

## **Study Guide #13: Spiritual Gifts**

### **Introduction**

The topic of spiritual gifts has been much debated in Christian circles. What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? Does every believer possess a spiritual gift? Is there a difference between spiritual gifts and natural talents? Did the *supernatural* spiritual gifts cease with the end of the apostles' era in the 1<sup>st</sup> century? We examine these and other questions concerning the issue of spiritual gifts in this Study Guide.

### **Question #1: What are spiritual gifts, and what is their purpose?**

**Answer:** Spiritual gifts are gifts given to Christians by God the Holy Spirit in the context of the Church as the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:4-7, 27-28). The New Testament teaches that every believer has at least 1 gift (I Peter 4:10). Since the Holy Spirit gives the spiritual gifts, they are usually given at baptism,



when the believer receives the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). They are called *spiritual* gifts for 2 reasons. *First*, they are given by the Holy Spirit. *Second*, they are given for members to engage in a particular *spiritual* ministry or work. It's important to note that spiritual gifts are never given for the benefit of the member, but for the benefit of others. [NOTE: This last principle was grossly violated concerning the gift of tongues in ancient Corinth, with members showing off that gift (I Corinthians 14—see Study Guide #14).]

There are 2 principal reasons or purposes for spiritual gifts: (1) Their close association with the Holy Spirit suggests they are given to empower the believer's witness for Jesus and make it more effective since that's one major purpose for the Holy Spirit according to Acts 1:8; and (2) At least some spiritual gifts are given (a) to equip members for a work of ministry, and (b) to edify (build up) the Church (Ephesians 4:7-12).

### **Question #2: Is there a difference between a spiritual gift and a natural talent?**

**Answer:** Some of the spiritual gifts are of a more supernatural nature. Obviously, these would definitely not be natural talents that one was born with. Most of them, however, could be natural talents, but even those have been *sanctified* ("set apart") by the Spirit and strengthened for use in the Christian witness and/or in edifying the Church. As with natural talents, these non-supernatural spiritual gifts can be improved or strengthened by using them.

### Question #3: Where can you find a list of spiritual gifts in the New Testament? And what are they?

**Answer:** There are 4 different lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament, with some of the gifts being repeated in more than 1 list: (1) Romans 12:3-8; (2) I Corinthians 12:4-11; (3) I Corinthians 12:28-30; and (4) Ephesians 4:7-11. There are 20 different spiritual gifts identified in the New Testament:

Prophecy	Mercy	Tongues
Ministry (Service)	Wisdom	Interpretation of Tongues
Teaching	Knowledge	Apostle
Pastor-Teacher	Faith	Helps
Exhortation	Healings	Administration
Giving	Miracles	Evangelist
Leadership	Discerning of spirits	

[NOTES: Explanations of several of the gifts are given below. Most of those not in this list of explanations are discussed either in this Study Guide or in Explorer II, Study Guide #14:

- Ministry (Service)—since every member has a ministry, this must represent an extraordinary ministry or a gift for whom service comes easily.
- Pastor-Teacher—This is a compound gift because the Greek text of Ephesians 4:11 doesn't have the word for "some" preceding the word "teacher."
- Exhortation—the gift of encouragement
- Giving—since all are to give, this must be a gift that enables the person to give more of themselves or finances than most can.
- Knowledge—this must represent a higher level of spiritual knowledge than most have.
- Faith—this must represent a member whose faith is greater than most.
- Apostle—this represents an apostle of the Church, which makes this the gift of missionary service.
- Helps—the Greek word here was used frequently with the meaning of one who provides assistance to the sick and poor.]



Gift of Teaching

### Question #4: It's easy to see if one has a *supernatural* spiritual gift. But how do you know if you have any *other* spiritual gifts?

**Answer:** *First*, praying about it may eventually result in the Spirit giving a believer a strong impression about his spiritual gifts. *Second*, and perhaps the best way, is to volunteer in various ministries of the church (not at the same time, however) and discover which ones you are more effective in. Other members can also give you feedback during this process. *Finally*, you can take a spiritual gifts test, which are usually available from your pastor or even on the Internet. [NOTE: As with any activity in the church, each member should work in coordination with other believers in an organized way to utilize his spiritual gifts.]

