

Are the Gifts of the Spirit for Today?

Teaching Notes

In our evaluation time we had with a student planning team at the end of last semester it was mentioned that they wanted us to teach more about the Holy Spirit. So, today, we are going to do that.

Two handed theology: One handed is closed and one hand is open. When we deal with the open hand we do it with respect and humility towards those that disagree with us, but that does not mean without conviction. For this one I am very convinced of. I gave this talk at Graduate Student Fellowship earlier this year. At points this will perhaps be more technical than what you are used to, but I want to error on the side of being thorough.

Issue of Bias: Intent is prior to content

Let's start off by me saying a few words and you tell me who or what group of people comes to mind. "Salvation by grace through faith alone" and immediately most people think of the Apostle Paul. Now, "Speaking in tongues" and most people are going to think, "Pentecostals" or "Charismatics." This little exercise merely illustrates how much most of us read the NT through the filters of our own experience in church. We tend to separate Paul's theology from his Spirituality. We think this way, despite the fact that Paul claims to have spoken in tongues more than the whole Corinthian church (14:18).

The fact is we have biases on this topic. We all bring a preconceived idea to the table when we think about the gifts of the Holy Spirit—if we had a bad experience with a charismaniac that has impacted you. If you have not had any experience of the gifts and feel like you are maturing in your walk with God just fine, you will either marginalize them at best or be dismissive in your general posture. Or maybe you grew up as a Pentecostal, then you will have favorable inclination towards it.

I see three general positions today on the gifts:

1. Those who say they are not for today.
2. Those who tacitly embrace but make sure they are marginal, (or "damn them with faint praise.")
3. Those who say they are for today and should be experienced as the normal Christian life.

What defines us?

At one point in Exodus, Moses said to God in Exodus 33:15–16 "If your Presence doesn't go with us, do not send us up from here...What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" God's presence among his people, was the mark of God's people from the rest of the world. If Paul was going to describe us, he would say the defining reality of our lives is the fact that we are people of the Spirit! This makes our understanding of the Spirit's work in our lives very important.

Unfortunately, if there is an area where I feel like as a whole Evangelical Theology is weak it is typically a strong and complete Pneumatology. I remember Gordon Fee talking about a student that came up to him one time and said "God the Father I understand, God the Son I understand, but God the bird, I do not understand". I think a lot of people feel this way, but it is tragic, because the Holy Spirit defines us as New Testament Christians.

Jonathan Gainsbrugh, who is full of one liners recently said to me, "for many the Holy Trinity has become, Father, Son and Holy Bible." We can manage that, but the Holy Spirit and His work, as it says in John 3:8 "is like the wind", is at times harder to fit in our box.

Let me first state the obvious about our current topic of discussion. Are the gifts of the Spirit for today? Let me just state the obvious—we are talking about gifts! Does God give these “grace gifts” today. Why anyone for a second would have a vested interest in hoping that God stopped giving “grace gifts” (Charismata) would be beyond me. *Interesting observation—many people who are sacramentalists are opposed to the gifts today.* So let’s be rational and hope together that these gifts of grace are for today and let’s dive into the topic.

(reasons not to—pride, intellectual discomfort, etc.)

Positions on the gifts

#1 Not for today

Some say, they are **not for today**. There are a few arguments that are used, that I would like to respond to.

1. They say they ceased in the early church history.

“Yet even if we excluded the modern Pentecostal and charismatic movements, the church throughout history continued to believe that supernatural gifts did persist or periodically recur.¹ For example, the early church fathers provided abundant evidence that gifts such as prophecy and miracles continued in their own time...² Christians in the medieval and modern periods continued to embrace these activities of the Spirit.³ It is in fact, cessationism that is not well documented in earlier history.” *Gift and Giver*, Keener 92

I have taken 3 church history courses, however, I am not a church history scholar, so I am relying on others scholarship for substantiation of this (Carson, Keener, Stanley Burgess, Gary McGee), but it just doesn’t seem to be historically factual.

