

## Gifts of the Holy Spirit - part 5.

This is my personal position. It is not the position of Westlake or the elders.

### Defining Terms

#### A spiritual gift:

- A Holy Spirit given ability (or super-empowered natural ability) to make us particularly fruitful in some area of ministry - for the common good, meeting need, building up the church and extending the kingdom, to the glory of God.
- Every believer has one or more.

Two Greek words are typically translated as spiritual gifts:

πνευματικῶν - 1 Cor 12:1 'Now concerning *spiritual gifts*.' - things/people that are spiritual, or of the Spirit. 'Spiritual things'

χαρισμάτων - 1 Cor 12:4 'Now there are varieties of *gifts*'

So we're talking 'gifts' 'of the Spirit'!

**Continuationist** - someone who thinks all the gifts (maybe with the exception of foundational gifts like apostles and prophets) continue today

Includes:

- pentecostals
- charismatic

**Cessationist** - someone who believes that, alongside the foundational gifts of apostle and prophet, signs and wonders and the revelatory gifts of prophecy and tongues have also ceased.

**Open but cautious** - a timid Continuationist!

However, these terms are problematic: They miss the nuance of different positions; we should try and avoid anything that divides true Christians; labelling rarely helps unity.

Cessationists still believe God miraculously heals, provides, speaks through his word, brings to conversion, empowers for service etc

Continuationists don't necessarily believe that everything that claims to be of the Holy Spirit is of the Holy Spirit.

### Arguments For and Against the Continuation of all the Gifts

Until relatively recently the cessationist position was the accepted position.

We do well to try and understand well the position of those who disagree with us.

#### Case For:

1. The NT never states that any gifts will be withdrawn, so - by default - they continue. Yes, 1 Cor 13:8-12 says tongues and prophecy will pass away, but that passage is speaking of the end of time. So, we can expect them to continue until then.
2. The cessationist position implies two stages within the new age instituted by Christ post his resurrection and pouring out of the Spirit: the apostolic age - where all the gifts were functioning, and post-apostolic age, when some (namely tongues and prophecy) are withdrawn. But the NT teaches only one age: that of the Spirit in Christ.

However, a cessationist might argue, 'true, but it also teaches the foundational role of apostles and prophets - and what comes after. So why would it be unusual for some gifts to be part of that period and not of afterwards?'

3. It is true that the gifts disappeared in the early church (see arguments made by cessationists below), but as early as 2nd C reports of their continuation appear. The reason they disappeared could be increased formalism/structure within the church, decreasing dependence on the Spirit. Plus, there are accounts throughout the church age of miracles and healings.

4. The fact of contemporary experience: Today, the most rapidly growing christian groups = pentecostal/charismatic. Can so many millions of Christians really be wrong?

### **Case Against:**

1. Biblically, extraordinary gifts are limited to extraordinary/strategic periods of Biblical history, serving as confirmatory signs of new revelation, or the Lord's prophets; or when special defence is needed against satanic attack of God's people (For example: at the time of the Exodus, Elijah, Christ, the apostles etc).

So these signs were not normative. In the NT, the gifts are confirming the apostles and apostolic teaching. So the gradual disappearance of the gifts fits with the gradual propagation and acceptance of the apostolic teaching and canon.

However a continuationist might argue that the Bible inevitably gives more attention to these crucial times because they are crucial. To say there were no gifts at other times is an argument from silence, which is never good.

Plus, miraculous gifts were more widespread than just at critical periods. For example, in the time of the Judges - supernatural strength; King Saul - prophesy; the prophet Nathan/David - divine insight; Isaiah/Hezekiah/Jehoshaphat - miracles of deliverance.

So it would be fairer to say that the Lord is often breaking in with supernatural power but that at times this may be intensified.

And if gifts are given to authenticate the apostolic teaching, or when the gospel is under attack, we should expect more supernatural gifts when the gospel is going to previously unreached areas or where the spiritual battle is intense.

2. In 1 Cor 13, Paul is not talking of the end of time, but of the comprehensive completion of what we can know about God through the apostolic teaching. And we now have that and so the revelatory gifts disappear.

3. We have no mention of tongues outside of 1 Cor. If those gifts were continuing why are they not mentioned in the pastoral letters (Titus and Timothy) written precisely to govern post-apostolic church life? Instead, we see a shift from these gifts to the teaching of apostolic truth.

4. Church history: how do you explain *theologically* the disappearance of certain gifts during the greater part of the church's existence? To say this was due to a lack of faith on the part of great saints is pride/arrogance on our part. But also, the NT says the Spirit gives his gifts freely - so why didn't he?

