

Spiritual Gifts: Some Interesting Questions... **A Series on Spiritual Gifts: Part 2**

During the course of studying spiritual gifts, four common questions arise:

1. Does the Holy Spirit give more than one spiritual gift?
2. Do certain spiritual gifts entitle one to the church office?
3. Are spiritual gifts temporary or permanent during the life of the Believer?
4. Have some spiritual gifts ceased today?

1. Does the Holy Spirit give more than one spiritual gift?

When listing various spiritual gifts, Paul never entertains the possibility that a Christian may not be endowed, and he does not mention how many gifts the Holy Spirit may give to an individual. While the Biblical text does not explicitly reveal an answer, there may be some possible inferences to the answer.

Paul reveals that he has the gift of apostleship (Rom 1:5; 1 Cor 9:2) and the gift of tongues (1 Cor 14:18). While there is no further biblical evidence, some scholars speculate that some of the apostles may have had the spiritual gift of teaching, prophecy and administration concurrently as well.

When Paul teaches the Corinthians that they are “Christ’s body and individually members of it (1 Cor 12:27-30),” he lists the gifts and then encourages them to “earnestly desire the greater gifts.” (1 Cor 12:31) Paul seems to imply that a Believer can aspire for another gift, and yet, this cannot be attained by achievement but through faith and obedience (Rom 12:3).

It appears that a Christian may have at least one spiritual gift. However, it may be worth mentioning that it may be difficult, if not impossible, to discern a spiritual gift from a natural talent. Take for example the spiritual gift of teaching. What differentiates one with the spiritual gift from a well trained teacher or from a naturally talented teacher?

2. Do certain spiritual gifts entitle one to the church office?

The list of spiritual gifts lists the gift themselves (1 Cor 12:8-10, 28) and the people who may have those gifts (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 4:11). Some of the people with certain gifts may share a name of an official church office (i.e. pastor-teacher). While it may be expected that such gifted individuals serve in official capacity of the church, it is not necessary for that person to serve in the church’s formal administration. A gifted teacher, for example, may teach a small group, or an evangelist may regularly function as an evangelist outside of the confines of his church.

An example can be seen in the Bible where Peter acknowledges David as a prophet (Acts 2:29-31) but he didn’t serve in that official capacity. In other instances, Philip had four daughters who were prophetesses but they did not have the office of prophet (Acts 21:8-9). Agabus however had both the office and gift as prophet (Acts 21:10).

Every Christian is blessed with a spiritual gift for the work of the ministry (Eph 4:12); God never intended this work to be done by only professional Christians workers.

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3. Are spiritual gifts temporary or permanent during the life of the Believer?

When Paul speaks of spiritual gifts, there is an implication that the gifts are permanent. In naming titles of people with a gift (i.e. prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc.), it seems unlikely that this endowment is temporary. In a similar fashion, when Paul speaks figuratively of the church as a human body, there isn't the sense that an eye will later become a hand as a Christian loses one gift to gain another (1 Cor 12:15-27).

It is implied that spiritual gifts may seemingly appear temporary if they are neglected (1 Tim 4:14).

What is less clear is how the spectacular gifts (i.e. healing, miracles, etc) are exercised. Can they be exercised successfully at anytime or does the Holy Spirit exercise the gift through a Believer when appropriate and gives the impression of a transitory nature to the gift? While the Bible is silent on issues like this, it leads to the ongoing debate of whether some of the gifts have ceased today, which will be discussed next.

4. Have some spiritual gifts ceased today?

There is considerable debate among theologians whether some spiritual gifts still exist today, and the hermeneutic arguments are vigorously defended by prominent academic theologians on either side of the issue. Here is a sampling of the discussion taking place.

Those who believe that all spiritual gifts still exist today cite Mark 16:15-18, 1 Corinthians 1:4-8 and Ephesians 4:7-13 as their main proof texts (1 Cor 13:8-13 is excluded as both sides cite it in their defenses).

Mark 16:15-18

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. These signs will accompany those who have believed in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

In this passage, the resurrected Jesus promises to Believers, beyond the apostles, the ability of spectacular signs such as speaking in tongues and healing. However, based on textual criticism, there is much debate as to whether Mark 16:9-20 is originally part of the Mark account. For academic scholars who do not consider Mark 16:9-20 as originally part of Mark, they see two significant reasons why it is not genuine:

1. Of external evidence, the strongest is the omission of Mark 16:9-20 from the Greek uncials, the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus which date from the fourth century A.D.

Scholars, who see Mark 16:9-20 as genuine, counter that these verses are found in early manuscripts and in 95% of all Greek manuscripts. Furthermore, ecclesiastical acceptance of Mark 16:9-20 as authoritative was geographically widespread and longstanding.

2. Of internal evidence, the vocabulary and style does not appear consistent with Mark and the transition between verse 8 and 9 is awkward.

Scholars who see Mark 16:9-20 as genuine argue that when using the same vocabulary and style methodology elsewhere, such as the last twelve verses of Luke where its authenticity is undisputable, the results would show that Luke 24:42-53 was not genuine of Luke authorship.

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Understanding this issue is technical and requires a background in textual criticism. Here are two examples of the academic perspective of contending sides: 1) *Is Mark 16:9-20 Inspired?* by Dave Miller, Ph.D (www.ApologeticsPress.org) and 2) *Mark's Ending: The Long and Short of It* by Jason Dulle (www.OnenessPentecostal.org).

