

A concise Biblical analysis of spiritual gifts

Introduction

Very many sects and cults base their experience upon a certain mystical or occult interpretation of the spiritual grace gifts (*charisma* – gift of grace) mentioned in the NT.¹ This is especially true of the Pentecostal and Charismatic sects. Every Charismatic-type manifestation in history has involved a syncretism of the occult with Christianity² and almost always resulted in failure,³ criminal proceedings,⁴ craziness,⁵ chaos,⁶ abuse,⁷ scandal⁸ and sometimes a conflagration.⁹ Therefore, it is necessary to examine what the true meanings of these gifts are.

The NT passages

The overriding principles

Since you are zealous for spiritual *gifts*, *let it be* for the edification of the church *that* you seek to excel. 1 Cor 14:12

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Pt 4:10-11

Leadership gifts to the church

And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, Eph 4:11-12

And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations [*kubernesis* – leadership], varieties of tongues. *Are* all apostles? *Are* all prophets? *Are* all teachers? *Are* all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 1 Cor 12:28-30

Grace gifts to edify the church

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. 1 Cor 12:7-11

¹ 1 Cor 12:1, 14:1, 12 do not mention the word ‘gift’, it is rather ‘spirituals’ or ‘spiritual things’. Heb 2:4, ‘gifts of the Holy Spirit’. Rm 12:6, 1 Cor 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31 *charisma*. Eph 4:8, *doma*.

² E.g. New Thought, New Light Prophets, the Montanists, the Shakers,

³ E.g. Paul Cain.

⁴ E.g. Jim Bakker.

⁵ E.g. Latter Rain.

⁶ E.g. The French Prophets or Azusa Street.

⁷ E.g. Frank Sandford or the Jesus Army.

⁸ E.g. The Catholic Apostolic Church in London or Aimee Semple McPherson.

⁹ E.g. The Munster tragedy during the Reformation.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; or ministry, *let us use it* in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Rm 12:6-8

The Charismatic interpretation

The key word is 'supernatural'. The basis of Charismatic doctrine regarding grace gifts is that they are paranormal ministries that enable men to be like God with supernatural power. Thus we have the use of various expressions relating to 'power', 'supernatural', 'dynamite', 'fire', 'enabling' and so on.

The basis of these gifts is Arminian in thinking. All Christians are entitled to a special second blessing experience, which is mystical in nature based on personal faith and will. This is called the Baptism in the Spirit (BIS) and this is necessary for power to minister. In practice the Charismatic version of this always requires transmission from one person to another by the laying on of hands (just like occult ministries do).

Without this mystical experience you cannot use the gifts and you are living a second class life. This creates a two-tier system in churches of the have and have-nots. It therefore promotes elitism and pride. It also derogates all godly believers in history prior to 1901 to second class status, including giants of faith. Thus it claims that alcoholic,¹⁰ adulterous,¹¹ sodomite¹² Pentecostal leaders had the fulness of the Spirit but Luther, Calvin, Spurgeon, Toplady, Brainerd, WC Burns, Tyndale, Bunyan, Ames, Perkins, Owen, Wycliffe and Whitefield did not.

In practice, multiple denominations place a different meaning on what the BIS does. Wesleyans taught that it resulted in perfect sanctification as a baptism of perfect love. Charles Finney taught that it was a baptism of power. The Holiness Movement averred that it resulted in a form of holiness, an improved sanctification, but not necessarily instant perfection (though some Holiness sects did believe this). Classical Pentecostals taught that it always resulted in tongues as the initial evidence of the BIS and that these were to be used by missionaries to speak foreign languages without learning them. Experience proved this to be false and this notion was dropped. However, many classical Pentecostals (e.g. Assemblies of God) still teach that tongues are necessary initial evidence for every believer (contrary to 1 Cor 12:30) but some Pentecostals (e.g. Bosworth) and many Charismatics deny this. Most Charismatics teach that it results in spiritual gifts in general. Some claim that it results in power to witness or to prophesy. Others teach that it results in edification of the church while yet others claim that it boosts faith to claim desires. The list stretches to over a dozen interpretations. There is no unanimity here – only confusion.

