

# The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Believer

by John F. Walvoord

---

*The sermon explores the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer, specifically the doctrine of spiritual gifts and their importance in the Christian life.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 28:11, Acts 2:1, Acts 10:46, Acts 19:6, Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:4, 1 Corinthians 13:8, 1 Corinthians 14:26, Ephesians 4:11

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Spiritual Gifts"

---

## Description

John F. Walvoord preaches about the important work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian, focusing on spiritual gifts, experiences, and service for God. He emphasizes the significance of understanding the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's work in believers, as it directly impacts every aspect of a believer's experience, including sanctification, spiritual understanding, assurance, service, prayer, and worship. The sermon delves into the two main categories of the Holy Spirit's work in believers: bestowing spiritual gifts and filling believers with the Spirit, highlighting the balance needed in appreciating and utilizing spiritual gifts without neglecting their importance or abusing them.

---

## Transcript

[Author's Note: Having previously considered the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation, we treat here the important work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian as evidenced in spiritual gifts, experience, and service for God.]

Introduction.

Few subjects are of more immediate moment in the experience of the believer in Christ than the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in His relation to the spiritual life. Important as other considerations may be from the standpoint of doctrine and accurate interpretation of the Scriptures, the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer has a prior place because it is directly related to every reality of the believer's experience. The believer's sanctification, spiritual understanding, assurance, service, prayer, and worship all spring from the work of the Spirit within. A proper understanding of the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer will do much to unlock the possibilities for spiritual blessing and usefulness, and it is, accordingly, the duty of those who teach and preach to give careful attention to its study and proclamation.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the believer falls into two well-defined categories. The important subject of spiritual gifts as bestowed by the Holy Spirit must be considered first, as the preliminary to all the

operations of the Spirit. Second, the work of the Holy Spirit in filling the believer, with consideration of its Biblical conditions and results, must be presented. The two aspects together determine the place and fruitfulness of every believer.

## I. The Work of the Holy Spirit in Bestowing Spiritual Gifts

The church from the beginning has been plagued by two opposing extremes in its doctrine of spiritual gifts. From the first, as the Corinthian epistles bear witness, there was abuse of spiritual gifts. In the course of the history of the church, excesses of the wildest kind are found in relation to this doctrine. On the other hand, there has been an appalling failure to appreciate the importance of spiritual gifts as determining the ministry of the church and as being essential to all its fruitfulness. The proper balance of doctrine is found in the Scriptures, and excesses have been noteworthy in their neglect of what the Scriptures actually teach. In the Scriptural revelation, certain facts are of great importance. First, the nature of the gifts of the Holy Spirit must be determined from the Scriptures. This at once distinguishes the true from the false. Second, spiritual gifts which clearly abide throughout the Christian dispensation must be examined and analyzed. Herein is provided the gifts without which even saved men would find it impossible to minister for God. Third, spiritual gifts as found in the apostolic age must be studied to determine whether, indeed, they are included in the program of God after the apostolic age. In other words, were certain spiritual gifts temporarily given the apostles for specific purposes which ceased to exist after their passing?

### 1. The Nature of Spiritual Gifts.

Something of the nature of spiritual gifts is revealed in the various words used in the New Testament to express the idea. The chief passage in the New Testament on the subject of gifts is found in 1 Corinthians 12-14. In the opening verse of the passage, the subject is introduced by the word πνευματικῶν, which with the article indicates the things of the Spirit, i.e., spiritual gifts. The word directs attention to the source, the Holy Spirit, and the realm of these gifts. As so used, the expression has the same reference as χαρισμάτων, meaning in the singular, a gift of grace, and in connection with spiritual gifts, the "extraordinary powers, distinguishing certain Christians and enabling them to serve the church of Christ, the reception of which is due to the power of divine grace operating in their souls by the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup> This word brings out the ground and nature of spiritual gifts. They are bestowed in grace, are entirely undeserved, and their power and operation is due to God alone. This thought is further emphasized by the use of the verb διδοται (1 Cor 12:7ff), meaning to give. It is clear from these several factors that the whole idea of spiritual gifts necessitates a supernatural work of God quite distinct from any natural powers of man, or even from any spiritual qualities which are universal among the saved. Spiritual gifts by their nature are individual and come from God.

A distinction may be observed in the New Testament between spiritual gifts and gifted men. While the two ideas are inseparable, spiritual gifts has reference to the supernatural powers possessed by individuals, while gifted men has reference to the sovereign placing of gifted men in the Church for the purpose of ministering to the body. While the principal thought of 1 Corinthians 12-14 is that of spiritual gifts, we find reference to the bestowal of gifted men on the Church in Ephesians 4:11. The two ideas are not strictly separated as indicated by the references in the Corinthian passage to both spiritual gifts and to gifted men. It may be noted, however, that gifted men are normally a gift of Christ or of God, while spiritual gifts are a work of the Third Person. The sphere of spiritual gifts is peculiarly a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and therefore is the primary concern of the present study.