1 Corinthians 1:4-8

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking (**ὑστερεῖσθαι**) in any gift, awaiting eagerly (**ἀπεκδεχομένους**) the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Recognizing God's blessings of knowledge and speech to the Corinthians, Paul is thankful that they were genuine Believers which attested to his message of salvation through Jesus Christ. In similar fashion, as recorded in Hebrews 2:1-4, supernatural attestation left no doubt to the divine origin and message of salvation and confirmed that the testimony of the apostles was genuinely of God. For the Corinthians, Paul speaks of spiritual gifts as continuing, for the purpose of confirming their testimony, until the return (Second Coming) of Jesus Christ.

This passage is perhaps the strongest text in favor of the continuance of all spiritual gifts. Vital to understanding the passage is observing the Greek grammar and syntax. Here the infinitive (**ὑστερεῖσθαι**) is in present tense contemporaneously with the participle (**ἀπεκδεχομένους**) which is also in present tense. This indicates that the possession of spiritual gifts occurs simultaneously with "eagerly awaiting" of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Of those who believe that all spiritual gifts exist today, most understand this passage in the context of the greater church, because most churches today do not have members who exhibit all of the spiritual gifts.

Ephesians 4:7-13

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men." (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until (**μέχρι**) we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

This passage suggests that the gifts of apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, pastor and teacher will continue until all Believers reach heaven when all will have: 1) unity of faith, 2) knowledge of Jesus Christ, 3) spiritual maturity and 4) the stature of being "full of Christ."

There is dispute whether this is the correct interpretation of the passage. As Paul mentions the gifts associated with leadership, each prepositional phrase logically progresses from the foundation set by the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:19-22) to itinerant evangelists and ends at the local ministry being equipped and built up by pastors and teachers. The term "until" (**μέχρι**) modifies the verbal phrase "building up the body of Christ." While apostles and prophets are involved with the establishment of canon, their foundational role indirectly builds up the church; today's pastors and teachers serve directly by teaching and explaining canon to the church.

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Those who believe that some spiritual gifts cease to exist today cite 2 Corinthians 12:12, Ephesians 2:20 and Hebrew 2:1-4 as their main proof texts (1 Cor 13:8-13 is excluded as both sides cite it in their defenses).

2 Corinthians 12:12

The signs (**σημεῖα**) of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs (**σημείους**) and wonders and miracles.

In this passage, in defense of his apostolic office and ministry, Paul indicates that the ability of performing miracles is evidence of and limited to apostleship.

However, many dispute this interpretation. As Paul makes a distinction from false apostles who are disputing his authority, the “signs (**σημεῖα**) of a true apostle” are not the “signs (**σημείους**)” of wonders and miracles. The signs (**σημεῖα**) “performed with all perseverance” were in reference to Paul’s faithfulness to the gospel (2 Cor 11:4; Acts 18:11) and Christ like behavior (2 Cor 10:1).

This is the predominant view that Paul has in mind, not the “signs (**σημείους**)” of wonders and miracles.

In using the passive voice, “the signs of a true apostle were performed among you,” Paul is emphasizing that the supernatural signs accompanying his ministry are not by his power rather than claiming that supernatural signs are unique to apostles.

Ephesians 2:19-20

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,

Understanding this passage requires, in part what Paul meant by “apostles.” Because he defended his apostleship on several occasions, he wrote what defined an apostle (see the article “What are the characteristics of an apostle?”), and they were essentially those who were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ, personally commissioned by the resurrected Lord and stewards of the mysteries of God. Thus Paul understands the foundation as referring to authorized doctrine of the church revealed to the apostles and prophets (Eph 3:5). In this light, apostleship and the development of canon ended with the death of the last apostle.

Of the New Testament, there is little mention of prophets who spoke with apostolic authority; however, Jude and the unknown author of Hebrews, as contributors to the Bible, may well have been.

Hebrew 2:1-4

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed (**ἐβεβαιώθη**) to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them (**συνεπιμαρτυρέω**), both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

The participle “God also testifying with them (**συνεπιμαρτυρέω**)” is present tense and contemporary with the past tensed aorist verb “was confirmed (**ἐβεβαιώθη**).” This indicates that the signs, wonders, miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit that confirmed the authenticity of the divine message of salvation had already occurred in the past by the time Hebrews was written.

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However not all scholars agree with the hermeneutics of this view. The disagreement is whether the interpretation of the past tense aorist verb “was confirmed (ἐβεβαιώθη)” is restricted absolutely to the past and whether the signs, wonders and spiritual gifts are limited to the apostles. The aorist verb probably views the whole action of “God also testifying” as a whole and does not focus on the beginning or end of the action, and if it was a completed past act, it was just to the Hebrews.

While most of the apostles died by the time Hebrews was written, John was still alive and preaching to the gospel.

Some commentators also interpret the present participle “God also testifying with them (συνεπιμαρτυρέω)” as an action continuing in the future; thus, the passage would have the interpretation as:

“it (the salvation) was confirmed (ἐβεβαιώθη) to us by those who heard, God also [**continuing**] testifying with them (συνεπιμαρτυρέω), both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”

This would mean that, in testifying of Jesus Christ, God would continue to confirm the authenticity of the divine message with miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit until the return of Christ.

The arguments for or against whether some of the spiritual gifts still exist today will never be resolved in our lifetime. Ultimately the real determinant of whether someone has a genuine spiritual gift is by examining who it edifies and benefits.

The question of whether some spiritual gifts still exist today or not is still a worthwhile question to study. The process sharpens your skills in reading the Bible and provides more opportunities to work with the Holy Spirit which will result in a better relationship with God.

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