

# Are We A Charismatic Church?

## Part 2: The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

by Mark Mitchell

The question of if we are a charismatic church also leads us to the subject of spiritual gifts. The believer first receives the “gift” or “baptism” of the Spirit at the start of his new life in Christ, but he also receives individual spiritual gifts which allow him to minister in a variety of ways. The main passages of Scripture where these gifts are described are 1 Corinthians 12, 14, Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:7-12 and 1 Peter 4:10-11. In these texts, spiritual gifts are most often called *charismata*, from which we get our term charismatic. Unfortunately, only a select few of these gifts have been associated with the Charismatic church. We will look at these gifts a bit later, but for now we will seek to lay a foundation for a proper understanding of how these gifts should operate within the church.

### Where do the gifts come from?

Spiritual gifts come from God. Paul writes, “*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons*” (1 Cor. 12:4-6). Paul is emphasizing that although the gifts are diverse, there is only one Giver. Furthermore, God gives these gifts to his people on the basis of his grace. Paul writes, “*And since we have gifts (charismata) that differ according to the grace (charis) given to us, let each exercise them accordingly...*” (Rom. 12:6). We do not earn our spiritual gifts any more than we earn our salvation. Thus, there is no reason for boasting or pride when it comes to our gifts. Finally, we do not get to choose our gifts. Just as there is no room for pride, there is no room for argument. The Spirit of God distributes these gifts according to his sovereign will. Paul writes, “*But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills*” (1 Cor. 12:11).

### To whom are the gifts given?

Spiritual gifts are not the prerogative of a select few. The New Testament clearly states that every believer has been given at least one spiritual gift. All four chapters in which spiritual gifts are mentioned contain a direct statement about this:

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

*“And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly...”* (Rom. 12:6).

*“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift”* (Eph. 4:7).

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

The fact that each of us have at least one gift is illustrated by Paul’s favorite metaphor for the church as the body of Christ. The body metaphor reminds us that every believer has an equally important role to play as a member of Christ’s body. Paul makes this point quite vividly when he compares the various gifts to parts of the human body who talk to each other. He addresses those who might feel that the role they have is quite small and unimportant with these words, “*And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?*” (1 Cor. 12:16-17). Clearly, he wants those who feel that their role is insignificant to accept their role and to know that they are needed. On the other hand, he addresses those who feel their gifts are so spectacular that they do not need others with these words, “*And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; or again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’*” (1 Cor. 12:21). As members of the body of Christ, we are all different and we are all needed.

### What are spiritual gifts given for?

Spiritual gifts are meant to be used, just as the parts of our body are to be used. We are stewards of God’s grace and to be good stewards we must use our gifts. “*Since we have gifts,*” Paul writes, “*let each exercise them accordingly*” (Rom. 12:6). Paul’s assumption is that each of us will actually have some idea of what our gifts are. Indeed, this ought to be something which every believer seeks to understand through prayer, service, and counsel with fellow believers.

There is a great deal of misunderstanding about the purpose of spiritual gifts in the church. Some think of them as gifts that are meant for our own edification and enrichment. Others think of them as aids to worship, whether it be private or corporate worship. Still others think of them as somehow displaying the power of God to unbelieving people. But Scripture trumps all of these ideas and says spiritual gifts are

given for one reason: to build up the body of Christ. Both the apostles Peter and Paul make this point. Paul writes, *“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good”* (1 Cor. 12:7). Peter writes, *“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”* (1 Peter 4:10). Thus, spiritual gifts are not given to help, comfort, inspire or strengthen ourselves as recipients but others in the body whom we serve.

## How many different gifts are there?

Though the interest of some Christians is with gifts which appear to be miraculous such as tongues, healing, miracles and prophecy, there are many more gifts than these. When we look at the four passages where gifts are listed, we see that there are at least 20 different spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12 there are 13 gifts mentioned. In Romans 12 there is a list of seven, five of which do not appear in 1 Corinthians 12. In Ephesians 4 there four or possibly five gifts mentioned, two of which are new. In 1 Peter 4 just two gifts are mentioned and it is possible these are not specific gifts at all but rather kinds of gifts. The rather fluid nature of these lists has caused some debate over whether or not these lists are exhaustive. Some say this shows how God is infinitely creative and willing to bestow different gifts on different people at different times throughout history. At the same time, we should be careful not to add to Scripture and when one looks at the lists it is hard to imagine much else that the Spirit of God could enable us to do! The following is a list of the gifts that Scripture sets forth: apostle, prophet, pastor-teacher, evangelist, service, helps, teaching, giving, exhortation, leadership, administration, mercy, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, distinguishing spirits, healing, miracles, tongues, interpretation of tongues.