The principal word for spiritual gifts (χαρίσματα) is found frequently in the New Testament (Rom 1:11; 5:15, 16; 6:23; 11:29; 12:6; 1 Cor 1:7; 7:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31; 2 Cor 1:11; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; 1 Pet 4:10). Most of these instances add little to the central passage of 1 Corinthians 12-14. All except the one passage in Peter are found in the Pauline epistles. A number of these instances do not have reference to extraordinary powers evidenced in spiritual gifts proper. In Romans 5:15, 16, the gift in view is that of justification, while in Romans 6:23, eternal life is the gift. The sovereign plan of God for each life, some to marry, some not to marry, is referred to as a gift in 1 Corinthians 7:7. The blessings of God in general as resulting from the prayers of God's people are spoken of as a gift in 2 Corinthians 1:11. In Romans 1:11, Paul speaks of imparting a spiritual gift to the Romans, either in the sense of a distinct blessing through his ministry, or in the specific sense of imparting a special power, or a spiritual gift properly. The apostle may have had extraordinary authority in this regard as indicated in the impartation of a spiritual gift to Timothy (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6), though the act of laying on of hands seems to have been in reality simply a solemn recognition of spiritual gifts already imparted by God, and a setting apart to their full exercise. In any case, there is no warrant to believe that anyone has power to impart spiritual gifts except God in post-apostolic times. The other references to spiritual gifts (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 1:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31; 1 Pet 4:10) may be taken as reference to spiritual gifts proper, extraordinary powers given by God as tokens of His grace and the means by which the individual's place in the ministry of the body of Christ may be fulfilled.

Before turning to the discussion of the gifts themselves, certain general factors relating to gifts may be mentioned. First, spiritual gifts are revealed to be given sovereignly by God, and as such, they are not properly the objects of men's seeking. To the Corinthians, who were exalting minor gifts to the neglect of more important gifts, Paul wrote, "But covet earnestly the best gifts" (1 Cor 12:31), yet in his other epistles it is clear from his silence on the subject that seeking spiritual gifts is not a proper subject for exhortation. Because their bestowal is sovereign, it follows that it is not a question of spirituality. A Christian unyielded to the Lord may possess great spiritual gifts, while one yielded may have relatively minor spiritual abilities. According to the Scriptures, "All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Cor 12:11). It remains true, of course, that proper adjustment in the spiritual life of the believer is essential to proper exercise of his gifts, but spirituality in itself does not bring spiritual gifts.

The question has been raised whether spiritual gifts are a part of the original bestowal of grace accompanying salvation, or whether they are a subsequent work. The Scriptures give no clear answer, but from the nature of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which occurs at the moment of new birth, and the resultant placing into the body of Christ, it would be reasonable to infer that spiritual gifts are bestowed at that time in keeping with the place of the believer in the body of Christ, even if these gifts are not immediately observed or exercised. Accordingly, spiritual gifts probably attend the baptism of the Holy Spirit, even though their bestowal is not included in the act of baptism. In the analogy of natural gifts as seen in the natural man, it is clear that all the factors of ability and natural gift are latent in the new-born babe. So, also, it may be true for spiritual gifts in the one born again. In both the natural and spiritual spheres, it is a matter of proper use and development of gifts rather than any additional gifts being bestowed.

Second, it may be observed that every Christian has some spiritual gifts. According to the Scriptures, "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (1 Cor 12:7), and "All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Cor 12:11). Christians are "members in particular" (1 Cor 12:27), and "are one body in Christ, and every one members one of

another" (Rom 12:5). However small the gift, or insignificant the place, every Christian is essential to the body of Christ. As the Scripture puts it, "Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary" (1 Cor 12:22). There is divine purpose in the life of every Christian, and spiritual gifts are in keeping with that purpose. It is the challenge of the Scriptures on this subject (cf. 1 Pet 4:10) that every Christian fulfill the ministry for which he has been equipped by God.

Third, it is clear that gifts differ in value. While there is equality of privilege in Christian faith, there is not equality of gift. According to 1 Corinthians 12:28, "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of hearings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." In the nature of the various gifts, some are more effective and essential than others. Paul contrasts the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues with the words, "I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied" (1 Cor 14:5); and again, "Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue" (1 Cor 14:19).

Fourth, as 1 Corinthians 13 bears witness, spiritual gifts to be profitable must be used in love. Spiritual gifts in themselves do not make great Christians. Their use in the proper way motivated by divine love, which is the fruit of the Spirit, is effective and bears fruit to the glory of God.

A fifth general feature of spiritual gifts is that certain gifts were temporary in their bestowal and use. It is clear that the great body of Bible-loving Christians does not have all the spiritual gifts manifested in its midst as did the early apostolic church. On the other hand, certain gifts clearly characterize the entire present dispensation. The considerations leading to the classification of each gift will be noted in its individual treatment.

A sixth and concluding feature of spiritual gifts which is of great importance is the evident contrast between spiritual gifts and natural gifts. While God may choose men of natural ability, it is clear that spiritual gifts pertain to the spiritual birth of Christians rather than their natural birth. The qualities of the spiritual gifts are not evident in the individual before his salvation. The spiritual gifts pertain to his new nature rather than his old. Spiritual gift must not be regarded, then, as an enlargement of natural powers, but a supernatural gift bestowed in keeping with the purpose of God in placing that individual in the body of Christ. It may be frequently observed that individuals with little natural talent are often used mightily of God when those with great natural talent, though saved, are never similarly used. The spiritual gift is not, then, a demonstration of what man can do even under favorable circumstances, but rather it reveals what God can bestow in grace.

