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A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

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## **OUTLINE**

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## A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

### Introduction

There is a wide range of opinion in the church today concerning the doctrine of spiritual gifts. Cessationists believe that the “sign gifts” are not in operation today.<sup>1</sup> A historical example of this position is B.B. Warfield, who believed that spiritual gifts were given to authenticate the apostles as God’s messengers and they ended with the death of the apostles.<sup>2</sup> A second example is W.H. Griffith Thomas, who believed that spiritual gifts ceased when Israel rejected the gospel and Paul turned to the Gentiles (Acts 28:23-28).<sup>3</sup> Continuationists believe that all of the spiritual gifts are in operation today and claim to use them. An example of this position is Gordon Fee, who believes that sign gifts will continue until Christ returns.<sup>4</sup> There also seems to be some form of mediating position between the two camps.<sup>5</sup> Vern Poythress affirms the modern use of tongues, and prophecy as spiritual gifts in a very loose sense. He states that it is not “inspired” like the apostles use of these spiritual gifts.<sup>6</sup> There are four questions that are of primary importance in understanding the doctrine of spiritual gifts. First, what is a spiritual gift? Specifically, what is the nature and function of a spiritual gift? Second, when are spiritual gifts given? Third, what are the temporary spiritual gifts? That is, are there spiritual gifts that are unavailable today? Fourth, which spiritual gifts are permanent? If certain gifts are unavailable today, which gifts are available?

Before proceeding the author would like to establish that the final authority for this work will be the Bible.<sup>7</sup> Sadly, in many cases spiritual gifts and the Bible have been viewed as opponents.<sup>8</sup> A proper biblical understanding of the doctrine of spiritual gifts must be determined by Scripture alone.<sup>9</sup>

### What is a spiritual gift?

The words that make up the term “spiritual gift” appear together once in the Greek New Testament (Rom. 1:11).<sup>10</sup> The word *carismata* means, “that which is freely and graciously given, favor

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<sup>1</sup>Cessationists believe that apostle, prophet, tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, the word of wisdom, and the word of knowledge have ceased. The point of cessation varies between different individuals in this camp.

<sup>2</sup>B.B. Warfield, “The Cessation of the Charismata.” Ch. 1 of *Counterfeit Miracles* (NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1918), 6.

<sup>3</sup>W.H. Griffith Thomas, *The Holy Spirit of God*, (Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 1969), 48.

<sup>4</sup>Gordon Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 890.

<sup>5</sup>Vern Poythress says that, “Modern ‘prophecy’ or intuitive speech is analogous to [Scripture].” Vern Poythress, “Modern Spiritual Gifts as *Analogous* to Apostolic Gifts: Affirming Extraordinary Works of the Spirit within Cessationist Theology,” *JETS* 39/1 (1996), 71-101.

<sup>6</sup>It is the author’s opinion that Poythress’ position is not purely a cessationist view.

<sup>7</sup>A.W. Tozer, “Why We Must Think Rightly About God.” Ch. 1 of *The Knowledge of the Holy* (NY: Harper & Row, 1975), 10.

<sup>8</sup>Elliot Miller, “Scripture Versus Spiritual Gifts,” *CRIJ* (1994), 1.

<sup>9</sup>In the author’s opinion, Scripture should be the final authority in all matters of faith and practice for Christians.

<sup>10</sup>The NASB translates the word *carismata* as “spiritual gift” though the word *pneumatika* does not appear in the Greek text.

bestowed, gift.”<sup>11</sup> This word is employed in nearly all of the “spiritual gift” passages.<sup>12</sup> The word pneumatika means, “having to do with the (divine) spirit.”<sup>13</sup> These two Greek words are used in combination by believers to describe what God has supernaturally given to each believer for the edification of the church (1 Cor. 12:6-7).<sup>14,15</sup>

The Scriptures teach that a spiritual gift is an ability that God gives to each believer for the purpose of ministry to the church.<sup>16</sup> The gifts are given to each believer by the direct act of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7, 11). Scripture is not clear in regard to how many spiritual gifts each believer receives. It is clear that each believer receives at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:7). It also seems clear that no believer receives all of the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:29-30; Rom. 12:4). The Bible informs us that each spiritual gift is necessary, and therefore all believers are necessary (1 Cor. 12:11, 18). Spiritual gifts are abilities given by the Holy Spirit to believers for the purpose of strengthening the church (1 Cor. 12:7, 13).<sup>17</sup>

