

## **SPIRITUAL GIFTS** **by Max Frazier, Jr.**

Back in the late 1970's and early 1980's, the subject of spiritual gifts became a prominent one within evangelical circles. One could hardly walk within any Christian bookstore and not become overwhelmed with the multitude of titles available on the subject. It seemed that every pastor, including this author, preached a series on how people could discover their spiritual gift. Several inventories or assessments were created with the purpose of assisting in this discovery process. At times I felt like a person with incredible insight and power as people came to my study hoping that I would tell them what gift God had given to them. I could tell them that they could become teachers or serve on the hospitality committee or even should consider becoming an elder.

Why the sudden interest in spiritual gifts in those days? you might be asking. I believe that it was a result of the awareness of the concept of the Church being a body. Dr. Ray Stedman's book titled, *Body Life*, was very influential in helping people to come to the realization that God had a role for each person within the Church, and that the health and vitality of the Church depended upon each person accomplishing that role. Furthermore, God gave enablement through the spiritual gifts. Thus, if a person was to truly become a part of the "body life" of his or her church, then he or she needed an understanding of that particular spiritual gift or gifts he or she possessed.

But, as with many other Christian fads, this one soon wore off and the focus was upon something else and those titles and inventories we had come to depend upon became out of print. One was left with the feeling that the subject of spiritual gifts did not have that great importance which we had first thought.

## **THERE WILL NEVER BE ANOTHER YOU** **An Introductory Study of Spiritual Gifts** **by Max Frazier, Jr.**

### **What are the Spiritual Gifts?**

If we are to seek to understand the role of the spiritual gifts, it is imperative that we first establish a definition. I am reminded of what the Apostle Peter wrote: As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Peter 4:10). Using this verse then, I can define a spiritual gift as that special ability or abilities which God has given to every believer in order that His work might be accomplished.

So, who has these spiritual gifts? According to the verse just cited from Peter, everyone who has received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior has received a

special gift from God. Now you might think that you have nothing to offer in service to God. Nonsense. God has given you a gift which He has tailor made just for you. I remember being told early in my ministry by a dear saint of God, "Max, if you don't do what God has created you to do, no one else will do it." This dear brother was simply reminding me that God had gifted me for a purpose and no one else could fill those shoes. Now, that made me feel pretty special. I had a purpose for living. I had something to do that no one else could do.

But what is the purpose of these gifts? Let me share with you a verse from Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth. He writes: Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7). Later on Paul continues: Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church (1 Corinthians 14:12). After identifying several gifted men given to the Church by God, Paul announces that their purpose was to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:12-13).

From the above texts, the purpose of the spiritual gifts is not to bring glory or praise to ourselves (we should never state, "Well, I have this particular gift" with a sense of braggadocio), or even to our church, or to our church programs. No, the purpose of the gifts is to build one another up as believers so that God is glorified and praised. I truly believe that if we are not doing the latter, then we are not using our spiritual gifts properly.

### **Are the Gifts the same as Talents?**

It is in this area that we get most confused. Just what is a talent? I think we can define it as a special aptitude directed in a special way. A talent has everything to do with techniques and methods. A talent is dependent upon natural powers and abilities. A talent is something everyone has at least one of since the time of his or her physical birth, howbeit that talent may be lying dormant in a person's life. Let me share a few possible talents: ability to sing or to play an instrument; an ability to play football or basketball or to swim or to wrestle; an ability to paint pictures which others can understand. (I can assure you that I don't have any artistic talent. I remember getting an "F" in seventh grade art on my stick-figure drawing. The teacher wrote on the picture in big letters, "What is this?" Right then and there I knew that I would never become another Rembrandt.)

Talents are not spiritual gifts, yet the Holy Spirit may choose to use our natural talents as the vehicle for the exercise of our spiritual gifts. Dwight L. Moody had a talent, and a passion I might add, for communicating with children. God used this talent as the means through which a Sunday school for street children was started in the city of Chicago. Later Moody would use this talent to begin a Bible Institute to train young people for ministry. I am also reminded of how God uses the athletic abilities of a Randall Cunningham or a Chris Carter or a Kurt Warner as a vehicle

through which the gifts of evangelism and encouragement are shared.

Although our talents are not spiritual gifts, they may point in the direction in which our gifts might be used by God. I remember a lady in a former church who had a beautiful voice and was always willing to sing any time. Singing was her talent. But through her music, she brought encouragement to so many people. On those Sundays she sang, I think people were more ministered to with her music than with my sermon. Praise the Lord. I always have encouraged young people to cultivate those talents which God has given to them, admonishing them to be available to use those talents as an instrument to minister to others.