## 2. Permanent Spiritual Gifts.

An examination of the fifteen spiritual gifts revealed in the New Testament will disclose considerable differences in the character of the gifts. Certain gifts are clearly the possession of the Church today as exhibited in their exercise in gifted men throughout the present dispensation. There is little doubt that some men today have (1) the gift of teaching, (2) the gift of helping or ministering, (3) the gift of administration or ruling, (4) the gift of evangelism, (5) the gift of being a pastor, (6) the gift of exhortation, (7) the gift of giving, and (8) the gift of showing mercy. In contrast to these, as their individual exposition will demonstrate, stand other spiritual gifts known by the early Christians, which seem to have passed from the scene with the apostolic period. Some of these are claimed for today by certain sects, whose neglect of the Scriptural instructions for use of these gifts is in itself a testimony to the spurious quality of

their affected gifts. Among these temporary gifts the following can be named: (1) the gift of apostleship, (2) the gift of prophecy, (3) the gift of miracles, (4) the gift of healing, (5) the gift of tongues, (6) the gift of interpreting tongues, (7) the gift of discerning spirits. The purpose of the present discussion is to examine, first, the spiritual gifts admitted by all as the possession of various gifted men throughout the present dispensation, leaving the treatment of the controversial aspects of the doctrine for the discussion to follow.

#### a. The Gift of Teaching.

The gift of teaching is mentioned specifically a number of times in the New Testament (Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11), and it must be considered as one of the major gifts. The foundational character of a teaching ministry is demonstrated in the activities of the apostles. Their principal work was teaching the new-born Christians who had been saved from their heathen estate. The teaching gift consisted in a supernatural ability to explain and apply the truths which had been already received by the Church. As such it is related to, but not identical with, illumination, which is a divinely-wrought understanding of the truth. Obviously, many Christians are taught of the Spirit, but they do not possess the ability to teach what they know to others as effectively as those who possess the gift of teaching. The teaching gift does not claim any superior knowledge of the truth necessarily, and is distinct from the prophetic gift, in which the prophet speaks as the mouthpiece of God. The teacher must understand the truth and be taught by the Spirit, but the gift of teaching concerns the explanation and application of the truth rather than the method by which the truth was originally received. In the present day, the gift of teaching is exclusively that of teaching the Word of God by means of divinely-wrought ability.

#### b. The Gift of Ministering.

A gift possessed universally among Christians, though varying in its qualities, is the gift of ministering or helping (Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28). It is difficult to imagine any Christian who does not possess some ability to minister or help in spiritual things. While to other few is committed the gifts of teaching and leadership, all Christians are able to minister and help. While this ability is universal, it remains a gift sovereignly bestowed according to each individual's place in the body of Christ. The distinctions within the gift are many, different individuals being able to minister in different ways, thereby retaining a peculiar quality to the gift according to the purpose of God in its bestowal. The task of the Church would be impossible apart from the gift and its exercise, however greatly endowed might be its leaders.

#### c. The Gift of Administration.

Necessary to the work of the Church is the leadership given to it by God. In keeping with this need, the gift of administration and ruling is sovereignly bestowed upon a few (Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 12:28). It is clear that all Christians are on the same level of privilege in spiritual things, but in the providence of God some are given places of greater authority. To those possessing the gifts of administration and ruling all Christians should give proper heed, being exhorted to observe such gifts and honor them by obedience (Heb 13:7).

#### d. The Gift of Evangelism.

Of primary importance in propagating the Gospel is the gift of evangelism (Eph 4:11). By its title, it is clear that this gift has reference to effective preaching of the Gospel message to the unsaved, and as such it is to be compared to the teaching gift which gives instruction to the saved. It is clear, experimentally, that knowledge of the Gospel does not bring with it the ability to preach it with success to others. Men may possess the gift of teaching, for instance, without possessing the gift of evangelism, and vice versa. In

some cases, men have possessed both the gift of teaching and of evangelism, as illustrated in the person of the Apostle Paul. While all are called to bring the Gospel to the lost by whatever means may be at their disposal, and accordingly, like Timothy, should do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim 4:5), it is the sovereign purpose of God that certain men should have a special gift in evangelism.

#### e. The Gift of Being a Pastor.

The general care of the Christian flock is the work of a pastor, and to this end some are given the gift of being a pastor (Eph 4:11). By its very title, it compares to the work of a shepherd caring for his sheep, the word pastors being the translation of ποιμηνες, a word meaning literally, shepherds. By the nature of the figure, a pastor is one who leads, provides, protects, and cares for his flock. As in the natural figure, no small skill is required to care for the flock properly, so in the spiritual reality a pastor needs a supernatural gift to be to his flock all that a pastor should.

An interesting light on the character of a true pastor's work is afforded by the close connection between pastoral work and teaching.

In Ephesians 4:11, the use of και, linking pastors and teachers instead of the usual δε, infers that one cannot be a true pastor without being also a teacher. The principle involved is of tremendous significance. While it is not necessary for a teacher to have all the qualities of a pastor, it is vital to the work of a true pastor that he teach his flock. It is obvious that a shepherd who did not feed his flock would not be worthy of the name. Likewise in the spiritual realm the first duty of a pastor is to feed his flock on the Word of God. Quite apart from being merely an organizer, promoter or social leader, the true pastor gives himself to preaching the Word.

#### f. The Gift of Exhortation.

As a part of the work of preaching, exhortation fills an important place. Differing from teaching in that it is an appeal for action, exhortation is ever the practical aspect of a preaching ministry. Some are given special gift in this work, enabling them to lead Christians into the active realization of the will of God. The Greek word translated exhort (Rom 12:8), παρακαλων, in addition to the thought of exhortation embodies the idea of encouragement, comfort, admonishment, and entreaty.<sup>2</sup> All of these form vital aspects of the preaching ministry which ensue as a manifestation of the spiritual gift of exhortation.