But even if it were the case, the idea that “the gifts should cease is not a logical conclusion based on the assertion that they *did* cease.” The question would then arise should there be some reformation or not.

2. The Scripture they point to cessation.

I hope to show you that, frankly that is just not right, it isn’t in the Bible. Let’s read the text from where some people try to justify this. (*We have to be people who let the Bible dictate our experience and not read our experience or our lack of experience into the text, which is precisely the case of what happens on this topic.*) 1 Corinthians 13 deals with how love is eternal but the Spiritual gifts are temporary, they are not eternal. 1 Corinthians 13:8–13 is dealing with this. **Read v8–13.**

Now I have a question for you:

V10—what is it referring to “When perfection comes?”—when perfection comes the imperfect disappears.

V12—What is it referring to “Then I shall see face to face?” or “Then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known?”

¹ D.A Carson “Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14” 165–168, Eddie Hyatt, “2000 years of Charismatic Christianity”

² See Gary Shogren “Christian Prophecy and Canon in the Second Century: A Response to BB Warfield” *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 40 (4 Dec 1997):609–26; Ronald A.N. Kydd, *Charismatic Gifts in the Early Church* (Hendrickson, 1984)

³ Stanley M. Burgess “Evidence of the Spirit: The Ancient and Eastern Churches” 3–19 and “Evidence of the Spirit: The Medieval and Modern Western Churches” 20–40 in *Initial Evidences: Historical and VBiblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism*, ed. Gary McGee. (Hendrickson, 1991)

Because it is at that point that the gifts will cease. It is speaking without a doubt about the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ! I have never read this text with anyone, who didn't have some preconceived notion about the text and have them tell me anything else other than it is when Jesus comes back. Those who espouse that the gifts ended, say that they ended at the end of the apostolic age and perfection coming was the completion of the Scriptures.

Keener cites Richard Gaffin, a prominent cessationist and professor at Westminster, concedes that "the view that they describe the point at which the New Testament canon is completed cannot be made credible exegetically."⁴

If there is any shadow of a doubt then let me show you one more passage that to me seals the deal of what the verses are talking about. **1 Corinthians 1:7-8** Paul starts his letter by saying this: "You do not lack any spiritual gift **as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ** to be revealed." This verse says that the spiritual gifts are for you, as you wait for Jesus to be revealed.—if there is any question what revealed means—the next verse says "He will keep you strong to **the end**, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Furthermore, Paul would have had to have had in his mind, that he was writing the NT. As Gordon Fee says "This is hermeneutically suspect, since Paul himself could not have articulated it."⁵ Fee goes on to say, "It is perhaps an indictment on Western Christianity that we should consider to be "mature" our rather totally cerebral and domesticated—but bland—brand of faith, with the (concomitant) absence of the Spirit in terms of His supernatural gifts! The Spirit, not western rationalism, marks the turning of the ages, after all; and to deny the Spirit's manifestations is to deny our present existence as eschatological (or people of the last days), [as belonging to the beginning of the time of the End]."⁶

So this passage goes from an apologetic against the gifts to an apologetic for the gifts of the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:20 is a text that Richard Gaffin, professor from Westminster Seminary, uses after admitting that 1 Cor 13 is just not exegetically possible. He says that Apostles and Prophets both performed a revelatory function and that now the canon gets rid of our need for further apostles and prophets.

Which is a big step of logic, with huge ramifications—it is not even in the text, the metaphor of temple is speaking about the unity of the body, both Jew and Gentile, one temple, one foundation, Jesus as the cornerstone. Not only is this question so far from the author's intent, (which it can't mean something today that it couldn't have meant then.) It could not have been taken that way because the gifts were still being used, at the time it is written, so the foundation that is being built on is still incomplete from that frame of reference....not to mention that the paragraph and point ends that the Spirit is what defines the temple!...not in anyway diminishing the Spirit's work, but lifting it up.