For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 1 Cor 12:13

The Biblical truth is that the promised baptism in/with¹³ the Spirit is a baptism into Christ by the Holy Spirit. This is the uniting of the believer into the body of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit. It is applied to the believer at conversion. 'Baptised' is an aorist verb meaning that it refers to a once for all action in the past with reverberations today. It happened at the cross when all believers were spiritually united into Christ and was first applied at Pentecost when Christ was glorified in heaven. Believers were co-crucified and

¹⁰ E.g. AA Allen.

¹¹ E.g. Kathryn Kuhlman.

¹² E.g. Charles Parham.

¹³ Matt 3:11, Mk 1:8, Lk 3:16, Acts 1:5 has 'with' in the NKJV. The Greek word *en* can mean 'with' or 'in'.

co-raised with Christ (Rm 6:4, 6; Eph 2:6) and immersed in the Spirit. Charismatics are wrong in teaching that the BIS happens over and over again, all the time.

The main issues here are that Charismatics teach: 1) that the BIS is a second blessing, post conversion, mystical experience; 2) it results in supernatural gifts to serve various purposes; 3) it results from a personal decision to believe in time; if you fail you miss out.

Gaining this experience also varies in different groups. It used to arrive from 'Tarrying meetings' where people continued meeting for many hours wearing themselves out until passive enough to get a mystical experience. Many practice laying on of hands to pass it on (in practice this always occurs, even during tarrying, or fasting or falling backwards etc.). Some demand extended prayer and fasting. Others aver that it just happens in a powerful praise meeting. Yet others insist that being slain in the Spirit (falling over) is required.

The individual gifts are then interpreted to mean supernatural things, which again have various meanings to different groups. In general Charismatics interpret these to mean gifts that are similar to occult expressions in the world used by a shaman (witch, sorcerer, magician).

We could list these as:

- The word of wisdom. Usually ignored by Charismatics.
- The word of knowledge. Interpreted as prescience, often required to initiate healing.
- Faith. Various explained or ignored. Word of Faith groups see this as positive confession to gain desires.
- Gifts of healings. Various interpreted. Most centre upon physical healing but some also focus upon emotional healing (inner healing) as well. Claims of raisings from the dead have never been proved and many claimed healings have proved to be false.
- The working of miracles. This usually means healing. Virtually no one claims to express this gift in judgment, unlike the apostles or Jesus.
- Prophecy. Often sub-divided into a) formal, official prophetic ministry; b) lesser prophecies by ordinary members. The former often claim foreknowledge (though these always fail).
- Discerning of spirits. This is usually applied to exorcists and is a method to enable correct deliverance from spirits by identifying their type.
- Kinds of tongues. Always results in gibberish and is often claimed to be the tongues of angels (who don't speak because they are immaterial, having no physical tongues).¹⁴
- The interpretation of tongues. Self-explanatory.

These nine are the ones most centred upon, but in reality it is tongues, the word of knowledge, prophecy and healing that are the chief focus. All the Charismatic expressions are commonly found in occult movements, such as New Age, Wicca, Shamanism, Gnosticism, Hinduism, Voodoo etc. Witches and spiritualists were present and happy in the Azusa Street 'revival' meetings.

¹⁴ 1 Cor 13:1, 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels', is poetry that uses angels as a superlative creation to make a point. Thus, 'even if I had the most supernatural tongues this is not as important as love'. When appearing as men they are adopting human form under a divine miracle assuming a body they do not possess naturally.

The Biblical explanation

The overriding principles

Zeal for spiritual gifts must be motivated by a desire to edify the church, not satisfy the individual. Personal issues are not the point; gifts are for developing and equipping the church (1 Cor 14:12).

