

The Gifts of the Spirit

What are the gifts of the Spirit and do we still need them today? The “gifts” are special abilities provided to Christians by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of ministry and building up the Church (Eph 4:12). Listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, they include wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Similar lists are contained in Ephesians 4:7-13 and Romans 12:3-8. By anointing the Body with spiritual gifts, God equips His Church with everything needed “for life and godliness” as we carry out His divine plan in the world (2 Pet 1:3).

The object of this study is to examine each gift individually so we can learn more about its function and use. We will also divide the gifts into the following two categories, **sensational** and **non-sensational**. We will discover that the sensational gifts are part of the “**signs**” which often appear in Scripture, while the non-sensational ones are related to **ministry and service**. Lastly, we will look at the arguments proposed by Cessationists who claim that the sensational gifts no longer exist and have passed into extinction with the completion of the New Testament canon. So let’s discover what the Scriptures teach about this vital subject.

MINISTRY AND SERVICE (NON-SENSATIONAL)

Apostles (Eph 4:11)

The Greek word for apostle is *apostolos* which simply means representative; and in this case, one representing Jesus. The original apostles, most of whom were Christ’s twelve disciples, were commissioned as **Church planters** to different regions of the then known world. They were also responsible for **laying the foundation of the Church** and **establishing its doctrine and creed**. According to the apostle Paul, this work was fully accomplished in his day: *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone* (Eph 2:19-20).

Paul recognized the important groundwork established by the apostles and prophets so that Jesus could reign supreme as the “chief corner stone” of His Church. He also understood that the members of the Church were now direct recipients of the blessings provided by their efforts. So what does this mean? It means that no further

improvement to the existing foundation is required. The apostles preached the only true Gospel as delivered to them by Jesus. They lived within the same historical time period as He and had personal interaction with Him. **So they alone were qualified to write inspired Scripture and pen the doctrines of the Church. And therefore this particular feature of their ministry would not continue with the next generation of apostles after them.** As a result, we now observe a **closed canon** and reject any writings submitted by others who were not directly affiliated with Christ or the original apostles. In other words, our Bible is sufficient as is and requires no further expansion of its text. Furthermore, if more could be added to what the original apostles have already written, the endless volumes of “scripture” collected over the course of two millennia would be more than the Church could ever sort through. But such confusion is simply unnecessary when we take into account several key scriptures that support the idea of a closed canon:

*Therefore, brethren, **stand fast, and hold the precepts** which ye have been taught, **whether by word, or ***our* epistle**** (Eph 4:14).*

*But though we, or an angel from heaven, **preach any other gospel unto you than that which ***we*** have preached unto you, let him be accursed** (Gal 1:8).*

*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you **that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints** (Jud 1:3).*

So while we can expect certain apostolic functions to have expired with the departure of the first apostles, we also make provision for the continuity of their ministry throughout the Church age. The apostles today are simply delegates for Christ and Church planters in foreign regions. Also, anyone claiming to be an apostle should be tested as to whether they are false or true: *I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: **and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars*** (Rev 2:2). According to Scripture, we can test any apostolic claims by the following criteria: *Truly **the signs of an apostle** were wrought among you in all patience, **in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds*** (2 Cor 12:12).

Evangelists (Eph 4:11)

Evangelists are simply those who preach the Gospel and add new converts to the Church. **Philip the evangelist was one of the seven deacons chosen to serve the widows in the Church, yet he was also a powerful evangelist. The same may be said of Stephen the martyr, who was likewise numbered among the seven. Both of these men preached to the Jews and produced great signs and miracles as part of their evangelistic ministry:**

*Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you **seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.** But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and **they chose Stephen**, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, **and Philip**, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: **And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people** (Act 6:3-5; 8).*

*And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into **the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven**; and abode with him (Act 21:8).*

Pastors (Eph 4:11)

Pastors are those who serve as shepherds over God's flock (the Church). They are called to occupy the role of overseer and to lead the Body by example. For more on this pertinent issue please refer to my article titled, "Defining Church, Its Biblical Function & Activity."

Teachers (Rom 12:7; Eph 4:11)

Teachers are gifted with a deeper understanding of doctrine and theology and are called to expound or teach these to God's people. They may also preach the Word or instruct the unconverted in the way of repentance and salvation.

Administration (1 Cor 12:28)

Those who have the gift of administration are able to organize and develop affective strategies for carrying out the work of the Church and aiding in its daily activities.

Helps (1 Cor 12:28)

The gift of helps is typical to those who always seem ready and available with both a desire and the ability to help others and to do whatever it takes to get a task accomplished. While everyone in Christ's Body is called to serve in some capacity, not all are always able and available to assist in every situation that demands it. Those who can, should do so to the best of their ability and to the glory of God.

Wisdom (1 Cor 12:8)

The gift of wisdom seems to be the ability to make decisions and give guidance that is according to God's will.

Knowledge (1 Cor 12:8)

The gift of knowledge is being able to have an in-depth understanding of a spiritual issue or situation.