### **When are spiritual gifts given?**

The Bible teaches that spiritual gifts are given to believers at the moment of conversion (1 Cor. 12:13; cf. vv. 4-7). The moment an individual places his trust in Christ as Savior, he is baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11-13, 18; Rom. 6:1-4). When an individual is baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, he receives spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:7-13; cf. Rom. 12:4-6).<sup>18</sup> Only believers possess gifts from the Holy Spirit, and they receive those gifts at the moment of conversion.

### **What are the temporary spiritual gifts?**

The author of this work is a cessationist and therefore will argue from that view point in regard to spiritual gifts. The spiritual gifts that the author believes to be temporary will be referred to as the “sign gifts” from this point forward.

### **The purpose of the sign gifts**

The Bible speaks of the apostles and prophets as being the foundation of the N.T. church (Eph. 2:20). The Holy Spirit revealed the N.T. Scriptures through the apostles and prophets (2 Pet. 1:21). The N.T. Scriptures provided the necessary basis for truth in the church-age (2 Tim. 3:16-17). God used the sign gifts to authenticate the apostles as his messengers (Heb. 2:3-4). Therefore, when the N.T. was complete (and the canon closed) the sign gifts were no longer necessary. There are at least six purposes

<sup>11</sup>Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., rev. and aug. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), 1081.

<sup>12</sup>See 1 Corinthians 12:1 for an exception. First Corinthians 12:1 begins with pneumatikwn.

<sup>13</sup>Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., rev. and aug. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 837).

<sup>14</sup>All Scripture references unless otherwise noted are from the NASB 1995.

<sup>15</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, “The Work of the Spirit in the Life of the Christian,” from A Survey of Bible Doctrine (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), electronic ed.

<sup>16</sup>“carisma ktl.,” in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, Trans. And ed. By Geoffrey W. Bromily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), electronic ed.

<sup>17</sup>Paul Enns, “The Church,” in The Moody Handbook of Theology (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), electronic ed.

<sup>18</sup>Each believer receives one spiritual gift at the minimum (1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:7).

for the sign gifts. First, to authenticate the authority of Christ (Acts 1:4-5, 8). Second, to authenticate the apostles as God's messengers (Heb. 2:3-4; cf. 1 Cor. 2:4). Third, to convict the Jews concerning their need to accept Jesus as Messiah (Acts 3:19-26). Fourth, to authenticate the church as God's new program (Acts 2:1-4; Rom. 11:25-29; cf. Eph. 2:11-3:10). Fifth, certain gifts were used to reveal truth which was inscripturated (Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 2 Pet. 1:21; 3:15-16).<sup>19</sup> Sixth, certain gifts were used to reveal truth that was not inscripturated, which served the purpose of guiding the church until the N.T. was complete.<sup>20</sup>

The sign gifts include: apostle, prophet<sup>22</sup>, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, healing, miracles, distinguishing of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28).<sup>23</sup> Something the author feels is of importance to note is that cessationists do not rule out the fact that God can work miracles.<sup>24</sup> Cessationists believe that once the N.T. Scripture was complete, the sign gifts were no longer in operation.

### **The gift of apostle and prophet**

The Scriptures refer to the apostles and prophets as "gifts" to the church (Eph. 4:11-12). Therefore in this author's understanding the two gifts refer to offices. The apostles and prophets were used in the process of revealing and recording N.T. Scripture (2 Pet. 1:21; 3:15-16; Heb. 2:3-4; Eph. 3:5). The canon of Scripture is closed (Jude 3; Rev. 22:18-19). The foundational pieces of the church (the apostles and prophets) have been laid (Eph. 2:20). There is no longer any need for these two spiritual gifts as a result of the closed canon.<sup>25</sup> Continuationist Jon Ruthven believes that as a result of Ephesians 4:11-16 the gifts of apostle and prophet must continue until all believers are in heaven.<sup>26</sup> This does not seem to take into account the meaning of earlier passages in Ephesians (2:20; 3:5) when attempting to understand later passage in Ephesians (4:11-16). The church was built on the foundation of these two gifts (2:20). After the completion of Scripture the gifts are not necessary (3:5).<sup>27</sup> As Paul wrote Ephesians the N.T. Scriptures were not yet complete, therefore apostles and prophets were most certainly included in the Ephesians list of gifts (4:11-16). When the canon was complete the other gifts to the church would be the tools used to help equip the church for ministry.<sup>28</sup> The apostles and prophets were no longer necessary for this equipping ministry. In the author's understanding these two gifts were of a revelatory nature.<sup>29</sup>

