as impossible to serve the Lord apart from the Spirit as it is to be saved apart from Him. The Holy Spirit desires to reign in believers' hearts and to rule in our lives.

It seems that today the Biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit suffers from three extremes: abuse, neglect, and distortion. Some groups, in all sincerity, overemphasize the truth concerning the Spirit to the neglect of other equally important truths. Other groups, with equal sincerity and with a desire to guard against undue emotionalism, have so compartmentalized truth concerning the Third Person of the Godhead that the doctrine is rarely applied to life. Still others, and we are not primarily concerned with their viewpoints here, reject completely the Biblical presentation of the Holy Spirit and thus relegate Him and His ministry to a place of unimportance.

Early councils of the church (Constantinople, AD 381, and Chalcedon, AD 451) came to clear and lasting decisions regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit. They based their orthodox viewpoints on the Bible. The problem today is not abuse or distortion. It is not that conservative evangelical doctrinal statements are wrong concerning the Holy Spirit. Rather, the problem is neglect. We have failed to live in the light of our theology. Our practice in life has not always been consistent with our principles in doctrine. We have all too often been orthodox in doctrine but heterodox in practice.

Within the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, His ministry of giving gifts to the members of Christ's Body has been one of the most neglected areas. In the church at Corinth, lack of understanding regarding spiritual gifts caused a great deal of confusion and disorder, as it has in many churches since then. Perhaps one of the greatest single causes in the church today for splits, disorder, discontentment, and the modern overemphasis on charismatic phenomena is a failure to understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit in giving gifts.

This study will view the gifts of the Spirit from a fourfold perspective: the definition of spiritual gifts, the distribution and diversity of spiritual gifts, the divine purpose of spiritual gifts, and the divine nature of spiritual gifts.

Definition of Spiritual Gifts

The Scriptural testimony regarding spiritual gifts leads to this simple definition: a *spiritual gift* is "a God-given ability for service."¹ I believe this simple definition encompasses all that God would have us know concerning spiritual gifts. Observe the crucial parts of the definition. The ability or enabling comes from God; it is sovereignly bestowed. In 1 Corinthians 12:1 Paul said, "Now concerning spiritual gifts." Note that the word *gifts* is italicized. That means the word was not in the original language but was supplied by translators. The word *spiritual*, however, was present in the original. Paul was really

saying, “Now concerning the spiritual faith, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant.” Thus, gifts are spiritual; they originate with the sovereign Spirit of God.

In 1 Corinthians 12:4 we learn that gifts are related to the grace of God: “There are diversities of gifts.” The word for *gifts* (*charismatōn*) literally means “grace gifts.” Part of the word is the word for *grace* (*charis*). So the gifts originate with the Spirit of God, and they are related to the grace of God. Then in verse 7 we read, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.” The word translated *given* (*didotai*) helps in defining spiritual gifts. From the usage of this word and from the importance that Paul makes of it, we may say the source of gifts is spiritual and their nature is according to grace. Therefore, I repeat the definition: a spiritual gift—whether it is a great gift or a small gift, whether it is the gift of an apostle or the gift of speaking in tongues—is God’s gracious enabling of each believer to serve Him.

Spiritual gifts must be distinguished from natural talent and innate abilities. While God may use these, they are not to be equated with spiritual gifts. Likewise, spiritual gifts do not depend on education and training. Education does not produce gifts of the Spirit. Academic achievement may help to develop gifts but can never give a gift to a believer. A spiritual gift is a God-given ability to be used for His service. Furthermore, gifts of the Spirit do not produce spiritual maturity.

It is difficult to determine the exact time an individual receives the gifts of the Spirit. It is, however, reasonable to assume an individual receives these gifts at the time of salvation, when that person is placed into the Body of Christ by the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). At salvation the believer becomes related to the Body of Christ; and the gifts of the Spirit certainly concern the believer’s work, fellowship, and service in the Body of Christ.