When we look at the various passages and the different lists they contain we see that spiritual gifts can be divided in various ways. The apostle Peter seems to divide the gifts up into two categories of speaking and serving, *“Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies...”* (1 Peter 4:11). In Ephesians, Paul separates the equipping gifts from gifts of serving, *“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service...”* (Eph. 4:11–12a). We also observe that some gifts seem quite miraculous while others seem rather ordinary, such as those mentioned in Romans 12: service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership and showing mercy. At the same time, in 1 Corinthians Paul focuses almost exclusively on what we would consider the miraculous:

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

## Are all spiritual gifts for today?

This question usually has to do with only a few of the 20 gifts mentioned earlier. Those who pose this question are normally thinking of the gifts we sometimes label as supernatural such as healing, miracles, prophecy, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. There are those who believe that somehow these gifts have ceased to be in operation. These “cessationists” do not teach that such gifts as teaching, exhortation, helps and service are no longer among us, but only those they sometimes call “sign gifts.”

Cessationists largely support their claim that these gifts have ceased on the basis of a statement that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 13:8–10, *“Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.”* Cessationists sometimes affirm that “the perfect” that Paul speaks of here is the Word of God which has been completed in what we know as the 66 books of the Bible. The idea is that gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge were only needed for the early church before the canon of Scripture was complete. The problem with this interpretation is that it is based on a false assumption. The “perfect” (teleion) in this passage is not the completion of the New Testament canon but rather the return of Christ. In a number of contexts the related words *telos* and *teleo* are used in relation to the Second Coming and the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth. Thus, it seems correct to understand *teleion* in verse 10 to mean that “perfection” is to come about at the end, or, if before, when the Christian dies and is taken to be with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:1–10).

We will now look at several gifts which are especially relevant to the charismatic question and examine whether they are still in operation today.

### Healing and miracles

We affirm that God both can and does perform healings and miracles today. Healing refers to miracles of physical (or perhaps emotional) sickness. These gifts of healing are a foretaste

of the physical healing he will grant every believer fully in the future when we receive our resurrection bodies. Miracles may refer to any kind of other activity where God's mighty power is evident. This may include answers to prayer for physical deliverance from danger (Acts 5:19–20), powerful works of judgment on the enemies of the gospel (Acts 13:9–12), or miraculous deliverance from injury (Acts 28:3–6).

In thinking about healing and miracles, several things must be kept in mind. First, God's power to heal and perform miracles can be displayed through either natural or supernatural events. Some Christians only detect the activity of God in the miraculous. But God's power is seen in the natural course of events as well. He sends the rain, maintains the regularity of the seasons, feeds the birds of the air, raises up political leaders, and opens and closes doors in our personal lives. Furthermore, it seems reasonable that the primary way that God works is through nature and the natural course of events in history. If miracles were to become commonplace, they would no longer be miracles! Once we begin to see the living God at work through the natural process of nature, we will begin to see that all healing is divine healing. God may or may not choose to use doctors to bring about healing, but either way it is his work.

Second, if we look at the whole sweep of biblical history, large parts of it contain no mention at all of miracles. In fact, when we look closely at where the biblical miracles are, we discover that they cluster in Scripture around four main epochs of biblical revelation—the law, the prophets, the Lord Jesus Christ, and his apostles. This is because at least one major purpose of miracles was to authenticate each fresh stage of biblical revelation. The message of Moses (the law) was confirmed, for there was *“none like him for all the signs and the wonders which the Lord sent him to do”* (Deut. 34:10,11). The ministry of Jesus was *“attested...by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him”* (Acts 2:22). And God bore witness to the message of the apostles *“by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will”* (Heb. 2:3–4). We affirm, therefore, that while God is able to perform miracles and healings in any and every age, we would expect to see these things more in times of fresh biblical revelation, which no longer exist.