Faith (1 Cor 12:9)

Some Christians have a deeper and more profound level of faith. They are more aware of God's presence and power and seem able to affect tremendous change even in the most impossible situations. They are God's change agents for good, equipped with a supernatural dose of faith. We should all strive to possess this gift since it is invaluable.

Mercy (Rom 12:8)

Some individuals in the Body are more apt to express or show mercy than others. They seem to have a constant pool of compassion to draw from when demonstrating kindness and love. While others struggle to find grace and are dependent upon God for the power to be merciful, these individuals seem to do so naturally and without a whole lot of effort. It is important that every Christian excels in mercy. However, if we don't seem to come by it easily, we should pray to the Lord for more grace to be merciful.

Encouragement (Rom 12:8)

Like mercy, the same principle could also apply to the gift of encouragement.

SIGN GIFTS (SENSATIONAL)**Miracles (1 Cor 12:10)**

Certain individuals in the Body are anointed with the gift of working miracles and are able to perform signs and wonders that give authenticity to God's Word and the Gospel

message. Those who have this gift are typically evangelists, apostles, or missionaries. It is important to seek after this gift especially when occupying an evangelistic role that requires us to convert unbelievers to faith.

*And these signs shall follow them that believe; **In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover** (Mar 16:17-18).*

Healing (1 Cor 12:9)

Like the working of miracles, the gift of healing is predominately connected to evangelism. However, the Spirit may also anoint certain individuals to perform healings within the Church. It would seem that the elders of the Church are those who typically carry out this ministry to God's people:

***Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick,** and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him (Jas 5:14-15).*

Note: In connection with this gift or the function of healing in general, it is wrong to assume that God should always be counted on to heal those that are sick. There is ample scriptural evidence to support the use of medical help when necessary, or the use of practical means to promote physical healing. For instance, consider the case of Luke the physician (Col 4:14), not to mention the example of Paul and Timothy. We can only guess that after Paul prayed over Timothy and exploited every spiritual method to help him get better, he finally instructed him to take a little wine for his recurring stomach upset: *Drink no longer water, **but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities*** (1 Tim 5:23). Christians who have an ultra spiritual approach to the teachings of Scripture often ignore the simple and practical advice here, insisting rather that God use **only supernatural means** to heal them. Yet while we recognize that we should always turn to God first and foremost before consulting physicians, we also advocate the use of medical help or alternative (natural) medicine (Jas 5:14-15).

Special note: Those who feel that all sickness is a result of someone's sin or poor spiritual health should consider the case of Epaphroditus: ***For indeed he was sick***

nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; **and hold such in reputation:** **Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me** (Php 2:27-30).

Special note: I do not support the use of pharmaceutical drugs as a means of curing sickness. I feel that medical research has clearly proven that drugs only create further side effects or worsen overall health while trying to treat a particular health problem. In my opinion, it is much wiser for people to rely on natural, God-given herbs in order to promote good health. In fact, it is essential we learn to use herbs to cure physical problems, as we may not always have the convenience of consulting a doctor for help.

Prophets/Prophecy (Rom 12:6; 1Co 12:10; Eph 4:11)

Throughout the Scriptures prophecy is given elevated status. When it was reported that Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp and that they were not among the men selected to accompany Moses in ministry, Moses made this profound statement, ... **would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!** (Num 11:29) Apostle Paul similarly echoes this desire, when he says, “pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, **especially that you may prophesy**” (1 Cor 14:1). So then this extraordinary gift is a blessing to the church and should not be quenched or despised (1 Thes 5:20).

Those who have the gift of prophecy differ from the Old Testament prophets who spoke the authoritative Word of God directly to the people of Israel. Since God's primary focus in the former dispensation was of national scope and consequence, prophets penned inspired words pertaining to Israel or nations and individuals in relationship with her. Today, God's focus has shifted to the Church and its individual members (Mat 21:43; Act 10:35). Prophecy, therefore, is relevant to the individual(s) of a local assembly of Believers, but is irrelevant to the universal Body. So then it is no longer necessary or appropriate to give prophetic utterances the same weight as the inspired Word of God. In fact, it is important that messages from those with the spiritual gift of prophecy are **tested against the Scriptures** to be sure they are not errant (1 Cor 14:29-33; 1 Thes 5:20-21; 1 Jn 4:1-3).

Now some Christians today often equate prophecy with preaching, but the two are not the same. The confusion comes from the following scripture passages:

*But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to **edification, and exhortation, and comfort** (1 Co 14:3).*

*For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all **may learn**, and all may be comforted (1 Co 14:31).*

The above verses describe prophecy as the function of speaking edification, encouragement, and comfort into people's lives. It is also said that prophecy serves to teach us, and that we may all learn from those who prophecy. Since many have difficulty understanding the scriptural function of prophecy it is naturally assumed that Paul was actually describing preaching. Hence preaching is said to be equal to prophecy. However, this interpretation of prophecy is flawed and the above passages must be filtered through the predominant definition of prophecy that occurs consistently throughout the Bible. So how does the Bible define prophecy? According to the Scriptures, prophecy is the verbal action of foretelling the future. Notice:

*And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and **signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar** (Act 11:28).*

*And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. **And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles** (Act 21: 10-11).*

***Despise not prophesying** (1 Thes 5:20).*

***This charge I commit unto you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which were spoken over you, that you by them might war a good warfare** (1 Tim 1:18).*

Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery (1 Tim 4:14).

