

spiritual gifts

Curt Parton, 2003, 2005, 2008

We are frequently questioned regarding what we believe about the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts. While this is not intended to be an in-depth study, we hope that it will adequately explain our teachings on this important topic—particularly regarding the gifts that seem especially controversial.

We believe that the Holy Spirit is God and that He is personal, not merely a force or power. He is sent to convict, counsel and comfort, and He guides us deeper into the truth of God's Word. The Holy Spirit leads us in worshiping the Father and the Son (John 16:7-15). He also gives spiritual gifts to the church for the edification of the body (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

We believe that all Christians are baptized in the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:9), but also that there should be subsequent times when the believer is specially filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:8, 31; 13:9; Ephesians 5:18).

We see no place where Scripture teaches that any of the gifts of the Holy Spirit have ceased and are no longer valid for the church. However, we believe that the practice of these gifts must be done in an intentionally biblical manner.

For example, many people are wary of any mention of speaking in tongues (speaking in a language that one has never learned and does not understand). While this is understandable, it is unfortunate and usually caused by the unbiblical abuse of this gift. But, while the gift may be misused, the gift itself is a good one given by the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the people of God (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). Paul thanked God for this gift and used it often (1 Corinthians 14:18).

Many Christians overemphasize this gift in a way that is not healthy. Paul shows us very clearly that not all believers will speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:27-31). Also we are told that the exercise of this gift is a form of prayer directed, not to other members of the body, but to God (1 Corinthians 14:2, 14-17, 28), therefore we would question whether "messages in tongues" that are directed to the people are true demonstrations of the biblical gift of tongues.

If this gift is used during an assembly of believers, it is to be done in an orderly way with no more than three speaking, one at a time, and there must be an interpretation (1 Corinthians 14:27-28, 32-33, 39-40). However, Paul also shows that this gift is best used in private devotions rather than in public worship (1 Corinthians 14:4, 13-19, 28).

The gift of prophecy is another controversial gift. Some prefer to relegate prophecy to the practice of preaching, but this is not the meaning of the word and it is never used this way in Scripture. *[Note: This view also seriously confuses the role of women in preaching and teaching. See our paper on [Gender Roles in Ministry](#).]* Instead, the Bible consistently shows prophecy to be something revealed to a person by God. For a typical example, see 1 Corinthians 14:29-31. It

is difficult to see how Paul could be referring to someone preaching when he speaks here of prophecy.

However, Scripture also makes it clear that prophets in the New Testament were subject to the authority of the apostles (1 Corinthians 14:36-38). Unlike prophecy in the Old Testament, each exercise of the gift of prophecy in the church must be weighed or "sifted" (1 Corinthians 14:29, 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21), and some prophecies in the New Testament were not completely accurate (Acts 21:4-5, 10-11). It is clear, then, that the gift of prophecy for the church is not the ability to speak the very Word of God as many prophets did in the Old Testament and the apostles did in the New Testament. The New Testament gift of prophecy could be well-defined as relaying to others, in one's own words, something that God has revealed to that person. [See Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000).]

Again, this gift is a good one, given by the Holy Spirit for the edification of the church (1 Corinthians 14:3-4). When this gift is exercised it must be done in an orderly manner, and each prophecy must be evaluated (1 Corinthians 14:29-33).

While we believe that all of the gifts that the Holy Spirit has for the church are valid today, we would not consider ourselves part of the Charismatic Movement. We believe that all Christians should have the freedom to passionately praise God, but also believe that when we come together as a body the honoring of God and the edification of our brothers and sisters must come before our own spiritual gratification. Just as there are expressions of intimacy between a husband and wife that are beautiful and wonderful, but inappropriate for public display, so there are expressions of adoration between the believer and God that are more appropriate for private devotions.

We believe that the worship of God and the study of His Word will often be deeply emotional. But a preoccupation with our emotions is not healthy and does not lead to spiritual maturity. We believe that God may at any time manifest His presence and power with signs and wonders. However, an obsessive expectation for continual signs and wonders is dangerous and can be very detrimental to the health and vitality of the body of Christ, especially when such experiences are not evaluated according to Scripture.

Spiritual gifts are not a measurement for spiritual maturity. Spiritual gifts are beneficial and should be used with a thankful heart, however we must always be mindful of the dangers of misusing these gifts. The more spectacular the gift seems, the easier it is for a believer to fall into using the gift with wrong motives or even pretending to use a gift that one does not truly have. We are striving for the balance taught by the apostle Paul:

**So, my dear brothers and sisters,
be eager to prophesy,
and don't forbid speaking in tongues.
But be sure that everything is done properly and in order.**

1 Corinthians 14:39-40

If you're interested in further study on these issues, I highly recommend D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Books, 1987).