#### g. The Gift of Giving.

While the gift of giving borders on the graces which are found universally in all Spirit-filled believers, it has a definite place in the list of spiritual gifts revealed in Romans 12:8, having in view the proper use of temporal means in relation to others. While exercised to some degree by all Christians, and its manifestation is connected somewhat with ability to give, it may be observed as a distinct spiritual gift in some Christians, who demonstrate in the superlative the quality of committing earthly possessions to the Lord for His use.

#### h. The Gift of Showing Mercy.

The concluding gift revealed in the series of gifts mentioned in Romans 12 is the gift of showing mercy (Rom 12:8). While the gift of giving had in view the poor and needy in respect to temporal needs, this gift is related to the sick and afflicted and any other who might fall within the sphere of needing succor. In dealing with such, some Christians are given special ability to show mercy with cheerfulness. The unusual

Greek word here for cheerfulness, ἡλαροτης, found only here in the New Testament in the noun form, has in it the thought of readiness of mind, promptness, from its root-meaning propitious.<sup>3</sup> It is this attitude which is divinely-wrought of the Spirit in some Christians, and these may be said to possess this gift.

### 3. Temporary Spiritual Gifts.

It is clear from a comparison of present-day Christian experience to that of the apostolic age that certain evident contrasts exist. While the Gospel remains unchanged, and many of God's methods of dealing with His own continue throughout the present dispensation, certain factors disappeared with the passing of the apostles and their generation. Different explanations have been offered to account for this. No doubt the church as a whole has drifted from its moorings and is unworthy of the same display of spiritual power. In every generation, however, there has been a faithful remnant of saints true to God, and to these God can continue to reveal Himself in fullness, but even those who have remained close to apostolic doctrine have failed to evidence the same outward phenomena.

The best explanation of the passing of certain gifts and their manifestation is found in the evident purpose of God in the apostolic age. During the lifetime of the apostles, it pleased God to perform many notable miracles, in some cases quite apart from the question of whether the benefit was deserved. A period of miracles is always a time when special testimony is needed to the authenticity of God's prophets. Three notable periods of miracles are recorded in the Bible as history: (1) the period of Moses; (2) the period of Elijah and Elisha; (3) the period of Christ and the apostles. In each of these periods there was need of evidence to authenticate the message of God. In the case of Moses, the miracles performed witnessed to his office as prophet and leader, causing the people to accept his messages as from God. In the time of apostasy and declension under Elijah and Elisha, there was need for unusual witness to the power of God to call a people back to Himself, especially in lieu of priests who were true to God. In the time of Christ, again there is special need for miracles to witness to His Person, to give the proper credentials for the Messiah, and in the case of the apostles, to demonstrate that their Gospel was a message from God. An unusual display of miracles is, therefore, not an ordinary feature of each generation, to be called down at will even by the godly, but is rather articulated in the purpose of God for its value in promotion of His truth.

With the completion of the New Testament, and its almost universal acceptance by those true to God, the need for further unusual display of miraculous works ceased. The preacher of today does not need the outward evidence of ability to heal or speak with tongues to substantiate the validity of his Gospel. Rather, the written Word speaks for itself, and is attended by the convicting power of the Spirit. It is not a question of the power of God to perform miracles, but simply whether it is His purpose to continue the same form of manifestation of divine power as seen in the apostolic times. Certain sects have clung to the idea that the unusual features of the apostolic age will be reproduced in any age where people truly seek them in faith from God. It is evident, however, that some of the most godly people of recent generations have been entirely without the spiritual gifts which are here classed as temporary. It is evident, also, that some who have claimed these temporary gifts in the present day have evidenced a gross indifference to the Bible as a whole, to Christian morality, and to the higher claims of a spiritual life. The history of these sects is most convincing in demonstrating that the undue seeking of spiritual gifts results only in excesses of the most unholy kind.

It is impossible in the nature of the case for anyone to cover the whole realm of Christian experience. Not only in the realm of spiritual gifts but also in other fields of doctrine there has been a constant parade of those who justify doctrines on the basis of varied experiences. The final test must always be what the

Scriptures actually teach. Experience may serve as a partial test of the conclusions, but in itself the Bible must be taken as the final authority. Experience ever possesses two fatal grounds for error: (1) a misapprehension of the experience itself in its content and divine origin; (2) a faulty conclusion as to the doctrinal meaning of the experience. Hence, on the one hand, an experience supposedly of divine origin may be purely psychological, or worse, a deceiving device of Satan himself. On the other hand, a genuine experience may be misunderstood and mislabeled, as the common denomination of the work of the filling of the Spirit as the baptism of the Spirit. The Christian seeking the truth must come in all humility and dependence on the Spirit to the Word of God, relying on its teachings implicitly, avoiding even by undue emphasis any warping of the truth.