[Fee responds "The logic proceeds the exegesis. Indeed, the whole enterprise has its logical form structured by asking a question to which not one of the Biblical texts intends an answer. Gaffin's overruling question is "when will tongues cease?". The one text that addresses this question at all—an even there it is quite incidental to Paul's real point—is 1 Cor 13:10, which almost certainly intends, "at the Eschaton," as its answer. But since the answer is the one Gaffin is uncomfortable with, he sets up his logical circles to answer his own question with , "at the end

⁴ Gift and Giver quoting Gaffin on page 106

⁵ God's empowering presence, Fee pg 207

⁶ God's empowering Presence, Fee pg 207

of the first century”. But in no case does he, nor can he, show that answer to the question is a part of the Biblical author’s intent in the texts that are examined.^{7]}

(Dallas Willard, remarks that those who doubt that God acts and speaks today as he did in the Bible are sort of “Bible Deists”. They act as though God withdrew as soon as the Bible was completed.⁸⁾

#2 Tacitly embrace but make sure they are marginal, or as Fee I believe says “damn them with faint praise.”

The way this is mentioned is with one of two approaches:

1. They say “well the gifts of the Spirit are not talked about except in 1 Corinthians so they obviously must not have been very important.” So you get a don’t ask, don’t tell policy. I would respond two ways:

First of all the presupposition is wrong. The gifts of the Spirit are talked about in many of Paul’s writings. They are talked about in **Romans** Ch 8 and 12, they are talked about in **1 Thessalonians** (5:19–22 I believe), and they are talked about in **Galatians** (3:1–5)—where Paul refers to the miracles that were happening when they came together, in fact he actually starts his argumentation in Galatians by appealing to their experience—then launching into deep theology, because this is where he knew he had them pinned in the corner—why all the miracles—Law or faith? So this means that the gifts of the Spirit were part of the regular Christian experience in Rome, Corinth, Thessalonica, and Galatia, from Paul’s writings alone. If we bring in the book of Acts, we see them in Jerusalem (Acts 2), Samaria (Acts 8), Antioch (Acts 13), Ephesus (Acts 19) just to name a few more and honestly the church over all. Paul would not have known of Christianity, where the Spirit of God was not dynamically active among God’s people. It just makes sense. If we are people of the Spirit, it makes sense that when people of the Spirit come together that God’s Spirit would be active among us! **As Fee says “Whatever else, the Spirit was experienced in the Pauline churches; He was not simply a matter of credal ascent”**⁹

Next, I would say, that yes, we get the most information about the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians, which is also true about the Lord’s supper, communion. We wouldn’t have any record of the early church taking the Lord’s supper if it wasn’t for 1 Corinthians. The same people who argue, saying that it must be marginal because we don’t get much treatment of the gifts of the Spirit in the Bible, which I just showed is not right, are the same people who deeply value communion and practice it often if not weekly, and rightfully so. The only reason why we get what we do about both topics is because the Corinthian church was messing it up!

2. The other thing that is said by some people who tacitly embrace and make sure they are marginal is the following: They use 1 Corinthians 13 which I just read and say, “**see who needs gifts, let’s have love, love is all that matters**” and juxtapose them against each other.

1 Corinthians 13 isn’t meant to be a contrast of love vs. Spiritual gifts, but it is to say, **love is the context for the gifts, love is the setting, the motive for the gifts**, which the Corinthians were missing—We must affirm and remember that love is the most important of all true expressions of the Spirit’s presence as 13:1–3 says very clearly, some take that and say “who needs the gifts lets have love”—this is a terrible misreading of the text. It is gifts without love that is the issue.

⁷ Fee, Gospel and Spirit, pg 77

⁸ Gift and Giver, pg 91

⁹ Listening to the Spirit in the Text, pg 108

Love has edification as its primary aim, and that is what the gifts are graciously given to us from God to do....edify, build up.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:1 Pursue love! And be zealous/eagerly desire (proactive not passive) for the things of the Spirit, especially the gift of prophecy. Keep things in context—**not pursue love and forget gifts, or pursue gifts this is where all the action is....but pursue love and you will be zealous for the giftings of the Spirit, precisely because you are pursuing love and you want to edify those around you. It says in verse 14:3 that prophecy is for strengthening, encouraging and comfort.** I will talk later how God has used people to edify me, and in doing so love me in powerful ways through the gift of prophecy.