No one gets into the Body because of spiritual gifts; but all who are in the Body are equipped with spiritual gifts. The divine purpose

of these divine enablings is an exclusive one. They are never to be used to glorify self or even the Holy Spirit. Rather, they are all to be used to glorify Jesus Christ, to display Him and all His excellencies. This the Lord clearly explained in His Upper Room discourse. He promised the disciples that after He departed, the Spirit would come and take up His work, continue it, and use it to bring glory to Christ (John 16:13–15).

Distribution and Diversity of Spiritual Gifts

A spiritual gift is a God-given ability to be used for His service. With this definition in mind, let us look at the diversity of gifts and the Spirit's distribution of them. It is important to remember that the gifts of the Spirit are based upon the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary.

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. (Eph. 4:7–11)

The Spirit of God can give gifts to people because of the victory the Lord Jesus achieved at Golgotha. The important thing is not whether that victory was exclusively over Satan, whether it was exclusively over Sheol or Hades, or whether it was over sin and death. The fact is that Jesus Christ became the victor. As the champion in battle, He has the sovereign right to bestow the spoils of battle, or spiritual gifts. God the Spirit gives gifts based on Christ's death, and we are able to receive them and exercise them on the same basis.

Many kinds of gifts are listed in the New Testament. The three central passages dealing with gifts are 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4—all written by the apostle Paul. The 1 Corinthians passage provides the longest list of God-given abilities for service. This list is as follows: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, apostleship, teaching, giving assistance or help, and administration (1 Cor. 12:8–28). In Ephesians 4:11 two additional gifts are listed: the gift of an evangelist and the gift of a pastor. Still three more gifts are listed in Romans 12: generosity, mercy, and exhortation. This totals eighteen gifts of the Spirit.

| 1 Corinthians 12 | Ephesians 4 | Romans 12 |
|---------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Wisdom | | |
| Knowledge | | |
| Faith | | |
| Healing | | |
| Miracles | | |
| Prophecy | Prophets | Prophecy |
| Discerning of spirits | | |
| Tongues | | |
| Interpretation of tongues | | |
| Apostleship | Apostles | |
| Teaching | Teacher | Teaching |
| Giving assistance or help | | Ministry |
| Administration | | Leadership |
| | Evangelist | |
| | Pastor | |
| | | Giving (liberality) |
| | | Exhortation |
| | | Mercy |

These passages are not designed necessarily to be exclusive lists of the Spirit's gifts. They do, however, emphasize that whatever God calls believers to do, He will also enable them to do. God never calls anyone to do anything without providing the means to do it. This must be kept in mind. A few of the gifts were given to benefit the apostolic (first generation) church in particular. Others were given to benefit the church throughout all its history. But all the gifts are given to benefit the entire church. Every believer—even the humblest, the most illiterate, the youngest—is granted a gift of the Spirit of God.

Some believers have more than one God-given ability, but every child of God has at least one. As this list is observed, it is immediately obvious that all Christians can use several of these things: all can give assistance; all can give monetarily; all can share the gospel. Every child of God possesses a spiritual gift or gifts, and each gift is important to the function of the Body. First Corinthians emphasizes that there ought to be diversity in unity and unity in diversity. The Corinthian church had a great problem. As believers exercised these gifts, they exalted some gifts above others. Paul tried to illustrate from the human body that just as every member is important to the proper functioning of the entire system, so every gift, small or great, is necessary to the proper functioning of the Body of Christ.

God gives the gifts to His own and at His own discretion. The “as He wills” phrase of 1 Corinthians 12:11 and the “according to His own will” of Hebrews 2:4 both substantiate the divine superintendence in bestowing gifts. Just suppose the choice and distribution of gifts had been left to us. No doubt all students would choose the gift of wisdom; all teachers would choose the gift of teaching; and most people would want the gift of tongues, since we use our tongues so much. God has not given us this choice, however, and that is obviously a good thing. Spiritual gifts are gifts *of the Spirit*, to be used *by the Spirit* and *for the glory of Christ*.