And he said unto me, **Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings** (Rev 10:11).

Clearly, from examination of the above scriptures we can hardly qualify preaching as prophecy. The prophet Agabus predicted the future twice in both Acts 11 and 21. And in 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul encourages the Church not to despise prophesy. But why? If preaching is the same as prophecy then hardly anyone is uncomfortable with those who preach. Prophecy, on the other hand, seems to make everyone squeamish, skeptical, and uncomfortable. It is logical, then, for Paul to encourage us not to become cynical towards it. Also, what about the verses in 1 Timothy 1 and 4? Timothy, it is said, was given one of the spiritual gifts through the elders of the Church laying hands over him with prophecy. This hardly sounds like something that would accompany preaching. Yet someone prophesying over you and predicting that you would be given a particular ministry seems more appropriate. Lastly, John the revelator was told that he must prophecy again concerning the **future events** that were being told him directly by Jesus. All of these passages very obviously define prophecy as a divine revelation which foretells the future.

But going back to 1 Corinthians 14:3 and 31, is it possible that Paul was simply demonstrating that those who are given a divine word of prophecy could also experience edification, encouragement, and comfort? Yes, absolutely. What if one were to receive a word of prophecy that foretold their future success in marriage or ministry? A man may receive encouragement through a prophetic word concerning his family's salvation. Or a woman may receive comfort through the promise that the Lord would soon bless her with child. These are just a few examples in which edification, encouragement, and comfort may be ministered through prophecy. And in terms of learning, it is obvious that prophetic utterances are meant to teach or enlighten members of the Body concerning future events. So prophecy does not necessarily have to be defined as preaching.

Yet the most notable problem arising from the view that prophecy is the same as preaching is the clear **prohibition** instituted by Paul concerning women teaching and maintaining a role of authority in the Church—such as preaching (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim

2:12). So if we insist that prophecy and preaching are the same then we would essentially force Paul to contradict his own teachings which forbid women from preaching in the Church. However, you will notice that this prohibition does not limit women from prophesying as evidenced in the following few verses:

*And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and **your daughters shall prophesy**, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and **on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy** (Act 2:17-18).*

*And the same man had four **daughters, virgins, which did prophesy** (Act 21:9).*

*But **every woman that prayeth or prophesieth** with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven (1Co 11:5).*

Now what if we take the same verses and substitute the word prophecy with preach. Notice what happens:

*And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and **your daughters shall preach??**, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and **on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall preach??** (Act 2:17-18).*

*And the same man had four **daughters, virgins, which did preach??** (Act 21:9).*

*But **every woman that prayeth or preaches??** with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven (1Co 11:5).*

Once again, if we allow for such a substitution, we force Paul to contradict his own teachings as located in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12.

Yet another aspect of prophecy worth mention and probably one of its most important features has to do with evangelism and the conversion of unbelievers. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul describes a particular scenario in which an unbeliever walks into a Church and

is converted upon hearing his secrets disclosed by those present: ***But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth*** (1 Cor 14:24-25). This clearly demonstrates the importance of prophetic activity in the Church, particularly in the area of evangelism. Furthermore, as this example illustrates, prophecy is not strictly employed for the purpose of edifying Believers. Such supposition may be gained from a casual reading of 1 Corinthians 14:22, where it says, *Wherefore tongues **are for a sign**, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: **but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe*** (1 Cor 14:22). Here, Paul is simply stating that while tongues may be used as a sign to unbelievers (e.g. a supernatural confirmation of the Gospel), prophecy's **main purpose** is the edification of the Church (1 Cor 14:4). So while that apparently is its main function, it does not exclude all of its secondary uses.

Finally, it is important that we don't take every prophetic word at face value, but rather test prophecy based on the following scriptural guidelines:

- A true prophet's predictions will "come to pass" (Deut 18:22; Jer 28:9)
- He will glorify God rather than himself (Jn 16:13)
- He does not give his own private interpretation (2Pet 1:20, 21)
- He points out sin (Mic 3:5-8)
- He warns of coming judgment (Is 24:20, 21)
- He edifies the church (1 Cor 14:3, 4)
- His message harmonizes with the Bible (Isa 8:20)
- He teaches that Jesus came in the flesh (1 Jn 4:1-3)
- He has a Christian character (Mat 7:16-20)
- He is obedient to the will of God (Deut 18:18)

*And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, **and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*** (Rev 19:10).

Discerning Spirits (1 Cor 12:10)

Some individuals receive an acute sense of discernment greater than what is typical. They are able to determine whether a message, person, or experience is truly from God. While the Holy Spirit gives every Believer a certain measure of this gift, some appear to be more sensitive to particular people, objects, or circumstances than others.