Third, whatever it means to have the gift of healing, this cannot mean that this person would be able to heal everyone whenever he or she pleases. It is significant that when Paul mentions healing in the context of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:9, he says, *“to another gifts of healings by the one Spirit.”* He does not point to the “gift” of healing but

rather to “gifts of healings.” It sounds as if the plural gifts of healings are such that each event is the work of God, rather than that the ability to heal on any and every occasion being granted to the believer in question. Furthermore, in James 5:15 it is the elders who pray as a group for the sick and through their prayer of faith God can accomplish much.

Finally, we believe that while we should pray for healing and at times God will grant gifts of healings, it is not his will to heal in every circumstance. Telling people that God always heals today if we only have enough faith is a cruel teaching not supported by Scripture. For example, Paul prayed for his own healing from a “thorn in the flesh” and the Lord denied him three times so that he would learn the lesson many have learned through suffering, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness”* (2 Cor. 12:9).

For this reason, we conclude that while God can and does give gifts of healings and miracles today, they are rare and they are not given to individuals to heal in any and every circumstance. While at times he chooses to heal as a foretaste of heaven, God uses suffering in this life and it is not a lack of faith or specific sin that always causes this suffering.

### Apostle

The word “apostle” literally means “sent one.” This word is used in two primary ways in the Bible. The word is used at least twice to describe *apostles of the churches* (2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25), who functioned as messengers sent on a particular errand from one church to another. In this sense this word may be applied to missionaries and other believers sent on specific missions. But this is clearly not what is being referred to when the Bible speaks of the spiritual gift of apostle. It is very significant that in the two passages where the spiritual gift of apostle is mentioned it is at the top of the list (1 Cor. 12:28, 29; Eph. 4:11). The gift of apostleship, which is given precedence, must refer to the special group of twelve men who were selected apostles of Christ, together with Paul (Gal. 1:1), and possibly also James, the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:19). They were unique in being eyewitnesses of the historic Jesus in his life, death and resurrection (Acts 1:21–22). They were personally appointed and authorized by Christ (Mark 3:14) and specially inspired by the Holy Spirit for their teaching ministry (John 14:25–26). In this sense, they have no successors. Though “apostles” may function today in the secondary sense, this gift has ceased to be bestowed in the primary sense.

### Prophet

Throughout church history many have claimed to speak with prophetic inspiration. Whether or not these claims are true

depends on how we define prophecy. The Old Testament understanding of a prophet is that he was the mouthpiece of God; an organ of divine revelation, to whom the word of the Lord came, and who therefore spoke the very words of God. Of course, many of these words are contained in Scripture. In this narrow sense, we must say that there are no more prophets, because we affirm that God's self-revelation was finished in Christ, and the canon of Scripture has long been closed.

It is significant that in the lists of gifts in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians, "prophets" comes second to "apostles" and "apostles and prophets" are mentioned together in several texts because their teaching is the foundation on which the church is built (Eph. 2:20; 3:5). As in a building, once the foundation is laid and the building is built upon it, it cannot be laid again. So, at least in this narrow sense, prophecy as a vehicle of divine revelation is no longer given as a gift. Stott writes, "For in Scripture the prophet is primarily neither the predictor of the future, nor the political commentator, nor even the bringer of encouragement, but the mouthpiece of God, the organ of fresh revelation. It seems to be that in that sense that Paul brackets 'apostles and prophets' as the most important of all charismata; and in that sense (whatever may be said about subsidiary meanings and ministries) we must say they no longer exist in the church. God's way of teaching in today's church is not by fresh revelation but by the exposition of his revelation completed in Christ and in Scripture" (Stott, pp. 101-102).

Most charismatics today, at least in theory, do not believe modern day prophecy is on the same level as Scripture and claim that there are secondary uses of prophecy which are in use today. Might there not still be men or women in the church like Agabus (Acts 11:28; 21:10, 11) whose ministry is not to add to revelation but to predict some future event or offer a divine word of comfort or exhortation? This seems to be the sort of thing the apostle Paul is addressing in the church at Corinth when he says, "*But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation*" (1 Cor. 14:3). In his book, *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem argues for defining the prophecy Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians as "telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind." Although it is prompted by the Holy Spirit and is called prophecy, it is not always infallible because things can get muddled in transmission. Why else would Paul say, "*Let two or three prophets speak, and then let them weigh what is said*" (1 Cor. 14:29). Grudem comments, "We cannot imagine that an Old Testament prophet like Isaiah would have said, 'Listen to what I say and weigh what is said—sort the good from the bad, what you accept from what you should not accept.' If

prophecy had absolute divine authority it would be sin to do this" (Grudem, p. 1054).