Gifts are for ministering to others not yourself. By exercising the gift you act as a steward of God to minister help to brethren. The gift is exercised by grace; you do it with the ability and power of God as he supplies it. If God is not supplying power, do not try to force the gift; shut up. The whole point of using the gifts is that God is glorified through Jesus Christ. As the body is built up by the gift, Jesus is glorified and God's testimony is magnified (1 Pt 4:10-11).

Leadership gifts

God gives gifts of men to the church to lead it properly and equip the saints. These gifts are:

- Apostles. These are divided into two categories in Scripture. 1) **The apostles of the lamb** are special (Rev 21:14). These had to witness the resurrection, know Jesus' ministry (Acts 1:21-22) and exhibit signs (2 Cor 12:12). They had supernatural power to authenticate that their ministry was from God (Heb 2:3-4). These apostles ceased and never appear again. They are the foundation of the church with the OT prophets and Christ as the corner stone (Eph 2:20). 2) **The apostles of the churches** (2 Cor 8:23; 'messengers' = 'apostles'). These are church planters. They have no authority in the established church whatsoever but are elders or evangelists at home. They have authority over a church plant until elders are appointed by them, then the church is an independent local church. Apostles are not archbishops ruling over multiple churches. Apostles of the churches include: Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), Andronicus and Junia¹⁵ (Rm 16:7) or Titus (2 Cor 8:23).
- Prophets. The formal prophetic gift as a powerful miraculous ministry that includes forthtelling and foretelling (like Elijah) ceased at the appearance of the New Covenant where all believers in Christ are prophets (proclaiming the Gospel is a prophetic act). John the Baptist was the last of these (Matt 11:13). Prophecy in the early church was widespread and included women (Acts 21:9). This was necessary because the NT had not been written and published and the OT scrolls were rare and expensive. This prophecy was chiefly encouragement (1 Cor 14:31), edification, comfort and exhortation (1 Cor 14:3) based on apostolic doctrine. A few people were given the gift of foretelling (e.g. Agabus) to help the church survive (Acts 11:28). Prophecy in this form continues today, and is chiefly found in powerful teaching and preaching. Prophecy is chiefly ministering the word of God to his people with power, i.e. more than didactics. Occasionally there is genuine foretelling when necessary (e.g. Alexander Peden).
- Evangelists. These are men gifted to lead the church in evangelism.
- Pastor-teachers. These two words are joined together in the Greek. They speak of the ministry of an elder who is both a shepherd and a teacher of the flock.

These ministries were sometimes given other names in a flexible manner. Elders are thus 'leaders' or 'rulers' (*proistemi*, 1 Tim 5:17; *hegeomai*, Heb 13:7, 17, 24), 'pilots' or 'steersmen' (*kubernesis*, 1 Cor 12:28), bishops (*episkope*, 'overseer', 1 Tim 3:1; *episkopos*, 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7) etc. Sometimes the change was cultural; 'elders' was a Jewish term while 'bishops' was Greek.

¹⁵ Not a female name.

There is no other leader in a local church than an elder and a team of elders govern the church in parity. All other leadership functions are false. (Deacons serve the church in a pragmatic, not a spiritual manner. They distribute to the needy but have no oversight.) Evangelists and apostles are usually elders appointed to this ministry for a time. It is possible that apostles and evangelists may be non-elders but ordinary members called to this task under the oversight of elders. Prophecy is centred in the pastor through his teaching. Thus certain pastors will excel in this.

