

World Religions, Cults, and Aberrant Beliefs

Lesson 15 – Spiritual Sign Gifts

Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School

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Introduction

In lesson 13, we looked at Oneness Pentecostalism and saw that, among other doctrinal errors, it teaches that speaking in tongues is a necessary manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Oneness churches teach that since a person cannot be saved without receiving the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9), it follows that only those who have spoken in tongues are saved. There is, therefore, an emphasis that Oneness church members speak in tongues to "demonstrate" that they are saved. In other words – no tongues means no salvation. This has placed tremendous socio-psychological pressure on adherents to conjure up the gift of tongues. Those who do not speak in tongues are thought to be lacking in faith or even to be entirely unrepentant.

Today we will examine spiritual sign gifts.

Spiritual Gifts

There has been much discussion on the subject of spiritual gifts in recent years, particularly on the topic of cessation versus non-cessation of the sign gifts. Teaching on spiritual gifts is extremely popular in churches today. Yet, most teaching on spiritual gifts is confused and abused as well. There are seminars, videos lectures, guest speakers, and surveys offered in many churches to teach about the gifts and to help you discover what gifts you have. Many churches get so carried away that teaching on spiritual gifts is overemphasized and the pursuit of holiness in one's life is ignored. The Scriptures present clear teachings (see key passages in Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12-14; Eph 4:11; and 1 Pet 4:10) on spiritual gifts that are important for us to understand if we are to function properly within the body of Christ, the church.

There are several Greek terms used in 1 Cor 12:1-7 that seem to speak of spiritual gifts:

1. spiritual gifts [pneumatikon] – The term here means, “things pertaining to the Spirit” and speaks of the spiritual ability/giftedness given to believers.
2. gifts [charisma] – This term means, “grace gifts”. It is simply translated “gifts” but is built off the Greek term for “grace”. If it is a grace gift, then it is something that cannot be earned or deserved, just freely bestowed.
3. ministries [diakonia] – The root of this term speaks of service. It is the same basic Greek term as serve, servant, and deacon (one who serves). In this context, it would give the idea of a service-oriented gift.
4. effects [energeima] – This term literally means, “what is worked out or energized”. It emphasizes that the one who gives the gifts provides the energy or power to make the gift effective.
5. manifestation [phanerosis] – This term has the basic idea of making known, making clear or evident. So spiritual gifts are not hidden or private. Rather they are a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. They put Him on display as He works through the believer's life.

Spiritual gifts are a NT phenomenon that have been given to each believer since Pentecost (Eph 4:7-8) and are not related to Spirit empowerment for a specific task in the OT (e.g. Ex 35:30-36:2). A spiritual gift is a freely bestowed spiritual ability given to us by the power of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of service to the body of Christ. Spiritual gifts are not natural talents, but are special Spirit-empowered abilities for service to the body of Christ. Talents are abilities that God has given each person as a result of general grace poured out on humanity (c.f. Matt 5:45). Talents may or may not be used to serve the body, but are not Spirit empowered. Ryrie in *Basic Theology* compares talents and spiritual gifts:

Talents	Spiritual Gifts
Given by God through our parents	Given by God independent of parents
Given at birth	Given at spiritual birth
To benefit mankind generally	To benefit the body (church)

A spiritual gift is a God-given capacity through which the Holy Spirit supernaturally ministers to the body. ... Your spiritual gift is not cooking -- there are good cooks who don't even know God. It is a human ability. Your gift is not being a violin virtuoso. It is a terrific ability, but not a spiritual gift energized by the Holy Spirit. Your spiritual gift is a unique capacity to minister to the body of Christ through the channel of the Spirit of God, who supernaturally touches the lives of other people.

Spiritual Gifts – The Source of Spiritual Gifts by John MacArthur, Tape GC 1850

A spiritual gift, then, is any ability and accompanying spiritual ministry and effect that God, through Christ, enables a believer to use, or motivates him to use, for His glory, in the body of Christ, through the energizing work of the Spirit. *Spiritual Gifts: Definitions and Kinds* by James F. Stitzinger, TMSJ 14/2 (Fall 2003) 143-176

Distribution of Spiritual Gifts

The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts supernaturally and sovereignly (1 Cor 12:11; Heb 2:3-4) distributing spiritual gifts to each believer (Rom 8:9) individually just as He wills. Each believer is given at least one permanent (Rom 11:29) spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:7) which is to be employed to serve other believers as a good steward of God's grace (1 Pet 4:10). Spiritual gifts are given for the advantage of all (1 Cor 12:7), the edification of the church (1 Cor 14:26), the equipping of the saints (Eph 4:7, 12), and the glory of God (1 Pet 4:10-11).