#3 Gifts are for today and should be experienced as the normal Christian life

First of all, they embrace the gifts of the Spirit for today, believe they are thoroughly biblical, desire them, value them and experience them.

Let me recap some of the reasons that I have mentioned above:

1. 1 Corinthians 1:7; 13:8–12 clearly teach they are for us until Jesus' return.
2. This is the normal experience of the NT church.
 - a. Galatians 3:5, Romans 15:18–19, 2 Cor 12:12—Paul would simply not have understood the presence of the Spirit that did not also include such evidences of the Spirit's working that he termed "powers," which we translate "miracles."¹⁰
3. Acts 2: A Trajectory passage
 - a. First of all as I talk about this let me point out a couple things that I, as a Pentecostal, find interesting.
 - i. Luke is a very intelligent man, a doctor—however he is fixated on the Holy Spirit. He includes the Holy Spirit often in his Gospel account and then writes the book of Acts that is full of the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.—You can be intellectual and a person of the gifts at the same time
 - ii. Acts 2:13 It says "Some however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine"—even on the day of Pentecost, people who embraced the gifts of the Holy Spirit were mocked and ridiculed. Some things never change.
 - b. When we read Acts 2 and Peter's quote of Joel in verse 17–18. What he says is very important. It says "In the last days"...He is not simply explaining what is happening on the day of Pentecost, He is saying **what will define the last days**. The clear teaching of Scripture is that we live in the "last days". **Is it not?** The time between the coming of Christ, in which he Initiated the Kingdom of God and the Second Coming of Christ, when He will consummate the Kingdom of God. The very fact that we have the Holy Spirit lavished upon us is evidence that we are in fact living as people of the New Age, the eschatological people of God, people of the future, living in the present. Are we not? [So we live in what is called a "Now and Not yet" existence. **Correct?** *(It is simultaneously a life of power and a life of weakness.)*] Well, Peter stands up and quotes the prophet Joel and says, in these "last days" they will be days where the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all flesh, (not just the select few of the OT), and as a result they will prophesy, see visions, dream dreams. All the people of God...young, old, slave, free, male and female. **He points to the Charismata as being descriptive and defining of this time period—the last days, which we live in!**
 - c. As Keener says "Unless God allowed the last days to begin and then retracted them—pouring out His Spirit and then taking His Spirit back, attesting Christ's reign and then concealing it—we must still be in the era of the outpoured Spirit."¹¹
4. Jesus expected the miraculous to follow His people (Matt 10:8, John 14:12, Luke 24:49)

¹⁰ Fee 166 *Paul, the Spirit and the People of God*, Hendrickson.

¹¹ *Gift and Giver*, pg 97

5. Let me just use a little bit of logic: Do you believe the Holy Spirit speaks today? Obviously inside the banks of Scripture, but gives you inclinations of direction, tells you to give to someone, pray for someone, remind you of a truth, give you a specific application of a truth, how to respond, or wisdom, etc. Do you believe He could speak to you in a way to share it with another person or a group of people? Then you probably believe in prophecy. If prophecy, why not tongues, or interpretation, or faith, etc.
6. The burden of proof is really on the other side. They must be able to prove that the Holy Spirit stopped giving grace gifts, but to do so would to either re-exegete 1 Cor 13:8–12 or contradict it.

Reason for the gifts of the Holy Spirit

The reason why we need the gifts of the Spirit, as we await our Lord Jesus, **is because of our weakness**. The fact is, as NT believers we are people of the Spirit, but we still wrestle with a now and not yet existence/weakness....a world that is fallen and polluted by sin, a world that is hostile to our faith, we face an enemy that wants to take us down, and we struggle with the tendencies from our old nature. So the gifts of the Spirit are gifts to us, in the midst of our weakness, to bless us because we need help. So, it is out of our weakness that we need the Spiritual gifts and why God gracious gave us these good gifts.