This gift is also invaluable for the purpose of casting out demons from people who are under demonic bondage. Through the revelation of the Spirit the one who discerns “spirits” may assess the particular demonic strongholds and command the demons out of a person in the name of Jesus.

Tongues (1 Cor 12:10)

The gift of tongues is multi-faceted and represents a variety of applications. The New Testament gives us at least three that are distinguishable. They are as follows:

(1) Speaking in tongues with interpretation

This is the utterance of an unknown language accompanied by interpretation:

*Now I wish you all spoke with tongues, but rather that you might prophesy, for he who is prophesying is greater than he who is **speaking with tongues, unless he interprets**, so that the assembly might receive upbuilding (1Co 14:5).*

*Therefore, he who is **speaking in a tongue, let him pray that he might interpret** (1Co 14:13).*

*If anyone speaks in a tongue, **let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret** (1Co 14:27).*

Note: According to Paul, this kind of tongues is practiced in an orderly manner. No more than two or three individuals in a meeting should be speaking in tongues, and only if accompanied by interpretation (1 Cor 14:27).

(2) Speaking in tongues without interpretation

This kind of tongues is the ability to speak a foreign language supernaturally and without prior intention. In which case those who hear will naturally understand and

require no interpretation. The Scriptures reveal that this kind of tongues is used as a sign for unbelievers (1 Cor 14:22). With further study we discover that it also pertains to judgment and a final call to repentance (Isa 28:11-13; 1 Cor 14:21).

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance... And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? ... we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God... (Act 2:4-8).

For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God (Act 10:46).

(3) Speaking in an unknown tongue (aka praying in the Spirit)

This type of tongues is different than the previous two already mentioned. Speaking in an unknown tongue is more properly defined as **praying in tongues or praying in the Spirit** (1 Cor 14:14-15; Eph 6:18). Paul refers to it as a **celestial prayer language which only God understands** (1 Cor 13:1; 14:2). Hence those who pray in tongues are edified thereby while “speaking mysteries in the Spirit” (1 Cor 14:2-4). Although Paul wished the entire Church was in possession of this gift, and while he himself was more proficient at it than those at Corinth, he makes it clear that it wasn’t for everyone (1 Cor 12:30; 14:5). Like Paul, Jude also encouraged the Body to pray in the Spirit continually as a means of building up their faith (Jude 1:20). As such, this gift should not be despised, forbidden, or neglected (1 Cor 12:31; 14:39).

For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries (1 Cor 14:2).

He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church (1 Cor 14:4).

I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying (1 Cor 14:5).

For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also (1 Cor 14:14-15).

I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: *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 14:18-19).

*Though I speak with the **tongues of men and of angels**, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal* (1 Cor 13:1).

*But ye, beloved, **building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost*** (Jude 1:20).

Note: Any who pray in an unknown tongue should do so quietly while in Church: ***But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God*** (1 Cor 14:28).

Interpreting Tongues (1 Cor 12:10)

The interpretation of tongues refers to the ability given by the Spirit to interpret an unknown tongue uttered in the Assembly.

CESSATIONIST ARGUMENTS

Many Christians claim that the gifts of the Spirit along with miracles and hearing God's voice were phased out during the first century and after the completion of the New Testament canon. This belief is known as the doctrine of cessation. The following is a concise rebuttal to the main arguments outlined in Cessationism written by Doug Bannister, author of the book, "Word & Power Church".

Foreword:

Let it be known that I am not a cessationist: I believe that God still speaks to people today outside of the Bible (though always consistent with it, and submitted to its authority); I believe that God still does miracles today; I believe that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit are still in operation today (ie. tongues, prophecy, etc.); and I believe that all of the offices of the 5-fold ministry, as spelled out in Ephesians 4:11-12, are still

functioning today and necessary for the Church to be effective (including the offices of apostle and prophet). Having thus prefaced the subject, allow me to highlight some of the most common objections to the continuity of the spiritual gifts. They are as follows:"

Cessation argument #1: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 teaches that the miraculous gifts passed away with the completion of the New Testament.

Response: Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 12-14 to answer questions the Corinthians were having about the use and abuse of spiritual gifts in their fellowship. His primary goal was to encourage the Corinthians to love one another. Chapter 13:8-13 is to show that love is greater than any gift: "Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned as a child. When I became a man I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall I know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three main: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

The miraculous gifts such as tongues and prophecy will cease. But when? "**When perfection comes.**" When perfection comes, these imperfect gifts will pass away. To what is Paul referring when he looks to the coming of "perfection"? There are basically two ways scholars have interpreted this passage. 1) Cessationists argue that "perfection" refers to the completed canon of Scripture. They hold that the first century church needed these miraculous revelatory gifts because the Bible was not yet complete, and when God completed the scriptural canon, these gifts were no longer needed and passed away. 2) Noncessationists believe that "perfection" refers to the second coming of Christ. They hold that these gifts are intended for the present church age but will no longer be needed when Jesus Christ returns. **The majority of biblical interpreters have concluded that "perfection" refers to the second coming of Christ and not the completion of the canon.**