Grudem on the other hand, believes that N.T. prophets did not share revelatory information. He

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<sup>19</sup>In the view of the author, these gifts would include the office of apostle and the gift of prophecy.

<sup>20</sup>In the view of the author, these gifts would include prophecy, knowledge, wisdom, and tongues.

<sup>21</sup>Ken Gardoski, "The Gift of Tongues," handout for TH500, Foundations of the Christian Faith. (Clarks Summit, PA: Baptist Bible Seminary, 2005), 15.

<sup>22</sup>The author views the office of prophet and the gift of prophecy to be inseparable.

<sup>23</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, "The Work of the Spirit in the Life of the Christian," from A Survey of Bible Doctrine (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), electronic ed.

<sup>24</sup>This seems to be a common accusation made by continuationists. The claim is made that cessationists are "against miracles" or "anti-supernatural." Jon Ruthven compares cessationists with those who have believed in the "gap theory", the ascension of Mary, and the belief that Mussolini was the antichrist.

<sup>25</sup>Charismatics disagree with this point. Jon Ruthven sees the gift of apostle and prophet as "foundational" and therefore *must* continue. Ruthven points to Ephesians 4:11-16 as evidence that these two gifts must continue until all believers reach full maturity, which will be in heaven.

<sup>26</sup>Jon Ruthven, "Answering the Cessationists' Case against Continuing Spiritual Gifts," from Pneuma Review (Vol. 3, No. 2, Spring 2000).

<sup>27</sup>Ruthven and others do not seem to take into account that in the understanding of the eleven apostles, an apostle had to meet requirements that are impossible for anyone today (Acts 1:21-22). Apostles had to have been present when Christ was baptized and had to have seen the resurrected Christ personally. The belief that the gift of apostle is still in operation is most certainly not textually based.

<sup>28</sup>The gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4 that are still in operation are evangelists and pastor/teachers.

believes that they were not the same kind of prophet as those in the O.T. This does not fit the Scriptural understanding of a prophet, nor the understanding of believers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. N.T. prophets were used by God to share revelatory information that was considered authoritative and inerrant.<sup>30</sup> Farnell shares some very compelling evidence that believers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century held to the belief that a N.T. prophet shared divine messages from God and that his messages were true.<sup>31</sup> Recognizing that these believers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century followed so closely behind the time of the apostles, it would seem that their understanding of a N.T. prophet would more closely resemble the apostles' understanding. This evidence strongly refutes Grudem's hypothesis of non-revelatory, non-authoritative N.T. prophets.

### **The gift of the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge**

The word of wisdom and the word of knowledge seem to be related in the context of 1 Corinthians (12:8). The word of wisdom (**logos sofia**) is the spiritual gift that God gives to certain believers for the purpose of sharing revelatory information with other believers in the body of Christ.<sup>32</sup> Thomas relates the word of wisdom to divine revelation.<sup>33</sup> It appears in the context of 1 Corinthians 12 that Paul is insinuating that there are a number of believers who had the word of wisdom, not just apostles and prophets (vv. 7-8; cf. Eph. 3:5).<sup>34</sup> The gift appears to be related to the word of knowledge (**logos gnwsews**). The reasoning for this is the construction of the text in 1 Corinthians 12 (vv. 8-10).<sup>35</sup> Also, the word of wisdom is found only here. Therefore it is closely related gift to the word of knowledge (**logos gnwsews**). In looking at the gifts that are said to "pass away" in 1 Corinthians 13, one finds that knowledge is related to prophecy (vv. 8-10).<sup>36</sup> Prophecy is a gift that was revelatory in nature. Therefore it seems that these two gifts were used by God to reveal necessary instruction for the church until the N.T. Scriptures were complete, at which time the two gifts would be unnecessary.<sup>37</sup>