#### a. The Gift of Apostleship.

The word apostle, a translation of the Greek ἀποστολος, means literally, a delegate, messenger, or one sent forth with orders.<sup>4</sup> According to Thayer (after Lightfoot) it is used 79 times in the New Testament, with 68 of these instances in Luke, Acts, or the epistles of Paul.<sup>5</sup> Its first use in the New Testament is found in the sending of the twelve to preach the imminency of the Kingdom (Matt 10:2; Mark 3:14; 6:30; Luke 6:13). Among those called to the office of apostle was Paul (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1, etc.), Barnabas (Acts 14:14; cf. Gal 2:9); Matthias (Acts 1:25, 26); and possibly James (1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19; and Apollos (1 Cor 4:6, 9). To these some have added Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess 1:1; 2:6); Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25, cf. Greek and A.S.V. margin); the unnamed brethren (2 Cor 8:23, cf. Greek); and Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7). of imparting the Spirit to Jewish-Christian believers; a new relation, that of foundation stones of the new temple (Eph. 2.20-22); and a new function, that of preaching the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified and risen Lord to Jew and Gentile alike. (7) The indispensable qualification of an apostle was that he should have been an eye-witness of the resurrection (Acts 1.22; 1 Cor. 9.1)."<sup>8</sup>

In view of the distinct nature of the apostolic office, it is designated a gift in the New Testament (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). It is expressly declared to be the most important gift (1 Cor 12:28), in that "God hath set some in the church, first apostles..." Apostles are distinguished from prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, etc. (1 Cor 12:28). It is clear, then, that the apostolic gift is given only to those who are apostles in the strict sense of the word. As Scofield indicates, as quoted above, the work of the apostles prior to Pentecost and after Pentecost must be distinguished. The work prior to Pentecost was chiefly in announcing the kingdom as at hand. During the period immediately following Pentecost, they were leaders in introducing the Gospel of salvation, having a divine commission and authority in this leadership, and given special revelation as the foundation of their teaching. The apostles in most instances had also the prophetic gift, and the gift of working miracles (2 Cor 12:12), though not all who had these gifts were apostles. The apostolic office died with the first generation of Christians, there being no provision for successors, nor have there been in the history of the church any who could stand with the apostles. The fact that apostles were chosen from those who were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ in the nature of the case eliminates any possibility of later generations participating in the call to apostleship. The inventions of the Roman church in the attempt to continue the apostolic office have been often refuted.

#### b. The Gift of Prophecy.

Classed second in importance in the list of spiritual gifts is the gift of prophecy (1 Cor 12:28). The importance of this gift is attested by definite mention in other passages (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:10; 14:1-40). The gift of prophecy was evidently possessed by many during the apostolic age. Agabus with evident prophetic gift predicted a famine (Acts 11:27, 28) and warned Paul of his sufferings (Acts 21:10, 11).

Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Paul are mentioned among the "prophets and teachers" at Antioch (Acts 13:1). The four daughters of Philip possessed the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:9), indicating that in the New Testament as in the Old Testament the prophetic gift was not limited to men. Indication that Paul possessed prophetic insight is apparent in his direct guidance by God (Acts 16:6ff; 18:9, 10; 22:17-21; 27:23, 24). Judas and Silas were evidently prophets (Acts 15:32). In all probability all the apostles possessed the gift of prophecy.

The New Testament prophet partook of some of the characteristics of the Old Testament prophet. Both spoke for God; both warned of judgment upon sin; both delivered their message as from God; both dealt with contemporaneous events as well as predicted events of the future. The Old Testament prophet, however, often had the character of a national leader, reformer, or patriot, and delivered his message normally to Israel. The New Testament prophet has no national characteristics; his message is individual and personal; it revealed the will of God which otherwise might have been unknown, meeting the need which later was to be filled by the written New Testament.

Three elements were essential to the gift of prophecy: (1) the prophet must have received his message from God in the form of some special revelation; (2) the prophet must have divine guidance in the declaration of this revelation, corresponding to the inspiration of the written Word; (3) the message delivered by the prophet must bear with it the authority of God. It has been often pointed out that the prophet's message was not necessarily of future things-it might be an interpretation of present events or doctrine. This does not destroy the character of his message as from God, however. Merely teaching guided by the Spirit as experienced by many Christians throughout the present dispensation is not evidence of prophetic gift. The prophet, if a true prophet, must necessarily deliver a message free from error, a product not of his own mind, but a revelation from God. While prophets were men who could err in judgment and in conduct, as illustrated in Peter's compromise with legalism, in their prophetic messages they must be kept from error. Accordingly, there is no reference in the New Testament to anyone teaching error who is designated a true prophet.

The need for the prophetic gift in the apostolic period is evident. There had been a tremendous doctrinal transition from what was commonly believed by the Jews to what constituted the Christian faith. The New Testament was not written immediately, and there was imperative need for an authoritative source of revelation of the will of God. Guidance was needed in formulating the doctrine of the church as commonly believed. To this end God gave to the church prophets who possessed the supernatural gift of prophecy. To them the church gave heed and was kept in relative doctrinal purity in spite of the fact that many of the first generation of Christians did not live to see the day of the completed canon.

The importance of the prophetic gift is indicated in 1 Corinthians 14, where it is set forth as the greatest gift in respect to edification, exhortation, and comfort (1 Cor 14:3). In contrast to the gift of speaking in tongues, teaching in exercise of the prophetic gift is declared to be far superior: "Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue" (1 Cor 14:19). Prophecy is declared to have special benefit in teaching those who believe (1 Cor 14:22). In establishing order in the church assemblies, Paul indicates that prophets should speak in turn, "For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted" (1 Cor 14:31). Probably related to the prophetic gift is the "word of wisdom" and the "word of knowledge" given to some by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:8).