How have they reached this conclusion? Which is right? Paul says that when the perfect comes, we will see God "face to face." The phrase "face to face" is used in the Old Testament to mean seeing God personally. Revelation 22:4 says that in heaven, "They will see his face." The Scriptures reveal much about God, but they do not allow for a

face-to-face meeting with him. This will come when Christ returns. Paul says that, for us, when perfection comes, "I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." The Scriptures help us know many things, but it could not be said that we know God fully because of them. God will be known fully to his people when his Son returns. Lloyd-Jones rejects the view that the word, "perfect", refers to the closed canon: [Do] you see what that involves? It means that you and I who have the Scriptures open before us, know much more than the apostle Paul of God's truth...if that argument is correct. It means that we are altogether superior to the early church and even to the apostles themselves, including the apostle Paul!...The "then" is the glory everlasting. It is only then that I shall know, even as also I am known; for then I shall see Him as He is. It is doubtful that when the Corinthians read this letter, the concept of a closed canon would have occurred to them. A far more common theme in Scripture is the return of Christ. When Paul pointed his Corinthian readers to a future day when they would see Christ face to face, they are far more likely to have thought of Christ's return. For these reasons, and many others treated in the scholarly literature, the most reasonable interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 says that Paul is teaching that the gifts will cease when Jesus Christ returns. Lloyd-Jones concludes his summary of the cessation arguments with typical bluntness: Let me begin to answer by giving you just one thought...The Scriptures never anywhere say that these things were only temporary – never! There is no such statement anywhere...So you see the difficulties men land themselves in when they dislike something and cannot fully understand it and try to explain it away. All things must be judged in the light of Scriptures, and we must not twist them to suit our theory or argument.

Cessation argument #2: The miraculous gifts ceased with the death of the last apostle. B.B. Warfield, a professor at Princeton Seminary, wrote a book in 1918 called *Counterfeit Miracles*, which is still the classic statement of the position that the miraculous spiritual gifts were given only to the apostles and Stephen and Philip. Warfield taught that the purpose of these gifts was to authenticate the apostles as trustworthy bearers of doctrine; when they died, this authenticating power died with them. Most of the contemporary works written from the cessationist camp are, in effect, a footnote to Warfield's work. Warfield wrote: It is very clear from the record of the New Testament that the extraordinary charismata were not (after the very first days of the church) the possession of all Christians, but supernatural gifts to the few. These gifts were not the possession of the primitive Christian as such: nor for that matter of the Apostolic Church, or the Apostolic age for themselves; they were distinctly for the

authentication of the Apostles. They were part of the credentials of the Apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the Church. Their function thus confined them to distinctively the Apostolic Church, and they necessarily passed away with it. The primary texts used by cessationists to support the claim that miraculous gifts were the sole property of the apostles include these: The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. – Acts 5:12 (NIV) The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles--were done among you with great perseverance. – 2 Cor 12:12 (NIV) This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. – Heb 2:3-4 (NIV)

Response: Warfield is correct in affirming the uniqueness of the apostolic office. The twelve apostles certainly enjoyed a unique wonder-working power. The major problem with Warfield’s argument, however, is that its conclusion does not follow from its premises. The argument can be broken down into a syllogism. 1) Major premise: The apostles, as the foundation of the church, experienced unique wonder-working powers to authenticate their ministry. 2) Minor premise: The apostles are dead. 3) Conclusion: No one experiences wonder-working power in ministry today. The conclusion does not follow from the minor premise. While it is true that the apostles had unique miraculous powers and it is true that they are dead, it does not logically follow that no other Christians can experience the miraculous gifts. Jack Deere points out how flawed this reasoning is when he applies it to church planting. We could say: 1) Major premise: Only the apostles planted churches in Acts. 2) Minor premise: The apostles are dead. 3) Conclusion: No one should plant churches today. All that is needed to refute this view from a scriptural standpoint is to find any examples of nonapostolic Christians using the miraculous gifts in the New Testament. Consider these: 1) Mark 9:38-39: An unknown man casts out demons in Jesus’ name. 2) Luke 10:9: Jesus commissions seventy-two disciples to preach and to heal. 3) Acts 9:17-18: Ananias heals Paul. 4) Romans 12:6: Paul refers to the gift of prophecy in Rome, a church not yet visited by an apostle. 5) 1 Corinthians 12:8-10: Gifts of healing and miracles are experienced in the Corinthian church without an apostle present. 6) Galatians 3:5: Paul refers to the Holy Spirit who “works miracles among you.” The “you” is plural and must refer to the entire congregation, which was not led by an apostle. 7) 1 Thessalonians 5:20: Paul demands that the Thessalonians not hinder the prophetic gift. 8) The list of miraculous gifts experienced by nonapostles in the New Testament grows much longer when we include tongues. Even a progressive dispensationalist like Dr. Robert Saucy of Talbot School of

Theology, who stresses in his writings the uniqueness of the apostolic era, challenges cessationist logic at this point: "While agreeing with many of the emphases in the cessationist position, some of the conclusions that demand the complete cessation of miraculous gifts in my opinion go beyond the express teaching of Scripture or necessary deductions from theological principles of Scripture." Conclusion: While the unique ministry of the apostles is honored and revered, it cannot be inferred from that ministry that the miraculous gifts were limited to and died with them.