### **First Corinthians 13:8-13**

First Corinthians 13:8-13 is used by cessationists and continuationists as evidence for their views. The crux of the issue is how one translates **to teleion** in verse 10. Some cessationists translate it as "mature."<sup>38</sup> This leads one to interpret the passage as referring to a cessation of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues when the church becomes mature.<sup>39</sup> Other cessationists translate it as "perfect." This leads one to interpret the passage as referring to a cessation of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues when Christ

<sup>29</sup>Wayne Grudem disagrees with this conclusion in regard to N.T. prophets. He believes the gift was non-revelatory.

<sup>30</sup>F. David Farnell, "The Montanist Crisis: A Key to Refuting Third-Wave Concepts of NT Prophecy," *TMSJ* 14/2 (2003), 262.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Gordon Fee who is a continuationist also concludes that the two gifts were some form of speech of a revelatory kind.

<sup>33</sup>Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 28-29.

<sup>34</sup>These two offices/gifts were used to reveal and record the N.T. Scriptures (Eph. 3:5; 2 Pet. 1:20).

<sup>35</sup>Donald G. McDougall, "Cessationism in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12," *TMSJ* 14/2 (2003): 183.

<sup>36</sup>The author believes that in the context of 1 Corinthians 13 the "perfect" refers to the second coming of Christ (vv. 10, 12). Yet, the teaching of Ephesians and the biblical purpose of the sign gifts gives the basis for their cessation (2:20; 3:5).

<sup>37</sup>The author notes that not all of the revelatory information was inscripturated.

<sup>38</sup>Donald G. McDougall, "Cessationism in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12," *TMSJ* 14/2 (2003): 207-209.

<sup>39</sup>McDougall does not believe that this refers to spiritual perfection. He thinks it refers to a spiritual maturity that results at an unspecified time. He believes God would end the three gifts whenever the maturity was present.

returns at the second coming.<sup>40</sup> The context of the passage leads one to prefer the translation “perfect” which refers to the second coming.<sup>41</sup> Verse twelve overrides any other possibility.<sup>42</sup> It is worth mentioning that this passage only deals with three of the sign gifts. This is of significant importance. Therefore other passages are necessary to determine one’s position on the cessation or continuation of the sign gifts.<sup>43</sup> The author believes that purpose of the passage is to compare the quality of revelation given by sign gifts in relation to the quality of revelation that will be received at the second coming (1 Cor. 13:8-10). The sign gifts pale in comparison with the presence of Christ.<sup>44</sup> At the second coming believers will enjoy knowledge that was previously unavailable. Godet shares the same conclusion pointing out that **to teleion** is emphasizing quality, not completeness.<sup>45</sup> The author does not believe that the goal of this passage was to give an exact time when revelatory (sign) gifts would cease to operate. The goal was to make a comparison and to correct the error of the Corinthians.<sup>46</sup>

### **The gift of healing, the gift of miracles, and the gift of distinguishing spirits**

The gift of healing, the gift of miracles, and the gift of distinguishing spirits were also sign gifts that were rendered unnecessary as a result of the completion of the N.T. Scriptures. The gifts of healing were a sign to authenticate the apostles as messengers of God (Heb. 2:4). It is important to note that the gift of healing is not mentioned in the list of spiritual gifts in Romans 12, which was written at a later date than 1 Corinthians.<sup>47</sup> There are only a few recorded instances of healing in the N.T., which are found in the book of Acts. There are men who are ill who are mentioned in the N.T. that are not healed, nor does there seem to be an occasion sought to heal them.<sup>48</sup> In fact, Paul does not seek any person to heal him (2 Cor. 12:7-10), nor Timothy in his physical ailment (1 Tim. 5:23). James instructed sick believers to call the elders of the church to pray over and anoint them with oil (Jas. 5:14-16). Even at this early stage in the N.T. church the gift of healing was not called upon. The reason for this may very well be that the gift of healing was not a permanent gift that a believer could employ any time he desired. It is possible as Mayhue mentions that the gift, “had to be renewed by God at his will.”<sup>49</sup> The author would suggest that part of the reason for this was that the gift of healing was a sign of authentication upon the apostles as messengers of God (Heb. 2:4). Therefore when the apostles died the need for authentication was no longer necessary.