¹¹But one and the same Spirit works all these things, **distributing to each one individually just as He wills.** 1 Cor 12:11

²For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, ³how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, ⁴**God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.** Heb 2:2-4

⁹However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. **But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.** Rom 8:9

²⁹**for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.** Rom 11:29

⁷But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good.** 1 Cor 12:7

¹⁰**As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.** 1 Pet 4:10

²⁶What is *the outcome* then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. **Let all things be done for edification.** 1 Cor 14:26

⁷But **to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.** ... ¹¹And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹²**for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;** Eph 4:7, 11-12

¹¹Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving **by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever.** Amen. 1 Pet 4:11

There is no direct statement of when spiritual gifts are given. However, since they are only given to believers and there seems to be some link with the baptism of the Spirit being mentioned within the context of Spiritual gifts, then the best conclusion is that just as we are baptized with the Spirit, indwelt by the Spirit and sealed by the Spirit, so also are we gifted by the Spirit at salvation (1 Cor 12:11-13).

¹¹But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. ¹²For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 1 Cor 12:11-13

There are a variety of spiritual gifts among the body that God uses to build His church. God has designed the body so that each individual is vital to its growth – no believer is more significant than another. There is strength in diversity.

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. ⁷But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Cor 12:4-7

¹²So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church. 1 Cor 14:12

⁴For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; Rom 12:4-6

¹⁴For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 1 Cor 12:14-18

Details of Spiritual Gifts

Paul says that there are varieties of gifts (1 Cor 12:4) and goes on in 1 Cor 12 (also Rom 12 and Eph 4) to give some examples of these varieties. There are two general groups of spiritual gifts: permanent (or edifying) gifts and temporary (or sign) gifts. Among the permanent edifying gifts there appears to be two categories: speaking gifts and serving gifts.

⁶Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Rom 12:6-8

⁸For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 1 Cor 12:8-10

¹⁰As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Pet 4:10-11

Speaking Gifts

- non-revelatory prophecy (1 Cor 12:10) **: the ability to proclaim clearly and effectively the testimony of Christ (Rev 19:10).
- word of wisdom (1 Cor 12:8) *: the ability to make skillful and practical application of Biblical truth to life's situations.
- non-revelatory word of knowledge (1 Cor 12:8) *: the ability to study, discover, and interpret, and explain the truths of Scripture.
- teacher (Rom 12:7) **: the ability to pass on truth in a manner that allows it to be receive and implanted in the hearer.
- exhortation/encouragement (Rom 12:8) **: the ability to provide comfort, courage, help, and strength to someone; the ability to get alongside someone who has a problem and build them, encourage them, strengthen them, and bear their load.

Serving Gifts

- administration/governing/leading (Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 12:28) **: the ability to make decisions and determine direction, to mobilize a group to reach an objective.
- ministry/helps/service (Rom 12:7) **: the ability to lovingly support someone, to take a burden off someone else and place it on yourself.
- giving (Rom 12:8) **: the ability to super-give beyond the normal.
- showing mercy (Rom 12:8) **: is the ability to sympathize with a suffering person – to come alongside the poor, the sick, the destitute, the orphan, the widowed, and those in prison, and minister.
- faith (1 Cor 12:9) *: an intense ability to trust God in difficult and demanding ways, often expressed through prayer.
- discerning of spirits (1 Cor 12:10) *: the ability to recognize lying spirits.
- evangelist (Eph 4:11): the ability to proclaim the gospel in a powerful way to those that have not heard before.
- pastors-teachers (Eph 4:11): the ability to shepherd (protect and feed) the people of God.

Temporary Sign Gifts

- healing (1 Cor 12:9): the ability to directly and immediately heal with touch or word as Jesus, the apostles, and those closely related to the apostles did.
- miracles/powers (1 Cor 12:10): the ability to intrude into the natural world in a supernatural way outside of natural laws.
- tongues/languages (1 Cor 12:10): the ability to speak in a language that has not been learned.
- interpretation of tongues (1 Cor 12:10): the ability to understand an unlearned language.
- revelatory prophecy (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11): the ability to speak directly the utterances of God as new revelation.
- revelatory word of knowledge (1 Cor 12:8; Eph 3:3-5; Col 1:25-27): being personally given new divine truth from God.

* definition is from *The MacArthur NT Commentary – 1 Corinthians*

** definition is from *Spiritual Gifts Study Guide* by John MacArthur

The Discovery of Spiritual Gifts

The way to discover our spiritual gift(s) is to be Spirit filled (Eph 5:18+) since it is the Spirit who energizes the use of spiritual gifts and to obey and serve (1 Pet 4:10). We must actively serve in the church and through that service we will discover what our spiritual gift(s).