Cessation argument #3: Church history proves that all evidence of the miraculous gifts passed away after the first century. This argument filled the bulk of Warfield's pages and has been popular in cessationist writing ever since.

Response: Two responses are in order. First, even if it could be proved that the gifts passed away in the history of the church, this does not prove that God will not grant them again. Second, history does not prove that the miraculous gifts passed away, as we will see below. 1) Stanley Burgess has produced a three-volume study on the history of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. He writes, "Before John Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407) in the East and Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430) in the west, no church father suggested that any or all of the charismata were intended only for the first-century Church. 2) The Patristic Era (A.D. 100-600).

An early second-century document, The Didache, was written to ministers. It exhorted the church to "permit the prophets to give thanks as much as they desire" and then proceeded to give instruction on how prophetic utterances were to be tested. Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 100-165) reminds fellow Christians in a letter that "many of our Christian men...have healed and do heal, rendering helpless and driving the possessing devils out. c) Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 130-202) writes, We do also hear many brethren in the Church who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit the hidden things of men...those who are in truth His disciples...do certainly and truly drive out devils, so that those who have thus been cleansed from evil spirits frequently both believe and join themselves to the Church. Others have foreknowledge of things to come; they see visions...others still heal the sick by laying their hands upon them, and they are made whole. Yea, moreover, as I have said, the dead even have been raised up and remained among us for many years. Origen, writing in the third century, reported that signs and wonders validated the proclamation of the gospel: The Gospel has a demonstration of its

own...this...method is called by the apostle the “manifestation of the Spirit and of power:” of “the Spirit” on account of the prophecies, which are sufficient to produce faith in anyone who reads them...and of “power”, because of the signs and wonders. The Latin theologian Hilary of Poitiers, writing in the fourth century, affirmed that the miraculous gifts were operating in his day: The gift of the Spirit is manifest...where there is...the gift of healings, that by the cure of the disease we should bear witness to His grace...or by the working of miracles...or by prophecy...or by discerning of spirits...or by kinds of tongues, that the speaking in tongues may be bestowed as a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit; or by the interpretation of tongues. Finally, Augustine, who wrote in the late fourth and early fifth century, believed that the gift of tongues was not given to the church in his day, but that the gift of miracles was.

The Medieval Era (600-1500). a) Colette of Corbi (d.1447) founded a convent and earned a reputation as one through whom God worked in miraculous ways. The Reformation and the Modern Era (1500 to present). It is widely reported that the Reformers did not believe in the miraculous gifts. Therefore it is somewhat surprising to find Martin Luther writing the following advice to a pastor who sought his counsel in ministering to a sick man: I know of no worldly advice to give. If the physicians are at a loss to find a remedy, you may be sure that it is not a case of ordinary melancholy. It must, rather, be an affliction that comes from the devil and must be counteracted by the power of Christ and the prayer of faith. Accordingly you should proceed as follows...Graciously deign to free this man from all evil, and bring to naught the work that Satan has done in him...Then, when you depart, lay your hands on the man again and say, “These signs shall follow them that believe; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.

In this century, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones helped to foster a renewed interest in Reformation theology in general and the Puritan way of thought in particular. He writes: There is evidence from many of those Protestant Reformers and Fathers, that some of them had a genuine, true gift of prophecy...read these books...you will find this gift of prophecy...[and] the occasional miracle. Anyone who is prepared to say that all this ended with the apostolic age, and that there has never been a miracle since the apostles...gives the lie...*and] is to quench the Holy Spirit. Conclusion: It is probably fair to say that the charismatic church has seen too much of the miraculous in the history of the church, and evangelical church has seen too little (There is no entry under “miracle” in the subject index of Philip Schaff’s History of the Christian Church). As is so often the

case, the truth appears to be somewhere in the middle. God has continued to give the miraculous gifts throughout the history of the church, although in varying degrees.

Cessation Argument #4: Jesus says, “A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign” (Matt. 16:4). This means that we should not pray for the miraculous in our ministries today.

Response: The problem with this objection is that it fails to consider who Jesus’ audience was. Matthew 16 shows us that the “wicked and adulterous generation” referred to were the Scribes and the Pharisees who came to test Jesus by asking for a sign. Jesus was rebuking hard-hearted unbelievers who mocked him with this request. Notice the greater frequency with which Jesus compassionately responded to a request for a miracle. Significantly, Acts 4:30 relates that the apostles and the early disciples prayed for signs and wonders to follow their preaching ministry. Paul, rather than discouraging his readers from seeking the miraculous gifts, told them do desire them eagerly (1 Cor. 14:1). John writes that “many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name” (John 2:23). Then he reinforces the positive role of signs in proclaiming the gospel: “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:30-31).

