Do All Christians Have One, and Only One, Spiritual Gift?
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12
Code: BQ042712

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. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (12:8–11)

A thorough examination will yield the truth that spiritual gifts fill two major purposes: the permanent gifts edify the church and the temporary gifts are signs to confirm the Word of God. God will continue to give the permanent gifts to believers for the duration of the church age, and those gifts are to be ministered by His people at all times in the life of the church. Those gifts include first the speaking or verbal gifts—prophecy, knowledge, wisdom, teaching, and exhortation, and, second, the serving or nonverbal gifts—leadership, helps, giving, mercy, faith, and discernment. The temporary sign gifts were limited to the apostolic age and therefore ceased after that time. Those gifts included miracles, healing, languages, and the interpretation of languages. The purpose of temporary sign gifts was to authenticate the apostolic message as the Word of God, until the time when the Scriptures, His written Word, were completed and became self–authenticating.

In the present passage Paul mentions some of those gifts that illustrate the “varieties” he spoke of in verse 4. This list includes both permanent and temporary gifts, and is only representative of the varieties, as seen from the fact that additional gifts are mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, including in verse 28 of this chapter (see also Rom. 12:6–8; cf. 1 Pet. 4:11). The apostle does not here explain the functions of the particular gifts. His point is to illustrate the variety in kinds of gifts and to emphasize the common source of the gifts, each of which is given for “the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (v. 7). As we have mentioned, because of their uniqueness in the lives and ministries of the millions of Christians, the gifts are not narrowly defined. We can define them only generally by the terms used in Scripture.

THE GIFTS OF HEALINGS

Again it is interesting to note that gifts here is plural, supporting what has been said in chapter 29:

namely, that Paul is speaking of categories of giftedness in which there may be great variety. The gifts of healing were the first temporary sign gifts Paul mentions in this passage. And since all these gifts were in operation then, the sign gifts are not placed in a separate category. The word healing also is plural in the Greek (iamaton), emphasizing the many kinds of afflictions that need healing. These gifts were for Christ (Matt. 8:16–17), the apostles (Matt. 10:1), the seventy (Luke 10:1), and some associates of the apostles such as Philip (Acts 8:5–7).

God may still heal directly and miraculously today; in response to the faithful prayers of His children. But no Christian today has the gifts of healings. This is apparent because no one today can heal as did Jesus and the apostles—who with a word or touch instantaneously and totally healed all who came to them, and who raised the dead. The Corinthian church may have seen God perform healings through Paul or others who had those abilities, and in that case Paul mentions them here simply to remind the Corinthians of the variety of ways in which God equips His people to do His work.

The gifts of healings, like the other sign gifts, were temporary, given to the church for authenticating the apostolic message as the Word of God. The Great Commission does not include a call to heal bodies but only the call to heal souls through the preaching of the gospel. It is not that God became no longer interested in men's physical health and well–being or that the church should have no such concern. Medical work has long been a God–blessed part of Christian service and is one of the cutting edges of modern missions. But God's healing work, whether through medicine or miracle, is no longer an authenticating sign, and He no longer endows His church with such gifts.

As did all the others with the gifts of healings, Paul used it sparingly and only for its intended purpose. It was never used solely for the purpose of bringing physical health. Paul himself was sick, yet he never healed himself nor asked a fellow gifted believer to heal him. Paul's dear friend and fellow worker Epaphroditus had been terribly ill and would have died but for God's intervention. "God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow" (Phil. 2:27). God miraculously healed Epaphroditus, but if the apostle had freely exercised the gift of healing, he would not have had to make a special plea to God. When Timothy, another co–worker, had stomach trouble and other ailments Paul did not heal him but rather advised him to drink some wine (1 Tim. 5:23). Trophimus, still another associate, Paul "left sick at Miletus" (2 Tim. 4:20). He did not exercise the gift of healing except as necessary to confirm the power of the gospel, not to make Christians healthy.

A Christian today has the right to ask God for the healing of any illness. God may choose to heal in order to accomplish some purpose of His and to show His glory. But He is under no obligation to heal,

because He has made no blanket promise to heal during any age (cf. Num. 12:9–10; Deut. 28:21–22; 2 Kings 5:15–27; 2 Chron. 26:5, 21; Ps. 119:67; 1 Cor. 11:30), and He no longer is authenticating His Word, because the completed Word is its own verification.

HE GIFTS OF TONGUES AND OF INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES

The most controversial spiritual gift in our day is that of speaking in **various kinds of tongues**. Because this gift, and that of **interpretation of tongues**, will be discussed in detail in the exposition of 1 Corinthians 14, it is necessary only to mention here that these are temporary sign gifts that are not genuinely active in the church today. Their ministry in the New Testament church was, like the other sign gifts, to validate the message and power of the gospel. They were disproportionately exalted and seriously abused in Corinth. But that is not yet Paul’s point. Now he is simply naming them to show the great diversity in the gifts sovereignly given by the Spirit of God.

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