### **Can Spiritual Gifts be Counterfeited by Satan?**

Unfortunately, the answer to this question is a qualified yes. He has done it in the past. Listen to these accounts from Exodus 7 and 8: (speaking about the plague of turning the water into blood) But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said...(speaking about the plague of frogs) But the magicians did the same things by their secret arts; they also made frogs come up on the land of Egypt (Exodus 7:22; Exodus 8:7).

Satan will counterfeit spiritual gifts in the future, for we read this about his activities in Revelation: And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived (Revelation 13:13-14).

So, both in the past and in the future, Satan is capable of counterfeiting a work of God with the express purpose of deceiving the people of God. If he has done it in the past and will do it in the future, it is pretty safe to assume that he is also doing it in the present. That is why the Apostle John wrote: Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets (those are the representatives of Satan himself) have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1). How we need to be on our guard these days. If I understand what John is saying, there is a danger that Satan will come into our midst doing things we usually attribute to God. Caution must be exercised that we examine, yes test, every person to see if they are truly communicating God's truth to us.

### **Why are the Gifts not being Used Today?**

One of the major reasons for the lack of usage is an ignorance as to what the spiritual gifts really are. Let me refresh your memories by using the following list:

ROMANS 12:3-8

Prophecy

Exhorting

Giving

Teaching

Showing Mercy

Ministering (Helps)

Government (Ruling)

EPHESIANS 4:11

Apostleship

Pastoring/Teaching

Prophecy

Evangelism

1 CORINTHIANS 12:8-10, 28-30

Word of Wisdom

Faith

Word of Knowledge

Healing

Miracles

Prophecy

Discernment

Teaching

Interpretation of Tongues

Apostleship

Teaching

Ministration

Government (Ruling)

If you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, let me assure you that you have at least one of the above. Remember those earlier words of Paul to the Corinthians that each one (that includes you and me) was given a special gift by God. If you are not sure what your spiritual gift is, I would counsel you to visit your pastor or a close friend. You might want to consider taking one of the many spiritual gift inventories which are available. Let me share two which I have found profitable.

TEAM MINISTRY: Spiritual Gifts Inventory Questionnaire, produced by the Church Growth Institute, located in Lynchburg, Virginia.

HOUTS INVENTORY OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS, developed by the Fuller Evangelistic Association, located in Pasadena, California

I also have observed a second reason why there is a lack of emphasis on spiritual gifts today. It might be called a feeling of inferiority.

So we develop a bad case of "let someone else do it." I am reminded of the following story:

This is the story about four people named Somebody, Everybody, Anybody, and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about it because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it. But Nobody realized that Everybody could not do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done. Now that story may sound confusing, but I have witnessed its truths more than I care to imagine.

We observe this inferiority when we measure ourselves, not by our own norms, but by someone else's. Maxwell Maltz, one of the great philosophical minds of our time, has written: It's not knowledge of actual inferiority in skill or knowledge that gives us an inferiority complex and interferes with our living. It's the feeling of inferiority that does this. And this feeling of inferiority comes about for just one reason: We judge ourselves, and measure ourselves, not against our own 'norm' or 'par', but against some other individual's norm. When we do this, we always, without exception, come out second best. But because we think and believe and assure that we should measure up to some other person's 'norm', we feel miserable, and second-rate and conclude that something is wrong with us.

God has indeed gifted you. But you are not to compare your giftedness to that of someone else. I will not be another Billy Graham. God did not gift me in that way. I will never preach like a Jonathan Edwards. But God has not called me to be another Billy Graham or Jonathan Edwards. He has called me to use the gift which He has given to me to the best of my abilities through the help of His Spirit. I am to model excellence in the use of the spiritual gift which I have because I am working for God.

Let me ask you, Have you discovered your spiritual gift? If you have, are you using it consistently for the Lord, or have you hidden your gift in the ground of inactivity because your gift does not compare with that of another? I want to remind you again of those verses we have already read from 1 Corinthians 12.

1. God has given a spiritual gift to each one of His children, including you and me.
2. If the gift has come from God, you can rest assured that it is a very important one.
3. God is counting on your using this special gift to bring encouragement and blessing into the life of someone else. No one else can adequately do what God has gifted you to do.
4. Therefore, you and your spiritual gift are very important and very special.

## **TO CEASE OR NOT TO CEASE? THAT IS THE QUESTION**

### **Sign Gifts and Their Relevancy for Today**

Controversy has always been one of the dynamics of Church history. Issues have arisen which threatened its unity and vitality. A few short years following its birth, the Church was divided over the requirements which the new Gentile believers needed to adopt in order to be part of the Church. Tensions were high, yet the spiritual leaders, representing all sides of the issue, met in Jerusalem, and through dialogue and prayer, reached a compromise which propelled the Church forward (Acts 15).