COUNTERFEIT SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND FALSE REVIVALS

What are the marks of true revival and how can we be certain the spiritual gifts around us are not counterfeit? Since the gifts of the Spirit are endemic to revival, it is important to investigate both of these areas. Today, more than ever before, most of the “spiritual” activity taking place and labeled as God’s work is completely contrived by man or demonic powers. And while some of these things may appear harmless on the surface, they have power to damage our spiritual perception and understanding in a way that may take years to undo. For this reason it is important that we learn to recognize the real work of the Holy Spirit as opposed to that which is not. And foremost, we must be sharp enough to pick up the tell tale signs that reveal the truth. In the following article by Shane Idleman (in blue), we will see some of these principles expressed succinctly, after which we will summarize them for a quick overview of the topic. Notice:

“Christians are called to discern truth from err, light from darkness, and right from wrong ... but how? Jeremiah 23:17 offers one answer, *They continually say to those who despise Me, The LORD has said, You shall have peace; And to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, No evil shall come upon you.*

False teachers often don't warn, confront or convict. They offer comfortable messages and a false sense of peace, or they mislead with rules and regulations as found in 1 Timothy 4:2-3—*speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.* Jesus said in Matthew 24:24 that, *false Christs and false prophets will appear and deceive many.* Deception comes in many forms but centers around false hope or legalism.

Not all leaders in experience-oriented movements are false and misleading. Many are sincere and open to the work of the Holy Spirit. God's Word is the foundation on which all truth stands (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15).

What is true revival then? Simply stated: a genuine revival is God reviving His people—*Wilt thou not revive us again that thy people may rejoice in thee?* (Ps. 85:6).

Repentance is often a mark of true revival as what was reflected in the life of Griffith Jones, who preached during the Welsh revivals of the 18th century: **“The tears [of the congregation] began to flow in streams down their cheeks. Soon, they wept openly, and cried out, 'What shall we do to be saved?’** Furthermore, it was not uncommon for people to tremble and weep or shout for joy under the anointed preaching of George Whitefield. Whitefield was the primary evangelist during the Great Awakening that occurred in the mid 1700s. During this time, old grudges and debts were forgiven, morality improved, many were added to the church, and there was **a greater sense of the fear of the Lord.**

Those who use past revivals in an attempt to validate odd events today perhaps have not truly researched revivals. In reading the historical writings of charismatics and Calvinists, Pentecostals and Puritans, Acts and Azusa, as well as countless biographies of leaders such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley, Robert Murray M'Cheyne, Charles Spurgeon and D.L. Moody, and puritans such as Thomas Goodwin, John Bunyan, John Owen and Richard Baxter, **nowhere do**

these leaders encourage the hysteria or the outright weirdness that we sometimes see today.

Granted, there were times of strong conviction such as when people held on to trees thinking that they were falling into the abyss of hell during the famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," by Jonathan Edwards. And people did cry out to God, and/or fall on the ground under the strong conviction of sin during the revivals of George Whitefield, John Wesley and Evan Roberts, but this is because sin, righteousness and holiness were preached—*falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you* (1 Cor. 14:25). This is true revival. Perhaps a balanced end to this article is found in an excerpt from Duncan Campbell's book, *The Price and Power of Revival*: 'How is it that while we make such great claims for the power of the gospel, we see so little of the supernatural in operation? Is there any reason why the church today cannot everywhere equal the church at Pentecost? I feel this is a question we ought to face with an open mind and an honest heart. What did the early church have that we do not possess today? Nothing but the Holy Spirit; nothing but the power of God.'

Here I would suggest that one of the main secrets of success in the early church lay in the fact that the early believers believed in unction from on high and not entertainment from men ... How did the early church get the people? By publicity projects, by bills, by posters, by parades or by pictures? No! The people were arrested and drawn together and brought into vital relationship with God, not by sounds from men, but by sounds from heaven. ... The early church cried for unction and not for entertainment. Unction is the dire and desperate need of the ministry today.

There is a desperate need to preach and proclaim God's Word with genuine power if we are to experience true revival. Without God's authority and power, words are lifeless. Where are those with uncompromising power and authority in the pulpits today? The one thing that all of the great revivals in church history had is the one thing that we often lack—the genuine power of the Holy Spirit. The very thing that we need is the very thing that we are afraid of. Many do not truly want revival because of fear of what it may involve.

A few years ago I prayed, 'Lord, bring revival to the churches'—I was not ready for the response that followed. I felt impressed with these words: 'You don't want revival—it

will ruin your schedule, your dignity, your image and your reputation as a person who is 'well-balanced.' Men will weep throughout the congregation. Women will wail because of the travail of their own souls. Young adults will cry like children at the magnitude of their sin. With the strength of My presence, the worship team will cease playing. Time will seem to stand still. You won't be able to preach because of the emotions flooding your own soul. You'll struggle to find words, but only find tears. Even the most dignified and reserved among you will be broken and humbled as little children. The proud and self-righteous will not be able to stand in My presence. The doubter and unbeliever will either run for fear or fall on their knees and worship Me—there can be no middle ground. The church will never be the same again. Do you really want revival?"