The gift of miracles was another sign gift that was employed by God to authenticate the apostles

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<sup>40</sup>As mentioned above, the present author agrees with this interpretation. He finds the time of cessation for the sign gifts in Ephesians (2:20; 3:5).

<sup>41</sup>Verlyn Verbrugge also agrees with this interpretation in his paper on 1 Corinthians 13:13. Verlyn Verbrugge, “‘And Now These Three Remain: Faith, Hope and Love. But the Greatest of These is Love’: The Problem in 1 Corinthians 13:13,” (Zondervan and Reformed Bible College), 3.

<sup>42</sup>This is also the conclusion of continuationists. Though arriving at the conclusion the present author is still a cessationist based upon reasons mentioned previously.

<sup>43</sup>Such as Ephesians 3:20; 3:5; 2 Pet. 1:21; Jude 3; Rev. 22:18-19.

<sup>44</sup>McDougall shares this same conclusion. Yet, he prefers to translate **to teleion** as referring to maturity in the church. The present author does not agree with his logic in regard to **to teleion**, but agree with his conclusion about the comparison of revelation.

<sup>45</sup>Frederic Godet, Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, vol. 2, (reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 251.

<sup>46</sup>The Corinthians seemed to believe that they had everything they needed spiritually, they were at the pinnacle as a result of these spiritual gifts. Paul corrects their thinking in chapter 13.

<sup>47</sup>Richard L. Mayhue, “Cessationism, ‘The Gifts of Healings,’ and Divine Healing,” TMSJ 14/2 (2003): 269.

<sup>48</sup>At least not through anything means like the “gift of healing” that is mentioned in 1 Corinthians.

<sup>49</sup>Richard L. Mayhue, “Cessationism, ‘The Gifts of Healings,’ and Divine Healing,” TMSJ 14/2 (2003): 269.

as his messengers (Gal. 3:5; Heb. 2:4). These miracles authenticated the apostle Paul in the eyes of the Ephesians (Eph. 19:11-12). The N.T. is clear that the purpose was to authenticate the messengers and the message that they were speaking (Heb. 2:4). As a result of this purpose of authentication, when the N.T. Scriptures were complete and the apostles died the gift was no longer necessary.

The gift of distinguishing spirits was a sign gift that was employed by the apostles in determining if an individual was speaking/acting by the power of the Holy Spirit or Satan.<sup>50</sup> It is possible that Paul employed this gift in his encounter with Elymas the magician (Acts 13:8-10). Peter may also have used this gift when he knew of Ananias and Sapphira's deceit (Acts 5:1-10). In this case it seems that Ananias and Sapphira were believers. As time proceeds in the N.T. we find that John instructs the believers that he writes to, "test the spirits to see whether they are from God," (1 John 4:1-3). The specific instruction that he gave those believers was that those spirits who do not confess, "that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God," (1 John 4:2-3). The gift of distinguishing spirits was a gift given by God to authenticate his messengers and message. Therefore when the apostles died and the Scripture was complete, there was no longer need for this sign gift.

### **The gift of tongues and the gift of interpreting tongues**

The gift of tongues (*glossa*) and interpretation of tongues is something that has caused great controversy. Cessationists believe that this sign gift has come to an end. It has served its purpose and is no longer necessary. McDougall makes a valuable observation in regard to the gift of tongues in saying, "it would be good to remember that the gift of tongues had a valuable place in God's economy. God deemed it as a good gift, necessary, valuable, and useful for his purpose in the early life of his church. The proper use of the gift did not disturb Paul; the abuse of the gift was of concern to him."<sup>51</sup> It is possible that the gift of tongues was something that God used to reveal truth for the edification of the church, that was not inscripturated (1 Cor. 15:5, 12, 17-19).<sup>52</sup>