Sign Gifts

Much of this information is taken from the VBC position papers.

The Scriptures indicate that the sign gifts were related to the founding of the church. The purpose of sign gifts (healing, miracles/powers, tongues/languages, interpretation of tongues, revelatory word of knowledge, and revelatory prophecy) was to confirm the apostle's message (2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4). With the NT complete, there was no need to confirm the message that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

¹²The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. 2 Cor 12:12

²For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, ³how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, ⁴**God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.** Heb 2:2-4

²²So then **tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.** 1 Cor 14:22

³Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. Jude 3

The relevant question is, "Are these gifts active today? Did the gifts extend beyond the apostolic age?"

Definition of "Tongues"

The gift of tongues should be understood as always referring to a miraculously given ability to speak in an actual human language that was foreign to the speaker. The gift of tongues is not an ecstatic utterance. The typical charismatic view of the gift of tongues is that it is an ecstatic utterance: a "heavenly language" or "the tongues of angels" or a "prayer language to God" (1 Cor 13:1 and 1 Cor 14).

¹If I speak with the **tongues of men and of angels**, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 1 Cor 13:1

Elsewhere, Paul uses the term "tongue" as a figure of speech for a statement made in a human language (Rom 3:13; 14:11; Phil 2:11). Other NT writers use "tongue" as a figure of speech for a statement made in a human language (Acts 2:11; Rev 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). In addition, the Greek translation of the OT has thirty references to tongue that refer to normal speech and none that refer to unintelligible speech. There is no place in the Scripture where the word "tongue" means ecstatic speech.

In addition, the verb "speak" in 1 Cor 13:1 is in the subjunctive mood. The subjunctive mood in Greek assumes an unreality or something not presently the case. Paul was not speaking of tongues of angels, but only used that phrase to make a hypothetical case based on a hyperbole. Furthermore, there is no evidence that angels use a heavenly language; when they communicate in Scripture they use normal human language (Luke 1:11-37, 2:8-14).

Tongues need to be interpreted (1 Cor 14:5, 13) which normally has the sense of “translation” (cf. John 9:7; Acts 9:36, Heb 7:2) and indicates a translation of a foreign language. Ecstatic speech or gibberish cannot be translated. While 1 Cor 14 describes the problem of the speech being unintelligible (vv. 9, 14), it is unintelligible because there is no one with the gift of interpretation, not because it is in essence ecstatic and unknowable. Furthermore, it is obvious that the gift of tongues was not an uncontrollable ecstatic utterance since Paul gives instructions on the control of the gift (1 Cor 14:27-28).

In addition, Paul quotes Isa 28:11-12 in 1 Cor 14:21, which is referring to the strange tongues of the Assyrians, an actual foreign language.

Definition of “Prophecy”

We define the spiritual gift of revelatory prophecy as: the ability to speak directly the utterances of God as new revelation (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). Prophecy in the Bible was an authoritative communication by God to His people through an individual (cf. Rev 10:7; 16:15; 22:7). A literal rendering of the Greek word for prophet (*prophetes*) is “one who speaks before God,” that is, someone who speaks in the name of God. The message of a prophet was a direct revelation from God. OT prophecies consisted of two basic elements: fore-telling and forth-telling. That is, they were God’s revelation about the future and God’s revelation about the present. Both aspects were God’s direct revelation to man.

In the NT, prophets ranked second in importance only behind the apostles (1 Cor 12:28-31; Eph 4:11). With the apostles, the NT prophets were considered the foundation upon which the church was built (Eph 2:20). NT prophecies were identical in nature to OT prophecies. Both were God’s direct revelation to man and both included new information regarding the present and the future.

Cessation of Sign gifts

There are many historical and logical reasons as to why sign gifts have ceased with the end of the apostolic age. However, the more relevant information is: what do the Scriptures teach?

The OT depicts periods of special revelation, which ceases with the passing of prophets. The book of Acts describes miracles, signs, and wonder at a decreasing rate in the history of the early church. Church history validates the ceasing of prophetic revelation and the gifts that confirmed this revelation.