## Question #5: What are the supernatural spiritual gifts?

**Answer:** These are often called the “sign” gifts because the large majority of Christians today believe they were given to the early Church only to validate the new Christian movement as being from God. Then after the 1<sup>st</sup> century, they were no longer needed and thereby disappeared. There are 5 of them: (1) Prophecy; (2) Healings; (3) Miracles; (4) Tongues; and (5) Interpretation of Tongues.

From an historical point of view, 2 factors were associated with the end of the so-called “sign” gifts. *First*, by the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century, a large number of Christians claiming to possess the gift of prophecy were proclaiming rather spectacular prophecies, which became an embarrassment to the Church. *Second*, the Church was in the process of developing the 3-fold ministry (see Study Guide #9). Eventually, this 3-fold ministry was used to deny even the existence of the genuine prophetic gift in the Church, thus ending most of the trouble caused by those who claimed the prophetic gift.

## Question #6: Is it true that God intended for the “sign” gifts to disappear about the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century?

**Answer:** The view that the “sign” gifts were intended to disappear near the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century is known as *cessationism*, as in “ceasing” to exist. There are clear indications that this was not part of God’s original plan.



Gift of Healing

The apostle Paul wrote of his desire that believers should **“come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (I Corinthians 1:7, NKJV). And in Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul refers to apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers as continuing in the Church **“till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”** (NKJV). Since prophets are mentioned here, and that

is one of the “sign” gifts, this is also evidence that Paul expected the “sign” gifts to also continue in the Church until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus.

## Question #7: So why did the “sign” gifts disappear in the Church?

**Answer:** *First*, why would the Holy Spirit continue to give gifts to the Church that the Church itself would never recognize as being genuine? Members with such gifts would either be ignored, or their “sign” gifts would be attributed to Satan. *Second*, while the ultimate conclusion of the cessationists is not correct, they do have a point. From Bible history, we discover that there were 3 great waves of the miraculous among God’s people: (a) in connection with Moses and the exodus of Israel from Egypt; (b) in connection with the prophets Elijah and Elisha amid the great apostasy of Israel; and (c) in connection with Jesus and His apostles in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. Although no spiritual gift will be withheld if the Holy Spirit deems it necessary, Bible history does suggest that the “sign” gifts come in waves in connection with extremely important times.

On that basis, we would expect the final wave of “sign” gifts to come just before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus. That view seems confirmed by the declaration in Joel 2:28-31 **“That I will pour out My Spirit on all**

**flesh, Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams. Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days...Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord” (NKJV).** Such an outpouring of the Holy Spirit will validate God’s final warning message to the world to get ready for Jesus to come. Of particular note in Joel 2 is the gift of prophecy.

### **Question #8: Does a final wave of “sign” gifts suggest a major counterfeit of the miraculous by Satan in order to deceive the world?**

**Answer:** Absolutely! That’s the reason Jesus warned us against **“false christs and false prophets [who] will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive”** (Matthew 24:24, NKJV). The Antichrist will work with **“all power, signs, and lying wonders”** (II Thessalonians 2:9, NKJV). And Revelation 16:14 warns that the **“spirit of demons, performing signs, [will] go out to the kings of the earth”** at the end time (NKJV). Undoubtedly, to be most effective, Satan’s counterfeit signs will probably appear before the final wave of “sign” gifts from the Holy Spirit so as to confuse the world. [NOTE: Note that Satan is an angelic being, which means he can—as permitted by God, of course—perform real miracles, and not only “fake” ones. We won’t be able to trust our senses—only the Word of God!]



A Miracle

### **Question #9: If a believer only had more faith, would he be able to perform miracles?**

**Answer:** Although this is a common idea among certain Christians, is it really true? *First*, while even supernatural spiritual gifts *could* exist at any time in the Church, they do tend to come infrequently in waves. Remember too that the Holy Spirit gives us spiritual gifts **“as He wills”** (I Corinthians 12:11, NKJV, emphasis supplied). *Second*, genuine Christian faith is not an entity unto itself; it’s faith or trust in God’s promises. The amount of faith isn’t what counts, according to Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6, but it’s the *object* of one’s faith. For example, even strong faith in a weak bridge may not get you safely across it. But weak faith, if exercised, will get you safely across a strong bridge every time. So the idea that if a believer simply had enough faith, or were somehow more righteous, he could work miracles can’t be true. Finally, this idea is dangerously close to the view that one can earn the right to do miracles if he were good enough. And we must always avoid any teaching that even tends toward legalism.