The gift also served the first four purposes mentioned at the beginning of this section, "What are the Temporary Spiritual Gifts?". First Corinthians teaches that one of the main functions of the gift of tongues was to pronounce judgment upon the unbelieving nation of Israel (1 Cor. 14:21-22).<sup>53</sup> The author believes that the gift of tongues consisted of human languages that were previously unknown to the individual practicing the gift. The word *glossa* and *dialektos* have been shown to be synonyms.<sup>54</sup> Paul also instructs that there is no language which has no meaning (1 Cor. 14:10). McDougall points out that, "Too much literature seeks to identify *glossalalia* as 'one thing' when Paul specifically takes pains to refer to different species."<sup>55</sup> Therefore Scripture states that tongues were human languages, which were translatable by another person present, who knew the language being spoken (15:5, 13). The interpretation of tongues was inseparable from the gift of tongues. The Scriptures teach that the gift of tongues was worthless if someone was not able to interpret what was spoken (15:5-13).<sup>56</sup> Interpretation of tongues is included in the list of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (v. 10). Therefore it seems that

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<sup>50</sup>Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987-94), 3:197.

<sup>51</sup>Donald G. McDougall, "Cessationism in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12," *TMSJ* 14/2 (2003): 188-89.

<sup>52</sup>The main reasons for this conclusion is the inclusion of tongues with prophecy and knowledge in 1 Corinthians 13:8, and the instruction to be received through interpreted tongues (15:5, 12, 17-19).

<sup>53</sup>A sign of judgment upon the nation of Israel for rejecting Christ.

<sup>54</sup>Donald G. McDougall, "Cessationism in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12," *TMSJ* 14/2 (2003): 190-91.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 191-92.

<sup>56</sup>It is interesting the note the wide spectrum of interpretation in regard to spiritual gifts. Gary Shogren in a paper stated that he believes the problem for the Corinthians in their use of tongues was rooted in the poor uneducated class striving against the wealthy educated. So in his estimation it was a socio-economic struggle. Gary Shogren, *The Corinthian Church: An Upwardly-mobile Elite versus Hungry Charismatics.*"

the interpretation of tongues was a supernatural ability that God gave to certain individuals for the purpose of translating the message of another individual speaking in a tongue previously unknown to him. The purpose that tongues and interpretation of tongues served is now complete and therefore unnecessary for the church today.

The author believes that these sign gifts were necessary until the N.T. Scriptures were complete. The canon was complete before the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. The sign gifts provided confirmation for God's messengers (apostle, prophet).<sup>57</sup> The sign gifts provided authentication for the birth of the church, the salvation of Gentiles, and judgment upon the Jews for rejecting the gospel (Acts 2:1-12; 10:44-48; 1 Cor. 14:21-22).

### **Which Spiritual Gifts are Permanent?**

After having dealt with the sign gifts, which are no longer in operation, it is time to discuss the spiritual gifts which are still in operation today. The author believes that Scripture records the following gifts as functioning today: evangelism, pastor/teacher, serving, faith, exhortation, mercy, giving, administration, and leadership. The unifying purpose of these spiritual gifts is to equip the church for service which results in the strengthening of the church (1 Cor. 14:12; Eph. 4:12).<sup>58</sup>

#### **The gift of evangelism**

The gift of evangelism is mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. It is mentioned as one of the offices given by God to equip the church for ministry (4:12-16). The word *euaggelistas* refers to one who proclaims good news. This seems like a special enablement from God to be able to share the gospel with non-believers. This office is very comparable to missionaries today.<sup>59</sup> This special gifting from God does not preclude believers without the gift of evangelism from sharing their faith. Paul calls on Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist," though nothing is recorded about Timothy having the gift of evangelism (2 Tim. 4:5).

#### **The gift of pastor/teacher**

The gift of pastor/teacher is mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. It is mentioned as one of the offices given by God to equip the church for ministry (4:12-16). The pastor/teacher is to meet certain moral and spiritual qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). Scripture also states that the man should desire the position and not do it for any other reason (1 Tim. 3:1; 1 Pet. 5:2). The Bible presents the principle that mature believers will recognize which men have been gifted/called to be a pastor (Tit. 1:5; 1 Tim. 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:3). Pastor/teachers are given the responsibility of teaching Scripture, leading the church, and equipping the church for ministry (1 Tim. 4:11-16; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Eph. 4:11-16).