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12:31 seem to imply that believers are to seek and pray for gifts: “But earnestly desire the best gifts. And

yet I show you a more excellent way.” Remember, however, that the apostle was writing to a church infiltrated by individuals who were posing a problem relative to spiritual gifts: They were exalting minor gifts, which Paul said they were to stop doing. Rather, he told them to earnestly desire the best gifts and not to overemphasize the minor ones. Writing to a church that was emphasizing the size of gifts, Paul argued that the greater emphasis ought to be placed upon edifying gifts, not elementary gifts. It seems the apostle was trying to express that there is a gradation of gifts, that all gifts are not of the same value, and that there is a difference within the gifts. “And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles” (1 Cor. 12:28). All gifts are not equal, but all gifts are necessary.

Thus far we have seen what spiritual gifts are—divinely bestowed abilities for service. Also, we have seen that the distribution of these gifts is based upon the victory of Christ at Calvary and given as the Spirit wills according to His sovereign choice. Now let us look at the purpose of spiritual gifts.

Divine Purpose for Spiritual Gifts

To find the purpose for spiritual gifts, we turn to Ephesians 4. Here Paul states that the purpose for gifts is “the equipping of the saints” (Eph. 4:12). This has subordinate purposes, but the first and primary purpose is “the equipping of the saints.” God gives gifts to believers to equip and build up the Body of Christ so there are no schisms, or divisions, in the Body. Gifts are given to facilitate the growth of the Body, and that means numerical growth as well as spiritual growth. Some of the gifts relate to the spiritual development of the Body of Christ, while other gifts, such as the gift of an evangelist, relate to the numerical growth. Therefore, both aspects are involved in the growth of the Body, and both the spiritual growth and the numerical growth of the Body are to result in glory to Jesus Christ, the Head of the Body.

Several of the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians were given as signs to unbelievers. It is clear from 1 Corinthians 14:22 that the gift of tongues was a sign to those who did not believe. So all the gifts were given for the equipping, edifying, and building up of the Body of Christ and for His glory. Other gifts, meanwhile, were designed to fulfill that purpose in a different way, as signs to unbelievers—a verification of the messenger and his message in that day when the canon of Scripture was not yet completed. This divine purpose for spiritual gifts means, therefore, that gifts are never given to exalt or promote self. They are not given to put individuals in the limelight; they are given to magnify and exalt the Lord Jesus Christ and to build up the Body of Christ.

Divine Nature of Spiritual Gifts

A few of the gifts of the Spirit were given as temporary sign-gifts and are, therefore, not to be expected in the church today. Does this lack of certain gifts today mean the Holy Spirit of God is unable to do today what He did in the days of the early church? No, this does not limit the Spirit of God. Instead, this lack exalts the Spirit's sovereignty, for it means He does not choose to do today what He did in the early church. Some of the gifts were obviously temporary. Everyone who believes the Bible to be the final and complete revelation of God to mankind must believe that some of the gifts were temporary. For example, one cannot believe that the gift of prophecy or the gift of an apostle is still in operation today but at the same time believe the revelation of God is closed. To believe in the presence of the gift of apostleship today is to believe in something akin to apostolic succession. To believe the gift of prophecy is present today is to deny the completeness of the canon of Scripture. By these two gifts at least, the principle of temporary gifts is firmly established. More will be said about these temporary gifts in chapter 2.

In summary, the subject of spiritual gifts has been dealt with in a

fourfold way. First, definition: spiritual gifts are abilities divinely and sovereignly bestowed for service. Second, the distribution and diversity of spiritual gifts: every believer, every child of God, possesses some spiritual gift. Third, the divine purpose in giving gifts: to edify, equipping the Body of Christ for service. Fourth, divine nature of spiritual gifts: many are permanent, but some were temporary.

In conclusion, it should be said and clearly understood that the discovery of spiritual gifts in a believer's life is a matter of that believer's yielding and surrender to the Spirit of God. Paul exhorts us in Romans 12:1 to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God, and in Romans 6 to present ourselves to the Lord. Thus, all believers are to present themselves to the Holy Spirit of God. This means to disclaim ownership; it means to admit that you are not the boss of your life; it means to surrender to Him and admit that you belong to the Spirit of God. God the Holy Spirit will not reveal His gifts to believers apart from yielded hearts and yielded spirits. Surrender and yielding will not produce a gift, but they will awaken believers to the reality of their gifts and make believers conscious of the need to exercise their gifts for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Endnote

¹Charles Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 124.