5. While certain gifts have ceased, there are still gifts in the church *analogous* to them. Here we should distinguish between *revelation* and *illumination*: *revelation* has ceased but that does not mean the Spirit has stopped *illuminating* his truth to our hearts: John Owen: '*Although these gifts and operations ceased in some respect, some of them absolutely, and some of them as to the immediate manner of communication and degree of excellence; yet so far as the edification of the church was concerned in them, something that is analogous unto them was and is continued.*'

For example: apostles then, = preaching of apostolic truth today; prophecy then = bible study where God illuminates our hearts, through his prophetic truth, by his Spirit, today.

### **Concluding Challenge**

Continuationists: how do you preserve the authority of scripture and the glory of God (and not attention seeking)?

Cessationists - how do you stay open to the Spirit's work and power with expectation of the miraculous, while holding to a position that this is not his normal way of working?

## **Prophecy**

Flow of Bible

**Hope:** Moses - "would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them" Num 11:29

**Prophesied:** "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" - Joel 2:28-29

**Fulfilled:** Pentecost "This is what was uttered through the prophet Joel..." Acts 2:16-17.

### **Who do we see prophesying in the NT?**

- Philip's 4 daughters - Acts 21:9
- Agabus and other 'prophets' - Acts 11:27-28, Acts 21:11
- Antioch prophets: Acts 13:1
- Ephesian disciples - Acts 19:6 (what were they doing?)
- The disciples at Tyre - Acts 21:4 - 'through the Spirit' telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem'
- Those prophesying over Timothy: just Paul or wider council of elders? 1 Tim 1:18, 1 Tim 4:14 (2 Tim 1:6 seems to link to the laying on of *Paul's* hands.)
- John in Revelation (10:11)
- the two witnesses who prophesy in Revelation (11:3) (= best taken as the church)
- [Your brothers the prophets, who keep the words of this book = Christians faithfully holding to the testimony of Jesus - Rev 22:9; see also 19:10]

### **What does Paul say prophecy is for?**

- The common good - like all gifts - 1 Cor 12:7
- The upbuilding, encouragement, consolation of others - 1 Cor 14:3
- The building up of the church - 1 Cor 14:4
- It works to call unbelievers to account, to lay bear the secrets of the heart, and bring them to worship of God: 1 Cor 14:25

### **In NT what is its content?**

- Predictive: Agabus' prophecies are predictive
  - Famine (Acts 11:28) - the church/apostles act on it
  - Arrest of Paul (Acts 21:11)

But the interpretation given to it can be wrong: Paul Acts 21

- Directive: Acts 13:1-2 - the setting apart and sending out of missionaries.

- Prophecies made over Timothy seem to be about Timothy and his giftedness, future, ministry:  
So ?encouraging; ?predictive. 1 Tim 1:18, 1 Tim 4:14

- It's the testimony of Jesus (the spirit of prophecy), made by Christians who hold to it - Rev 19:10

**So:**

Prophecy is **forth-telling** - testifying to Jesus, to the gospel, words of encouragement;  
and **fore-telling** - predictive.

But the interpretation one puts on it can be wrong.

**Does Prophecy Continue?**

That depends on your view of what we've previously said!

I'd add the following:

Scripture writing prophecy - no.

Authoritative prophecy that we *must* obey - no. It must be tested by Scripture. It has no final authority.

In 1 Cor 14:1 Paul says, 'Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophecy' - it seems odd to say that and then, 10 years later, they're being told 'no, don't do that'. And if the spirit of prophecy - the heart of it - is testifying to Christ (Rev 19), to encourage one another and build up the church, we should do that.

1 Thess 5:19-20 we're told, 'Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies' but test them. So there's something less than perfect about prophecies that might lead us to despise it. Instead, we should test it. What we say has to be in submission to God's word.

We are all prophets - but not capital P Prophets. Paul asks, 'are all prophets?' And the answer is 'no'! (1 Cor 12:29). However, we are all prophets in the sense that every believer is to exhort (Heb 13:13), counsel (Rom 15:14); evangelise (Acts 8:4) and teach (Col 3:16) - with the word dwelling richly in you (Col 3:16). In that sense we should all be speaking forth God's word.

And if the standard is Scripture, we should be seeking to make the things we say to one another to encourage and build up get closer and closer to Scripture. How do we do that? By immersing ourselves in God's word and then encouraging, instructing, advising one another from it.