The corporate grace gifts

- The word of wisdom. This is equivalent to the ministry of a pastor. It is being able to counsel with wisdom.
- The word of knowledge. This is the ministry of teaching, instruction, didactics, imparting knowledge.
- Faith. This is primarily saving faith, the faith that results in conversion, which is a gift from God. It can then mean special faith to trust in God above problems, especially sickness (Jm 5:15).
- Gifts of healings. God still heals but this is rarely seen today as the purpose of early church healings and miracles was to authenticate the message of the Gospel in the apostles. Pentecostals are totally wrong about healing in the atonement as an automatic right and that all believers should never be sick unless they have poor faith. Note that apostolic workers were often sick and not healed by Paul (Timothy, 1 Tim 5:23; Trophimus, 2 Tim 4:20; Epaphroditus, Phil 2:25-26). Jesus healed people that showed no prior faith and also healed only one person out of many sick people (Jn 9:1-7). Healing comes today via prayer (Jm 5:15).
- The working of miracles. Though not disappeared entirely, it is now rare since the Bible and the Gospel have been authenticated and proved. However, it can sometimes, by God's grace, be seen. Miracles include acts of judgment (e.g. against Elymas, Acts 13:9-11).
- Prophecy. See above.
- Discerning of spirits. This has nothing to do with exorcism. It is the ability to see the root issues of a heretic (1 Jn 4:1). Elders need this gift.
- Kinds of tongues. Tongues were originally a sign to outsiders to testify to the power of God in the church and the Gospel (1 Cor 14:22). The power of this testimony was the speaking of existing human languages (not gibberish) by people that had not been taught that language; they were a mystery to the speaker (Acts 2:4ff; 1 Cor 14:2). Tongues were not prophecies (which is common in Pentecostal services) but prayers glorifying God (1 Cor 14:2). Tongues do not edify the church (because they are for outsiders) they only make the speaker feel good (1 Cor 14:4). Tongues, with many miracles and healings, were a sign of the power of God in the Gospel in the early church. They authenticated the preaching of the apostles. Paul said that they would cease (1 Cor 13:8) and all accept that they did cease after the apostolic age. Pentecostals and Charismatics teach that they appeared again in the late 19th century. But the word 'cease' means 'to cease forever'. In fact gibberish tongue-speaking occurred from time to time in history but always in aberrant, apostate, ecstatic, mystical groups for a short time before being scandalised (such as the Montanists, the French Prophets, Shakers, The Catholic Apostolic Church etc.). Thus tongues are not available today.
- The interpretation of tongues. In the days when tongues were active, all speaking of such in church (no more than three, 1 Cor 14:27) had to be interpreted to glorify God (1 Cor 14:27-28). The demand to interpret tongues means that corporate singing in the spirit as a mystical chant (a common occult feature) was always unbiblical. Biblical singing in the Spirit in the apostolic age was individual and was interpreted.

- Ministry. The gift to serve the saints in God's name in some manner.
- Teaching. See 'elders' above. Teaching begins in a person growing in the gift in the fellowship until it progresses to the point where it is recognised and the person is ordained as an elder. Only men can teach (1 Tim 2:12) and elders must be able to teach (2 Tim 2:14). There is no such thing as a division between teaching and ruling elders, or such thing as a senior pastor.
- Exhortation. Buoying people up when they are down. Encouraging towards a certain goal.
- Giving. A vital ministry in the church. The giving of money and goods to those in need.
- Hospitality. Sharing your home with a person in need (Rm 12:13).
- Leading. See 'elders'. *Kubernesis* (1 Cor 12:28) does not mean the job of an administrator. It is a description of church leadership (being a steersman) that resides in elders. Elders are many things: they shepherd (pastor), they teach, they counsel, they admonish, they exhort, they evangelise, and they steer the ship of the church.
- Showing mercy (Rm 12:8). Forgiving the sins of others, helping the afflicted, being patient with offenders, being longsuffering towards offenders. It is a necessary characteristic of being an elder.

Conclusion

The grace gifts are nothing to do with making men move in the supernatural like God. This is an occult notion and is based on the original temptation of the Devil, to make man like God.

The gifts are designed to help the church be equipped to grow in grace.

The focus of Charismatics on a supernatural explanation of the BIS and the grace gifts explains why so many occult manifestations now appear in these churches.

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