The deity and humanity of Christ, the nature and purpose of the Holy Spirit, and the canonicity of Scripture also threatened the unity of the Church, but resolutions were found through diligent study and prayerful dialogue at various church councils. The result was the advancement of the Church.

The days of the Protestant Reformation brought new controversies. The dynamics of the communion service, the validity of eternal security of the believer, and man's free will and God's sovereignty became issues which did divide the Church, after attempts at resolution failed.

The Church has become even more fractured with the advent of the movement known as Pentecostalism which began in 1906. The centerpiece of that movement has been a renewed emphasis upon certain of the spiritual gifts. Bible scholars have debated the legitimacy of these gifts and many have concluded that these signs gifts ceased at the end of the apostolic era.

It is the purpose of this article to share the biblical position and to allow you, the reader, the right to formulate your own view based upon the biblical facts.

### **The Gifts Defined**

Many New Testament scholars divide the spiritual gifts, as found in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12, into three groups. First, there are those associated with speaking: apostleship, prophecy, teaching, evangelism, wisdom, knowledge, and discernment. A second group includes those equated with acts of service: giving, mercy, encouragement, helps, and administration. The third group is known as the sign gifts and includes miracles, healings, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. It is primarily with this last group that the controversies have occurred. The New Testament certainly does not deny their existence, yet their importance seems to diminish as the early Church progresses. In order for us to understand this phenomenon, we must first ask if there was a special purpose for these gifts.

### **Signs, Wonders, Miracles**

Often within the New Testament, these three words--signs, wonders and miracles--are linked together. (See a listing of references.)

The Greek word for sign, semeion, meant a "distinguishing mark by which something is known." The sign or distinguishing mark of the infant Jesus was that He would be found wrapped in swaddling clothes. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:12, the things that mark an apostle - signs, wonders and miracles - were done among you with great perseverance. Therefore, we might define a sign as "a super-human ability which authenticated God's spokespersons by convincing people that they were, in fact, bona fide servants of God" (Charles Swindoll, He Gave Gifts, p. 55).

Miracles, used in Scripture, were to draw people to God, never to bring praise to the miracle-worker. Jesus rebuked the crowd following Him, after the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, telling them that they had missed the purpose. They wanted their stomachs filled; Jesus wished to draw them to God (John 6:26).

The purpose of signs, wonder, and miracles was to authenticate the messenger and the message. This was necessary because God's written revelation was yet incomplete. Christ performed many miracles and signs which the Apostle John describes with these words: Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31). Notice, the miracles of Jesus gave attestation to His deity.

Peter and John (Acts 3:1-10, 5:15-16, 9:32-43), Philip (Acts 8:6-7), and Paul (Acts 14:3, 8-10, 16:16-18, 19:11-12, 20:9-10) are recorded as having done miracles. The very last recorded miracle in Scripture occurred in Acts 28:8 while Paul was on his way to Rome. Each occasion marked those performing the miracles as being from God.

With regard to the gift of healing, it is interesting to note that Paul did not use this gift for his own selfish purposes. He did not heal his friend Epaphroditus who was sick unto death (Philippians 2:25-27). Paul left his traveling companion Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20). Paul did not even heal his son in the faith, Timothy (1 Timothy 4:23). Why did Paul choose not to heal these friends? I believe it was because he realized that the importance of the gift was to authenticate the message, not to alleviate the sufferings of his friends.

As we have seen, by the close of the New Testament, the ministry of miracles had become increasingly infrequent. They were no longer necessary because God's written revelation was nearing completion. That written work would give final authority to its proclaimers.

## **What About Tongues?**

The gift of tongues is mentioned three times in the Book of Acts (chapters 2, 10, and 19) and in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (chapters 12-14). There are no other references in any of the other New Testament books. The purpose of the gift of tongues is alluded to in 1 Corinthians 14:22: Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers. That truth is borne out by the use of tongues in Acts. Allow me to quote from Dr. John Walvoord, past president of Dallas Theological Seminary:

In all three instances in Acts, speaking in tongues served to prove that what was taking place was a genuine work of God. In Acts 2, of course, it was the gift of the Spirit and the beginning of the New Testament church. In Acts 10 it was necessary as an evidence to Peter of the genuineness of the work of salvation in the household of Cornelius and was designed to teach Peter that the gospel was universal in its invitation. The third instance, in Acts 19, again served to identify the twelve men mentioned as actually being converted to Christianity instead of simply being followers of John the Baptist. In all of the instances in Acts, speaking in tongues was a sign that the work of the Holy Spirit was genuine. (The Holy Spirit at Work Today, page 46-47).