The preceding article reminds us to be on the lookout whenever men attempt to invoke revival in the name of the "Holy Spirit". How vigilant we should be to check for genuine fruit every time we are confronted with a "great move of God". In light of these dangers, the following checklist may help us remember the true earmarks of any spiritual work:

- 1. Is there a healthy emphasis on repentance from sin and holiness?**
- 2. Is there a tangible fear of God?**
- 3. Is there reliance on entertainment, comedy, rock music, and concert style performances to garner interest and participation? If so, steer clear of it!**
- 4. Are people riding the high of a "feel good" experience or driven rather by love and devotion to Jesus?**
- 5. Do the gifts of the Spirit reflect those described in Scripture or do they appear to be extra-biblical in character? Counterfeit spiritual gifts can include being "slain in the spirit" (falling backward to the ground), making animal noises, bizarre physical activity such as sticking out one's tongue or laughing uncontrollably. Note: While the Spirit may produce overwhelming joy in a Believer (Act 13:52; Gal 5:22; 1 Pet 1:8), it should never cause us to act foolish, silly, or without self-control (Gal 5:23; 2 Tim 1:7).**
- 6. Are leaders prompting their followers to speak in tongues while using self help techniques such as, "now repeat after me" or "just blabber whatever comes to mind". Note: We know that the Apostles never once artificially induced people to speak in tongues. We are told that the Holy Spirit "fell upon them" and they supernaturally spoke in tongues and prophesied. Man was not involved in creating this experience at all. There is a big difference between what man contrives as opposed to what God brings**

about supernaturally. Be extra wary of such things! And if you were ever deceived into participating in such activity then consider repenting of your involvement and renouncing all affiliation to said activity.

HOW DOES GOD SPEAK TODAY?

Many Christians often wonder how God would speak to them today. Since we believe in the continuity of the spiritual gifts, we also affirm that God continues to speak to people today the same way He had in times past. According to Scripture, there are eight definite ways in which we can discern God's voice or understand His will in our current life situation and they are as follows:

- **Audible voice** (Ex 3:4; 1 Sam 3:8; Act 9:3-4)
- **Internally** through the Holy Spirit in a "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12; Jn 16:13)
- **Angels** (Gen 18:2-15; Luk 1:26-38; Rev 1:1)
- **Visions or dreams** (Gen 31:11; Joe 2:28; Mat 2:22)
- **Casting of lots** (Lev 16:8; Josh 18:6; Act 1:26; Prov 16:33)
- **Prophecy** (Ezek 37:4; Dan 9:24; 1 Cor 12:10; 2 Pet 1:21)
- **Tongues** (Act 2:11; 1 Cor 12:10)
- And the **Bible**—God's Word (Psa 119:105; Prov 30:5-6; 1 Thes 2:13; 1 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20)

COMPARING THE GIFTS WITH THE FRUIT

The gifts of the Spirit are given primarily for ministry and edification and are an **integral part** of every Christian fellowship. Conversely, the fruit of the Spirit are the character traits of Jesus that should be applied to our own character in order to conform to His image (Gal 5:22-23). If we place too much emphasis on the gifts and lose sight of the fruit, then we will never be any more Christ-like and deserve the same rebuke as the Church at Corinth (1 Cor 12:31). **But if we exclusively pursue the fruit and undermine the need for the gifts, we will be like a boat using only one oar to paddle across the waters. We will go around in circles without making any forward progress.** Our spiritual lives will simply lack tangible growth.

Jesus Christ was a **complete spiritual man** because He showed evidence of both the spiritual fruit and the gifts working harmoniously in His life. Nevertheless, if we are to

get our priorities in order, it is the fruit of the Spirit that we should strive for **most** (1 Cor 12:31).

CONCLUSION

Many Christians have undermined the spiritual gifts or completely neglected their powerful contribution to the Church. Even worse, the great majority who lay claim to them have only produced counterfeit manifestations that are deceiving multitudes and leading them astray. Yet the gifts are part of the very nature of God, imparted to Believers in order that we may expand His Kingdom on the earth. For this reason Paul reminded the Ephesians that the gifts were given **“for the perfecting of the saints, and the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come into the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”** (Ephesians 4:12–15). So then imagine what happens when we remove the gifts of the Spirit from our assemblies. **Can the Church continue to grow into perfection? Does ministry outreach have any more meaning or purpose? And can the Body continue to receive edification from those who practice their God appointed roles in the Church?** If we completely extinguish the spiritual gifts or their operation then the spiritual life in the Church is gone with it. The Church would have effectively lost her ability to withstand the devil and the gates of hell would have prevailed against her contrary to the promise of Scripture (Mat 16:18). Could this possibly be the cause for the demise of so many churches around the world? Is this why Christianity has lost its relevance in society and no longer represents anything substantial? If so, then perhaps it's time to plead with God for a greater outpouring of His Spirit so that individual members may once again receive Pentecostal power and the Body of Christ may be edified, unified, and matured to be more closely like Jesus.

In Christ alone,
John A.