It seems that we should be both open and cautious in regard to this kind of prophetic ministry. Throughout the history of the church men and women have made countless unfulfilled predictions that have led other believers astray and brought disrepute on the church. Furthermore, any word that supposedly comes from God must be tested to be in accord with Scripture. Paul's advice to the church at Thessalonica is most relevant, "*Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good*" (1 Thess. 5:19–21).

### Tongues/Interpretation of Tongues

The phenomenon of speaking in tongues is unique to the new covenant age. Before Adam and Eve fell into sin, there was no need to speak in other languages because they spoke the same language. Later, as humanity multiplied after the Fall, this unified language was used in rebellion against God in the building of the tower of Babel. In order to stop this united rebellion against him, God "confused the language of all the earth" and scattered people abroad. If we pass over the age of the New Testament church and look at the eternal future we see that once again the unity of language will be restored, because then everyone will speak the same language in their service and worship of God (Rev. 7:9–12). In the New Testament church the gift of tongues may be something of a foretaste of the unity of language that will exist in heaven.

On the Day of Pentecost the early believers spoke in tongues that were real languages intelligible to various groups within the crowd who watched (Acts 2:4–11). The result was that these Jewish visitors to Jerusalem from various nations all heard in their own language a proclamation of "the mighty works of God." Note that this gift did not involve an unintelligible utterance but rather a real language. The noun used for this gift is *glossa* and it has only two known meanings, namely the organ in the mouth and a real language.

The same experience came to the church at Corinth. The gift of tongues is not mentioned in the list of gifts found in Romans, Ephesians or 1 Peter. This does not necessarily mean these gifts were not in operation there, but it at least raises the possibility that this gift was not in operation in every church. Nevertheless, our assumption is that what happened at Corinth was basically the same thing that happened at Pentecost. The Greek phrases are almost exactly the same and so we can assume these were once again real languages. In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul states that there is no value to these

tongues unless someone is able to interpret them for the congregation. This is why Paul says, *“Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying”* (1 Cor. 14:5). The only apparent difference between prophecy and interpreted tongue speaking appears to be that tongues is speech primarily directed towards God (prayer), while prophecy consists of a message from God to the church. Paul says, *“one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God”* (1 Cor. 14:2). If there is no interpreter available, Paul says that the one speaking in tongues should *“keep silent in the church and speak to himself and to God”* (1 Cor. 14:28). This is consistent with the fact that Paul often describes speaking in tongues as prayer: *“If I pray in tongue, my spirit prays but my mind remains unfruitful”* (1 Cor. 14:14). Thus, we can define the gift of tongues as “prayer or praise spoken in a language not understood by the speaker.”

What about what is known today as a “prayer language”? Many today claim to have discovered a new intimacy with God through this private practice and yet have no idea what they are saying to God. Is there biblical precedence for speaking an unintelligible prayer language to God for no other reason than self-edification? Those who encourage this practice point to a few verses in 1 Corinthians to validate their experience such as, *“One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church... If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let one interpret; but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God”* (1 Cor. 14:4, 27–28).

Given these statements, should we not encourage private tongue-speaking as an aid to personal devotion? We think not. If Paul completely forbids public tongue-speaking without interpretation, he seems to discourage private tongue-speaking if the speaker does not understand what he is saying. Paul clearly says, *“He who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret”* (v. 13). Otherwise his mind will be “unfruitful” or unproductive (v. 4). So what is he to do? Paul’s reply is that he will pray and sing “with the Spirit,” but he will do so “with the mind also.” Paul can’t encourage prayer and praise in which the mind is not actively engaged.