Sadly, those who are used in Spiritual gifts or have a specific spiritual gift, whether it be tongues, or prophecy or another gift, may hold themselves with a bit of superiority, but the fact is, **the gifts are reminders of our current weakness** and should not lead to a sense of superiority, but of humility before the Lord and our need for the Spirit in the midst of our weakness as Romans 8:26 says, “That He helps us in our weakness”... (we use groans that words cannot express, in our weakness longing for our ultimate redemption just as creation does in its weakness...which is why Paul uses groans and not glossolalia.) “for now, we know in part and see in part.” But one day, when Jesus comes back, we will not need prophecy because we will see face to face, we will not need tongues, because the we will know fully!...but right now we do need to gifts of the Holy Spirit, that is why they are called gifts!

Let me say this: I am so weak I need prophecy to comfort, strengthen and encourage me. I am so weak there are times I do not know how to pray and I need the gifts of tongues. I am so weak there are times when I don't know how to lead Chi Alpha and I need words of wisdom and knowledge. I am so weak I need gifts of faith to do what God is calling me to do. I am so weak, I need God's gracious gift of healing. I am so weak, I need the Holy Spirit's grace gifts! Are you? I need people to love me in a way where they allow the Holy Spirit to use them to minister those gifts to my life—to edify me!

I speak in tongues most days, but I don't think I am superior to anyone else, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit remind me of my weakness!

It is because of our between the times existence that we desperately need the Spirit's help in our present frailty.¹²

Personal Experience

Perhaps look at fruit around the world—China, Africa, and South America?? This week I was reading a book about this topic and the author posed the question should we expect to see “signs and wonders” as ordinary Christians? He quickly answered—I know how believers in China would answer this!

A couple stories of tongues that I have encountered just in the past 6 months: After my last session on the Holy Spirit in the Spring Semester, I independently had two gals come up to me and tell me about times when they spoke in tongues but had no idea theological background for it, but just knew it was powerful and glorious.—Claudia and Jocelyn.

¹² ¹² Listening to the Spirit in the text, pg 117

Then just two weeks ago we got a report from Chi Alpha missions director, who is heading up a team in a Almaty, Kazakstan country and he prayed over a young lady from Kyrgestan for healing and felt like God told him to pray in tongues over her, and she told him that he was praying perfectly in her native language. This has happened to my pastor as well, Pastor Pete. I know of several of these accounts.

Let me tell you a couple stories about prophesy and then I will close with a final word.

As I look over my life, at almost every major crossroads in my walk with God, God has used the prophetic to confirm what He was doing or wanting to do in my life.

- In going to camp—Mary Ann Harrwood (and Nanny) had a prophetic word from prayer that caused them to pay me to go and pay for my way...my life was changed—up/side down that week!
- In going public with my call—Kathy Pinkston praying for me “God put you on my heart to pray for you to be obedient to do what you needed to do”
- In going into Chi Alpha—Eric Lerew calling “you sometimes know the answer to your prayers when you see it.”
- In coming to UVA—Pastor Pete “I already knew that, I presented you to the board last night for missionary support”

This shows me the importance of the prophetic in my life. These were words that edified me, that were loving to me, and ultimately have been powerful in my life.

In closing, I want to read the end of 1 Corinthians 14. It ends where we started. V39–40: “Be eager to prophesy” or as v1 said, eagerly desire the Spiritual gifts, especially the gifts of prophesy. “And do not forbid speaking in tongues.” In other words in your correction Corinth, don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater. (Interesting verse considering some churches views. I am not sure how churches that forbid speaking in tongues get around this, specific command.) And then let me give you a Pete Bullette paraphrase of the last verse: don’t be weird about it. But express the supernatural in a fitting and orderly way, honor the Holy Spirit by handling the gifts in a way that is not weird, but having your heart open and eagerly desiring His gracious gifts.