But, what about tongues? In 1 Corinthians 13:8, Paul declares, Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. The Greek work used is pauo which meant "to cease, never to start up again." The word can literally mean "to stop of themselves." Did the gift of tongues cease? Let us look at some evidence.

First, following the writing of First Corinthians, probably written in 57 AD, there is no other mention of tongues-speaking in the New Testament. Outside of this rather unusual congregation at Corinth, we read nowhere of any other early church practicing it. Second, it is significant that the gift of tongues is nowhere alluded to, hinted at or even found in any writings of the Post Apostolic Fathers (Cleon Rogers, as quoted in John MacArthur's book, The Charismatics, p. 169). In fact, until the early part of the twentieth century, every time a tongues phenomena appeared in the annals of Church history, it was usually associated with a heretical group. The evidence certainly would lead one to believe, at the very least, that the gift of tongues had lost its importance for the Church following the completion of God's written revelation, and at the very most, to say it had ceased altogether.

### **A Danger**

So, have the sign gifts ceased, or is there a purpose for them today? How are we to interpret these events? In his volume titled, Foundations of the Christian Faith, Dr. James Montgomery Boice gives these possible alternatives. Allow me to quote at length:

The question arises as to whether such gifts exist today, a matter on which Christians are divided. We may note, on the one hand, that some gifts (such as the gifts of apostleship and prophecy) no longer occur in their biblical sense. The gifts of healings and miracles (and I might add to this list, tongues) could be like them.

Yet gifts like evangelism, teaching and faith continue to exist and clearly must continue to the end of church history. Healings and miracles (and tongues) could be like them.

A third possibility exists. Healings and miracles (and tongues) could exist but could occur infrequently. There are several reasons for preferring this interpretation. Miracles and healings (and tongues) are bracketed by other gifts which continue: in the case of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, by wisdom, knowledge and faith before, and by the discerning of spirits afterward; in the case of 1 Corinthians 12:28-30, by teaching before and the gift of helping after. The working of miracles is similar to the case of speaking in tongues, which is treated at great length two chapters later and in regard to which we receive an explicit warning: "Do not forbid speaking in tongues" (1 Cor. 14:39). Paul is not encouraging tongues-speaking, but he recognizes that God may continue to give this gift and it should therefore not be discouraged. Nowhere does Paul indicate that either healings, miracles or tongues will cease. Further, accounts of healings and other miracles exist from every period of church history. (Page 614)

Two reasons lead me to believe that there is a serious danger if we adopt the idea that these sign gifts have totally ceased. First, if the gift of tongues was to cease at the close of the Apostolic age, then why did God allow Paul to write so specifically about this gift (1 Corinthians 14)? Paul even commands the Corinthian believers to not forbid speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:39). Was this command only for that one particular congregation? If that be the case, perhaps other commands, such as not being unequally yoked with unbelievers was also only for the Corinthians. Yet, we claim the relevancy of the later, so why not the former? We must practice consistency in our interpretation. (Let me state that I do have very strong reservations about the modern day tongues phenomenon if it does not adhere to the directives established by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14. All tongues speaking is not created equal).

Second, to state categorically that the sign gifts have ceased appears to place limitations upon God. In essence, we are telling God what He cannot do. We must not put God into a box. Leslie B. Flynn, in his book titled 19 Gifts of the Spirit, writes: Even though we may believe the gift served its major purpose in apostolic days, we dare not try to put a strait jacket on the Holy Spirit to confine Him within the borders of our traditional mold. The Spirit can give His gifts when and where He wills (page 188).

## **Conclusion**

It is universally agreed that God has gifted His Body, the Church, with spiritual gifts. And, there is almost universal agreement as to the nature and purpose of those gifts. Those gifts - tongues, interpretation, healing, and miracles - which appear to lessen in influence as one reads the New Testament, are the ones creating most of the difficulties today. It would appear from the biblical evidence that God has deliberately chosen not to use them as He once did because of the presence of the complete written revelation of His will in the Scriptures. Therefore, we should not be expecting their appearance except for those moments when God steps onto the pages of history in a way which reveals Himself uniquely.

But, I do not believe that we should limit the workings of God by stating that these gifts are no longer functional within the Body. God is so much greater than any limitations which I could place upon Him. I have learned never to say, "God can't."

The presence of the sign gifts need not create a controversy. Within His Word, God has given to us criteria for their employment within the Church. All God asks is that we seek discernment in such instances. Then we should rejoice in what God is doing.