But what about Paul’s statement that the prophet “edifies the church” while the tongue-speaker “edifies himself?” Is Paul not actively encouraging the practice of private tongues? We question whether this is the right conclusion. “Edification” in the New Testament is invariably a ministry which builds up

others. The Greek word *oikodomeo* means literally “to build” physical structures but came to be used of “strengthening, establishing and edifying” Christians and churches. In light of this consistent New Testament emphasis on edification as a ministry to others and to the church, why would Paul encourage the tongue-speaker to edify himself? It seems there is at least some degree of irony in what Paul writes, for the phrase is almost a contradiction in terms. Self-edification is not what edification is all about in the New Testament. As we have already seen, all spiritual gifts are service-gifts, bestowed “for the common good.” How, then, can this one gift be turned in upon itself and be exercised for personal good instead of the common good? It seems that this involves a misuse of a gift. What would one think of a believer with a teaching gift who uses it only to give himself private instruction, or of a man with a healing gift who healed no one but himself? It is hard to justify the self-directed use of a gift specifically bestowed for the benefit of others.

It seems that as with all the gifts tongues was designed for the edification and service of fellow believers rather than oneself. When used within the congregation they should be first interpreted and then evaluated by the elders as would a prophecy be evaluated.

### Words of Wisdom and Knowledge

Paul writes, *“For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit”* (1 Cor. 12:8). These two gifts are mentioned nowhere else in Scripture. This means that the only information we have about these gifts is contained in this verse: we have the words used to describe these two gifts, and we have the context in which the phrases occur, but that is all. This warns us that our conclusions will probably be somewhat tentative in any case.

The major alternatives for understanding these gifts are two: (1) These gifts are commonly thought in charismatic circles to be the ability to receive a special revelation from the Holy Spirit and on that basis to speak words that give wisdom in a situation or give specific knowledge of a situation in the life of someone present in a congregation. In this interpretation these gifts would be “miraculous,” in that they would not be based on information ordinarily available to the person using the gift. (2) The other interpretation of these gifts would see them as more “non-miraculous” or ordinary: the “word of wisdom” simply means the ability to speak a wise word in various situations and “word of knowledge” is the ability to speak with knowledge about a situation. In both cases the knowledge and wisdom would be empowered by the Holy Spirit but

acquired in the ordinary course of life and through the study of Scripture. Examples of “words of wisdom” in this sense would be found in Acts 6:1–6 (the appointment of the first “deacons”) and Acts 15:19–29 (the decision of the Jerusalem council).

In favor of the first interpretation, it has been argued that all the other seven gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 are in the “miraculous” category, and therefore these two gifts should be understood that way as well. But we affirm the second interpretation for two reasons. First, the words Paul uses for “word” (logos), “wisdom” (sophia), and “knowledge” (gnosis) are not specialized or technical terms, but are the ordinary words used for “word” and “wisdom” and “knowledge.” They are not ordinarily used to denote miraculous events (as are the words revelation and prophecy, for example), but are simply the words used for human knowledge and wisdom. So from the meanings of the words themselves, no indication of a miraculous gift seems to be given.

Second, the New Testament already has a term to describe the action of receiving a special revelation from the Holy Spirit and reporting it in the congregation, this is what Paul calls “prophecy.” Since he discusses prophecy at some length, describing it and regulating it, we can know fairly clearly what

prophecy was. But to say that these other gifts functioned in exactly the same way (perhaps differing only in content) does not seem justified by anything in the text other than a preconceived notion of what these gifts should be.

Therefore it would seem preferable to understand these in a “non-miraculous” way, simply as the ability to speak with wisdom or with knowledge in various situations. What many people today call “word of wisdom” and “word of knowledge” in charismatic circles, would seem better simply to refer to as “prophecy.”

We started by asking the question, Are we a charismatic church? On the one hand, CPC is clearly not a charismatic church in that we do not believe in the traditional charismatic understanding of the baptism of the Holy Spirit as an experience that takes place subsequent to salvation. Nor do we believe that we should actively pursue “miraculous” spiritual gifts for their own sake or because these are somehow more “spiritual” than other gifts. On the other hand, CPC is a charismatic church in that we do believe in the active ministry of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life and ministry, and we do affirm the contemporary use of all spiritual gifts as they are used in the edification of the church, the body of Christ.

1. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, InterVarsity Press, Leicester, England, and Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1994.

2. John R. W. Stott, *Baptism & Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1964.