While it may be freely admitted that men today possess the gift of teaching, the gift of exhortation, and the gift of evangelism, it is a safe conclusion that none possess the gift of prophecy. With the completed New Testament, it is evident that there is no further need for additional revelation. It is the purpose of God to reveal Himself through the Word, rather than beyond the Word. There is no more possibility of anyone possessing the prophetic gift in the present dispensation than there is of anyone writing further inspired books to be added to the canon. It is in this light that we may interpret 1 Corinthians 13:8, where in contrast to the abiding character of love, prophecy and special revelation (knowledge) are said to "fail" and "vanish away." The solemn warning of Revelation (Rev 22:18-19), the last to be written of the New Testament, is that God's judgment will rest upon those who add to the book, a reference specifically to the book of Revelation, but embodying the principle which underlies the whole canon.

#### c. The Gift of Miracles.

The gift of miracles (1 Cor 12:28) is classified as the first of the lesser gifts. While apostles, prophets, and teachers are of primary importance, miracles and other gifts are secondary. The use of ε■πειτα makes it clear that the order is deliberate. The apostle is putting first things first. The word for miracles δυνα■μεις has in it the thought of inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature.<sup>9</sup> From this idea is drawn the specific application of power to perform miracles. It is the regular word used for the miracles of Christ (Mark 5:30; Luke 5:17; 6:19; 8:46, etc.), and is used in combination with other words to indicate the nature or purpose of the miracle. In 2 Corinthians 12:12, it is grouped with signs (σημει■οις), wonders (τε■ρασιν), and mighty deeds (δυνα■μειςιν), as the "signs of an apostle." Miracles were, accordingly, a display of divine power with a view of authenticating the apostolic or prophetic gift.

As has been previously indicated, it was evidently the purpose of God to confine this unusual display of divine power to the apostolic age, as the need for subsequent miraculous works ceased with the advent of the written Word of God with its manifest inspiration of God. Much of the objection to the position that the gift of miracles was confined to the apostolic age arises from the confusion of thought which identifies every miracle with the gift of miracles. The apostolic age is distinct because in it some men had the power to perform miracles at will in the name of Christ. It was not simply that a miracle was performed, but it was rather that men possessed a gift of performing miracles frequently. Accordingly, in the history of the church there have been occasional miracles, and God has intervened in answer to faith and prayer and performed mighty works. To no one, however, since apostolic times, has power been given to heal all who are sick, to raise the dead, and in other ways display unusual power to perform miracles. As the gift of apostleship and the gift of prophecy have ceased, with it has ceased the need for the signs of the gift. A Christian can still appeal to God to do wonders, and God does answer prayer. God can still heal and even raise the dead if He chooses, but these miracles are sovereign and individual, not committed to the will of men or bestowed as a spiritual gift. While, therefore, the gift of miracles is not a part of the present program of God, the power of God to perform miracles must be affirmed.

#### d. The Gift of Healing.

The only reference in the Scriptures to healing as a gift is found in 1 Corinthians 12 (vss. 9, 28, 30). In each of the three instances, healing (ι■αμα■των) is used with χαρι■σματα (gifts). It is an aspect of the gift of miracles, a specific application of the power of God. The gift of miracles, however, in some cases was not displayed in healing, as the blinding of Elymas proves (Acts 13:11). The gift of healing had specific reference to restoring health to the body. Like the gift of miracles, it was designed to be a testimony to the truth proclaimed, and ceased as a gift with the passing of the apostles. The same

distinction between the gift of miracles and the possibility of miracles exists between the gift of healing and the possibility of healing. While the gift of healing is no longer bestowed, God is able to heal in answer to prayer and faith. It is possible that some Christians may have unusual experiences in answers to prayer for healing, and yet healing as a gift is not now committed unto men. In every case healing is sovereignly bestowed. No one today, however filled with faith and powerful in prayer, is able to heal in virtue of an abiding gift.

#### e. The Gift of Tongues.

Throughout the history of the church, no spiritual gift has occasioned as much continual controversy as the gift of tongues. Many solutions have been offered to the problem of the nature of this gift, but every one has some difficulties. A full discussion of the problem can be afforded only in works which deal with this one subject. However, within the limited sphere of the present study, the problem can be stated, the nature of speaking in tongues be examined, and the arguments for concluding that this gift was temporary be set forth.

##### (1) The Problem Stated.

The starting point in the examination of the doctrine of speaking in tongues is the account of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13). According to the Scriptures, attendant to the filling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4), all the considerable company gathered together on that day in Christian fellowship, "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." This phenomenon amazed unbelievers who flocked to the scene. They confessed to hearing everyone his own language (Acts 2:8-11), and in their own language the wonderful works of God were extolled. Some accounted for this as an expression of drunkenness, but Peter refuted this by contending it was a predicted sign of the outpouring of the Spirit, quoting Joel 2:29, "And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:18).

The Scriptural account definitely states they spoke with other tongues (λαλεῖν ἐν ἑτέροις γλώσσαις). In addition to this definite statement, there is the confirming evidence that they were heard and understood in various languages. All naturalistic explanations must be dismissed. It is clearly a supernatural work of God, designed to be a sign of His power attending the events of Pentecost.

In Acts 10:46, in connection with the conversion of Cornelius and his house, a second instance of speaking in tongues occurs. While Peter was bringing the Gospel to them, the Spirit fell upon them and "they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God." Attending the formal extension of the Gospel to the gentiles, speaking with tongues is repeated, as if linking this event definitely with Pentecost. Peter evidently refers to this when, in reciting the event, he states, "And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning" (Acts 11:15).