1 Cor 13:8-13 specifically teaches that prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will cease to exist. However, when the ceasing will occur is debated. There are two basic views:

1. the second coming of Christ
2. the end of the apostolic age and completion of the NT

⁸Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away*; if *there are tongues, they will cease*; if *there is knowledge, it will be done away*.⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part;¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.¹¹When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.¹²For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.¹³But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love. 1 Cor 13:8-13

Both interpretations regarding the timing of the cessation of sign gifts rest on the understanding of the word “perfect” in 1 Cor 13:10. Does “perfect” mean a completing of what was incomplete, or a perfecting of what was imperfect? The word for “perfect” (TELEIOS) in 1 Cor 13:10 has a well-established meaning of “complete.” In addition, Paul never uses TELEIOS to mean absolute perfection, which occurs at the return of Christ. The completion of the God’s revelation fits Paul’s usage of TELEIOS.

Understanding TELEIOS in 1 Cor 13:10 as “complete” makes more sense than “perfect” because of the contrast with “partial.” The completed Scripture is the reason why the partial, or incomplete, prophecy and knowledge are done away, for they are no longer necessary. This is better than trying to contrast the perfection of Christ’s return with the imperfection of prophecy and knowledge. Prophecy is not imperfect, it is rather incomplete. In other words, since prophecy is not partly perfect, but rather part of a whole, it makes more sense to understand “perfect” as “complete.” We know in part before the completion of the NT (1 Cor 13:9) and with the completion of the canon the partial revelation of prophecy will be done away (1 Cor 13:10).

Also, 1 Cor 13:11 describes a development from childhood to maturity, which is not instantaneous but gradual. This does not fit the return of Christ. It rather fits the gradual reduction of prophecy as the NT was being written and the apostles and prophets passed on.

1 Cor 13:12 is why most interpret this passage as referring to the return of Christ. Phrases like “face to face” and “knowing fully” can make people jump to this conclusion. However, it is important to note that even if 1 Cor 13:12 is speaking about the return of Christ this does not undermine the view that tongues will end with the completion of God’s revelation with the apostolic age. The partial being done away does not need to mean that we then know fully (1 Cor 13:12). This final knowledge could be a separate occasion at the coming of Christ with 1 Cor 13:11 describing the increasing completeness of God’s revelation and 13:12 describing the absolute completeness at the return of Christ.

However, the better explanation is to view 1 Cor 13:12 as teaching that with the completion of the biblical revelation, we will know ourselves fully, as we are fully known. The metaphor of the mirror (ESOPRON) is used only in one other place in the NT, in James 1:23, where it refers to God’s revelation in the Bible. Moreover, we look at ourselves in a mirror, not at God. In addition, when the phrase “face to face” is used about God and man in the Bible, it normally means God’s revelation to man, not God’s fellowship with man. God’s complete revelation enables us to see ourselves as in a mirror face to face, completely, rather than as in a mirror dimly, partially. With God’s complete revelation, we are able to understand God’s view of us in a way not possible before.

Finally, this view explains the contrast of 1 Cor 13:13. In contrast to the three gifts which will not endure throughout the church age (prophecy, tongues and knowledge) are the three virtues which will endure throughout the age (faith, hope and love). This temporal understanding of the virtues is further affirmed when we learn that love is the greatest, in that it alone is permanent while faith and hope will be fulfilled when we see Christ face to face (cf. 2 Cor 5:6-8; Rom 8:24-25).

If prophecy and knowledge will be done away with when the canon of Scripture is completed, then it follows that the ceasing of tongues will occur also at that time since they are grouped together in verse eight. The significance of the terms “cease” for tongues and “done away” for knowledge and prophecy is in regard to the process of how the cessation will occur, not with regard to timing of when the cessation will occur. This minor distinction is due to the nature of tongues as validating sign of the messenger and message of God’s direct revelation. After God ends the revelation of knowledge and prophecy, the evidence affirming the revelation is no longer necessary and thus ceases to exist all by itself. The ceasing of tongues as taught in 1 Cor 13:8 is the natural result of the end of God’s special revelation in the age of the apostles.

Conclusion

The reason why we believe the gift of tongues has ceased to exist with the passing of the NT apostles and prophets is based on what the Bible says. 1 Cor 13:8 teaches the gift of tongues is no more in operation today than is prophecy and knowledge. There is no longer a need to validate God's revelation since the end of the NT has brought the end of direct revelation from God during the church age. There will be prophecy occurring again after the church age, during the seven-year tribulation period (cf. Rev 11). Tongues is not an active spiritual gift because its very purpose for existing is no longer active.

Since God is not giving new revelation today through His appointed messengers, He is likewise not enabling anyone to speak supernaturally in a language they do not know. This is because biblical tongues speaking served the purpose of affirming the messengers and their message by demonstrating His miraculous power in association with their prophetic ministry. The conclusion of prophetic revelation produced an end to the gift of tongues that had served to validate the revelation.