I don’t know what background you come from—my wife came from a background where it wasn’t talked about at all and the gifts were not embraced, but let me encourage you to: Follow the way of love and eagerly desire the Spiritual gifts, especially the gifts of prophecy.

Are you and I open to whatever the Holy Spirit has for us?

Are we willing to prayer for that?

What could God accomplish through us?

? Questions ?

(Are you ready for Himmersion? Immersion in Him—the Holy Spirit?)

Tongues: Prayer (v14–15), praise (v16), thanksgiving (v17)—edifies himself

Prophecy: Stengthening, encouragement, and comfort (v3–4)—edifies the Body.

Page 1: [I am going to do something that is against what they tell you to do as a public speaker. I want to tell you that I speak in tongues almost every day. Now that I have said that, what was your emotional reaction? Perhaps you took that as sounding arrogant—as often times it sounds like I am saying I am superior to others who don’t, hopefully we will clear that up. Did my perceived authority increase or decrease? (that is why I shouldn’t have done it) But on the other

hand, my perceived authority on the topic may have decreased with that statement because we want someone who doesn't have a bias on the topic.]

The topic that I have been brought in to discuss is "are the gifts for today?", so the thought is we want someone who has done brain surgery to talk about brain surgery, not just someone who has just read a lot about brain surgery.

Page 1: (Probably not: In fact I would say, that this bias is the only thing that keeps cessationist in existence. It is hard for me to believe that today someone could read the Bible and come to the conclusion that it wasn't for today.)

Page 3: [Probably not: Why did Paul even deal with this? Because apparently the Corinthians were thinking that with speaking in tongues and the Spiritual gifts they were actually more spiritual and living in a heavenly life, so to speak....this is probably why Paul hits on tongues of men or of angels...and probably why he is dealing with wives holding out on their husbands in Chapter 7, because of their sins of "being Spiritual" had achieved for them a heavenly state, where sex was not needed or necessary. The irony is that Paul uses the present gifts of the Spirit to focus them on the preeminence of love and how actually the gifts don't just remind us that we are people of the future, but they remind us that we are still weak...living inbetween the times. (The giftings of the Spirit is not that we live in eschatological glory, they are necessary now, but there is coming a time when they will not be necessary anymore.)

As Fee puts it, "The problem is an over-spiritualized eschatology, as if tongues, the language of angels, meant that they were already partakers of the ultimate state of spiritual existence." The irony is that these gifts will pass away. They remind us of both our current weakness and the fact that we are people of the eschaton, the present working of the Holy Spirit.]

(from list of reasons for believing in the gifts Page 6)

1. *(Jack Deere who was a seminary professor and cessationist who began to experience the the supernatural and changed his stance points out the following from 1 Cor 12-14*
 - a. *The gifts are for the common good (12:7)*
 - b. *We are commanded to zealously pursue spiritual gifts (14:1)*
 - c. *Paul warns not to prohibit the speaking in tongues (14:39)*
 - d. *Paul valued tongues (14:5,18)*
 - e. *Spiritual gifts are necessary for the health of the body of Christ (12:12-27)*
 - f. *As mentioned earlier, Paul explicitly states that these gifts will not cease until Christ's return (13:8-12)*

Would God place such commands in Scripture if they were relevant for only 4 decades, especially since during most of that time the majority of ancient Christians would not have yet had access to Paul's letters?)

Link of craziness:

<http://www.bible.ca/tongues-ceased-perfect-come-intro.htm>

This man definitely have the Father, Son and Holy Bible as his trinity.

It seems to me the argument by many is over the word in the greek for perfect—Telios. But I have to look and say, Paul encouraged the gifts and was happy for them in his own life, and admits he is part of the those that are still in a posture of weakness, glass half full. But the fact is, he would be saying by including himself, that as soon and he and John finish writing a few more letters he will see perfect? I don't think so.