A third important passage is found in Acts 19:6. Paul had discovered some disciples of John the Baptist who had never heard the Gospel of Grace and, accordingly, had not turned in faith to Christ. Following their baptism, Paul laid his hands upon them, and "the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied." The three instances in Acts constitute the only Scriptural reference to tongues in the New Testament except for the account in 1 Corinthians (12:10, 28, 30; 14:1-40). The passages in Acts do not explain the gift of tongues, nor is there any evidence in Acts that the act of speaking in tongues was ever repeated by those who had part in these three instances. Outside of 1 Corinthians there is no exposition of the doctrine in any of the epistles. Accordingly, it is the problem of the doctrine of

tongues to examine the instances in Acts for clues as to the nature of the gift, and to determine its regulation and extent from the 1 Corinthian passages.

Before attempting to reach conclusions in the doctrine, note must be taken of the attempts to solve the problem by various simple expedients. Liberal theologians have tried to solve the problem by placing a late date upon the Acts and inventing a theory that these references are textual interpolations. There is, of course, no scholarship to support this view beyond wishful thinking.

There has been a tendency on the part of some writers in all classes of theology to claim a distinction between Acts 2 and the 1 Corinthian passages. While it is allowed by some that in Acts 2, speaking in tongues consisted in utterances in foreign languages which could be understood naturally by those acquainted with them, it is claimed that in 1 Corinthians speaking in tongues consisted in ecstatic utterances in which human language was not used, the strange sounds issuing forth from the tongue being interpreted by others who had the gift of interpretation. Accordingly Thayer defines speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians as "the gift of men who, rapt in an ecstasy and no longer quite masters of their own reason and consciousness, pour forth their glowing spiritual emotions in strange utterances, rugged, dark, disconnected, quite unfitted to instruct or to influence the minds of others: Acts x.46; xix.6; 1 Co. xii.30; xiii.1; xiv.2, 4-6, 13, 18, 23, 27, 39."<sup>10</sup>

In an attempt to repudiate the excesses of the modern tongues movement, it has served the purpose of some writers to minimize the gift of tongues and to deny to it the reality of an unknown language. Some, like Thayer, extend this only to the 1 Corinthian passage. Others include the passages in Acts as being simply ecstatic utterances which included some foreign words. Any view which denies that speaking in tongues used actual languages is difficult to harmonize with the Scriptural concept of a spiritual gift. By its nature, a spiritual gift had reality, and being supernatural, needs no naturalistic explanation. The phenomenon of speaking in tongues was accepted by believers as a work of the Holy Spirit. All attempts to relate speaking with tongues with the ravings of heathen mystics and soothsayers as some do must be rejected as, in effect, an attack on the accuracy of the Scriptural revelation.

There are good reasons for believing that Thayer's position, illustrating the viewpoint of moderate opposition to considering all Scriptural references to tongues as essentially one, is based on an inadequate conception of the gift. By the express statement of Acts 11:15, the phenomenon of speaking in tongues in Caesarea was similar to the experience at Pentecost. If these two instances are essentially the same, Acts 19 would follow. It would be, certainly, arbitrary and strained exegesis to make a distinction when none is made in the text.

The use of identical terms in reference to speaking with tongues in Acts and in 1 Corinthians leaves no foundation for a distinction. In all passages, the same vocabulary is used: λαλεω and γλωσσα, in various grammatical constructions. On the basis of the Greek and the statement of the text no distinction is found. The appeal to psychology is at best an a priori argument based on presumption.

Some have ignored the problem of Acts and attempted to solve the statements of 1 Corinthians by making all references to tongues a reference to the Hebrew language-i.e., an unknown language to the Corinthians. There is no basis for this in the text, nor does it warrant the designation a spiritual gift, if it concerns a language known to the speakers by natural means.

The only safe principle to follow in discerning the doctrine of speaking in tongues is to assume that basically the gift is the same in its various references. Distinctions there are, as will be noted, but in each case

speaking in tongues is real, not simply apparent; supernatural, not natural; a work of the Spirit, not a product of psychology or education; and a sign given particularly for unbelievers.

The problem of whether the gift of tongues was temporary for the apostolic period or permanent throughout the dispensation must be settled on the basis of 1 Corinthians alone. This problem becomes more simple if first the real character of speaking in tongues is determined. An examination of all the facts will substantiate the doctrine that speaking in tongues is not normal for the entire present age.

## (2) Speaking in Tongues in Acts.

Previous discussion of the three notable passages in Acts (2:4; 10:46; 19:6) has shown a unity in vocabulary, binding the instances together. It is evident that all are real, as proved both by the direct statement of Scripture, and the confirming evidence of those who heard them. All must have been supernatural in character, a work of the Holy Spirit. It remains to note that all the instances have their significance revealed in their character as signs.

On the day of Pentecost, all the full-orbed work of the Spirit now enjoyed by believers came into being. In addition to the full reality of regeneration, believers were baptized into the body of Christ, indwelt by the Spirit, sealed unto the day of redemption, and filled with the Spirit. On the day of Pentecost the Church as the body of Christ began by the act of baptism. It is evident that some outward display of the fullness of the Spirit was fitting. In the providence of God, the ability to speak with tongues was given as a confirmation that God had wrought in them and as a token of the ultimate universal extension of the Gospel to all nations.