There also seems to be a spiritual gift of teaching that exists outside of the office of pastor (1 Cor. 12:28; 2 Tim. 2:2). This would entail the gifting to teach Scripture to others.

#### **The gift of serving**

The gift of serving is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28, and Romans 12:7. The word *diakonian* means to serve. Some have suggested that this refers to the office of serving, namely deacon. The same word is used in both cases. It is likely that gift is even received by believers outside of those men who serve as deacons.<sup>60</sup> Grudem points out that this gift will take on many forms. People who

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<sup>57</sup>Richard L. Mayhue, "Cessationism, 'The Gifts of Healings,' and Divine Healing," *TMSJ* 14/2 (2003): 268.

<sup>58</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1019.

<sup>59</sup>Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 2:623-45, 2 vols. (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983-85).

<sup>60</sup>Men are not asked to have the gift of service to be qualified to be a deacon. The qualifications deal with godliness and character, not the gift of service. Though admittedly, I am sure that the gift would be useful for a deacon.

have the gift of service will look to do many different types of things to help serve believers and non-believers alike.<sup>61</sup> Those who have the gift of service have been given grace by God to minister to the physical and spiritual needs of other believers around them (Rom. 12:4-6; 1 Cor. 12:6-7).<sup>62</sup> Peter mentions the use of this gift and encourages believers to serve according to the ability that God gives (1 Pet. 4:11).

### **The gift of faith**

The gift of faith is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:9. This is the only occasion that this spiritual gift is mentioned. This refers to special grace given by God to be able to trust him in situations that would otherwise be difficult or have faith to meet a certain need.

### **The gift of exhortation**

The gift of exhortation is mentioned in Romans 12:8. This is the ability given by God to persuade believers to follow God in their lives.<sup>63</sup> God has gifted certain individuals with this special ability to encourage others spiritually to pursue obedience.

### **The gift of mercy**

The gift of mercy is found in Romans 12:8. This is the special ability given by God to certain believers for the purpose of having compassion upon others. This gift may be exercised by a believer in the lives of other believers and also non-believers. This would entail meeting the physical and spiritual needs of others.

### **The gift of giving**

The gift of giving is found in Romans 12:8. This special gift is given by God for the purpose of believers meeting the physical needs of others to the glory of God.<sup>64</sup>

### **The gift of administration**

The gift of administration is found in 1 Corinthians 12:28. This gift is given by God for the purpose of organization and management within the church. It is possible that this developed into the formal office of pastor.<sup>65</sup>

### **The gift of leadership**

The gift of leadership is found in Romans 12:8. This gift is given by God for the purpose of giving guidance and leadership to the church. In many cases pastors would have the gift of leadership also, though it does not seem to be a prerequisite (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). God uses this gift to provide direction in the church.

## **Conclusion**

Spiritual gifts are an extremely important part of God's work in the church today. Therefore a proper biblical understanding of gifts are essential for the church to effectively serve God in the way that he desires. A spiritual gift is a special ability given by God to a believer at the moment of conversion. The gifts are given to believers for the purpose of serving him. As discussed in this work there are certain gifts that ceased when the apostles died and the canon was complete.<sup>66</sup> There are still many spiritual gifts that are in operation today that God gives to believers to reach non-believers for Christ and to help

<sup>61</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1021.

<sup>62</sup>Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987-94), 3:199.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 199

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 199.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 198.

strengthen the church.<sup>67</sup> Spiritual gifts are essential for the health and growth of the church. God is still at work through the use of spiritual gifts in the lives of believers, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” (Rom. 11:33).

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<sup>66</sup>The sign gifts: apostle, prophet, miracles, healing, tongues, and interpretation of tongues, distinguishing of spirits, the word of knowledge and word of wisdom.

<sup>67</sup>The spiritual gifts of: pastor/teacher, evangelist, service, teaching, faith, exhortation, mercy, giving, and administration.

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