In the preaching of the Gospel to Cornelius, a further important step was taken. The Gospel had been preached to gentiles before, but it was now being revealed that gentiles could accept the Gospel on the same basis as the Jews: they had equal privilege. This was the truth which was impressed upon Peter. Accordingly, God saw fit to endow the occasion with a display of divine power which reproduced to some extent the phenomena of speaking with tongues manifested at Pentecost. An outward token was needed, and God provided it.

The third instance in Acts 19:6 offers another instance in which an outward sign was needed. The sign was needed not only to convince unbelievers, but also to confirm the faith of the believers who only then had come to know Him of whom John spake. either psychological or demonic activity. A most convincing argument is the history of the tongues movement with its excesses and its obvious evil characteristics. Some earnest Christians, however, are numbered among those claiming to speak in tongues, and in the nature of the case it is not possible to examine the experience of everyone. The evils of the tongues movement have not arisen from the belief in speaking in tongues, but rather in the neglect of the Scriptures in their teaching on the subject, their regulation of the gift, and the modern false doctrine of tongues itself.

Three important lines of argument substantiate the claim that speaking in tongues was a temporary gift. First, by its character as a sign, tongues are no longer needed. Isaiah predicted, "With stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people" (Isa 28:11; cf. 1 Cor 14:21). The fulfillment being fully established, there is no further need of the sign. Second, some other spiritual gifts are temporary, as illustrated in the gift of apostleship, the gift of prophecy, the gift of miracles, and the gift of healing. It was apparently God's purpose to withdraw the unusual phenomena which attended the early church.

Third, it is predicted that tongues would cease (1 Cor 13:8). In view of the fact that tongues as mentioned in the context refers to the gift of tongues, it is reasonable to conclude that the same reference is here. On the basis of both inference and specific reference, the gift of tongues is revealed to be a temporary provision of God for the apostolic period.

#### (5) The Danger of Abuse of the Doctyne.

It is apparent from 1 Corinthians that speaking with tongues by its very nature is peculiarly liable to abuse. With this in view, certain facts may be restated in conclusion. First, speaking in tongues is the least of all spiritual gifts. It was, therefore, not to be exalted as an evidence of great spiritual power or usefulness. The prominence given to it by certain sects is quite apart from the Scriptures. Second, speaking in tongues was in no sense a test of salvation. By its very nature as a gift, it is clear that not all Christians possessed it even in apostolic times. The total lack of reference outside of Acts and 1 Corinthians must presume that it was non-essential. If tongues were essential even as an outward sign of inward salvation, it is inconceivable that it should not be given a prominent place in the plan of salvation. It is significant that neither the Gospel of John nor Romans mentions it.

Third, the gift of speaking in tongues was no indication of spirituality. Of all the churches to whom Paul wrote, the Corinthian church manifested the most carnality and gross sin, yet speaking in tongues was more in evidence here than in the other churches. It is a matter of history that the tongues movement has not led in holiness of living, but rather has been guilty of all manner of excesses. Many godly men and women through the centuries have been entirely aloof from any experience of speaking in tongues.

Fourth, speaking in tongues is not inseparable from baptism of the Spirit. According to 1 Corinthians 12:13, every Christian is baptized by the Spirit, but it is obvious that all Christians do not speak in tongues. The attempt to make speaking in tongues a necessary condition for baptism of the Spirit is one of many evils attending abuse of the Scriptural doctrine.

#### f. The Gift of Interpreting Tongues.

In connection with the bestowal of the gift of speaking in tongues upon some in the early church, there was need for others to interpret what was spoken. It is possible that in some cases speaking in tongues became the vehicle for revelation, though it is sharply distinguished from prophecy. It consisted mostly in ecstatic ascriptions of adoration and worship. The gift of interpreting tongues (1 Cor 12:10; 14:26-28) was simply the divinely-wrought ability to translate the speech of those speaking in tongues. If speaking in tongues is no longer existent in the church today, it is clear that the gift of interpreting tongues has likewise passed from the present purpose of God. God encompassed in each life unfolds according to the divine pattern. It can be best traced in love, in dependence upon God and yieldedness to His sovereign will.

Dallas, Texas

(Series to be continued in the April-June Number, 1942)

\* \* \* \* \*

Has Christian experience taught any one of ourselves any other lesson than that the Holy Spirit carries forward His work within us in proportion as we give thought to the truth? Who has not found that to withhold his mind from meditation on the truth is to take the tools out of the Holy Spirit's hand? And what pastor has not witnessed the saddest, and the most farcical, proof of this in the stubborn silence at his

prayer meetings of those who allege that the Holy Spirit has given them no message to their brethren, while the bald fact is that they come with empty minds; or still worse, in the excessive talkativeness of some who allege that the Holy Spirit gives them on every occasion pretty much the same thing to say, and who, naturally enough, are the only one present of that opinion? If Christian folk will dwell upon the thoughts of God they will dwell in God; and when they come to the assemblies of the saints they will come every one with a psalm, a doctrine, a revelation, an interpretation. Certainly every pastor may be cited to his own experience that the all-inclusive office of the Holy Spirit in the church is to minister the truth-Bibliotheca Sacra, July, 1892.

1 Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, in loco.

2 Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, in loco.

3 Thayer, op. cit., in loco.

4 Thayer, op. cit., in loco.

5 Loc. cit.

8 The Scofield Reference Bible, p. 1008, note 1.

9 Thayer, op. cit., in loc.

10 Op. cit., in. loc.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-f-walvoord/the-work-of-the-holy-spirit-in-the-believer/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**