

Chapter 53: Gifts of the Holy Spirit (2)

How should we understand and use specific spiritual gifts?

- A. Prophecy: Prophecy in the New Testament is telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.
1. The New Testament Counterparts to Old Testament Prophets Are New Testament Apostles
 - Old Testament prophets spoke and wrote words that had absolute divine authority. They prefaced words with "Thus says the Lord," so to disobey a prophet's voice was to disobey God. (Deut 18:18-19)
 - In the New Testament, people who spoke and wrote God's very words and had them recorded in Scripture were not called "prophets" but "apostles." They are the counterparts to Old Testament prophets. When the apostles wanted to establish their unique authority, they never appealed to the title "prophet" but "apostle." (Ro 1:1; 2 Pe 3:2; 1 Co 2:13)
 2. The Meaning of the Word Prophet in the Time of the New Testament
 - The word prophet (prophētēs) in the time of the New Testament generally meant "one who speaks on the basis of some external influence." In everyday use it could mean "one who predicts the future" or "spokesman" (the latter without any connotations of divine authority). (Titus 1:12)
 - The words "prophet" and "prophecy" were sometimes used of the apostles in contexts that emphasized the external influence of the Holy Spirit under which they spoke. But the words much more commonly referred to ordinary Christians who simply reported something that God had brought to their minds.
 3. Indications That "Prophets" Did Not Speak With Authority Equal to the Words of Scripture
 - a. Acts 21:4: And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.
 - Paul disobeyed this, which he never would have done if this prophecy contained God's very words and had authority equal to Scripture.
 - b. Acts 21:10-11, 31-33:
 - There are a few discrepancies between Agabus' prophecy and what actually took place:
 - The Romans, not the Jews, bound Paul
 - The Jews, rather than delivering him voluntarily, tried to kill Paul and he had to be rescued by force.
 - This text could be explained by supposing that Agabus had a vision of Paul as a prisoner of the Romans in Jerusalem, surrounded by an angry mob of Jews. His own interpretation of such a "vision" or "revelation" from the Holy Spirit would be that the Jews had bound Paul and handed him over to the Romans. This is exactly the kind of fallible prophecy that would fit the definition of New Testament congregational prophecy—reporting in one's own words something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.
 - c. 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21: "Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good."
 - If the Thessalonians had thought that prophecy equaled God's Word in authority, Paul would never have had to tell the Thessalonians not to despise it—they "received" and "accepted" God's Word "with joy from the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:6, 2:13).
 - By encouraging them to "test everything" and "hold fast what is good," Paul implies that prophecies contain some things that are good and some things that are not good. This is something that could never be said of the words of an Old Testament prophet or a New Testament apostle.
 - d. 1 Corinthians 14:29-38:
 - When Paul says, "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weight what is said" (29), he suggests that they should listen carefully and sift the good from the bad, accepting some and rejecting the rest. It is unimaginable that an Old Testament prophet would qualify his words in the same way.
 - "If a revelation is made to one sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one" (30-31). If prophets had been speaking God's very words, equal to Scripture, it is hard to imagine that Paul would say they should be interrupted and not be allowed to finish their message.
 - "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized" (37-38). Here Paul, as an apostle, claims higher authority than prophets.
 - e. Apostolic Preparations for Their Absence
 - The apostles encourage their successors to listen to the Scriptures, not the existing prophets, once the apostles were gone. (2 Pe 1:19-20)
 - There certainly were prophets prophesying in many local congregations after the death of the apostles. It seems that they did not have authority equal to the apostles, and the authors of Scripture knew that. The conclusion is that prophecies today are not "the words of God" either.
 4. How Should We Speak About the Authority of Prophecy Today?
 - There is almost uniform testimony from all sections of the charismatic movement that prophecy is imperfect and impure, and will contain elements that are not to be obeyed or trusted.
 - But it must be said that in actual practice much confusion results from the habit of prefacing prophecies with the common Old Testament phrase, "Thus says the Lord," a phrase no New Testament prophet is recorded to have spoken.
 - If someone thinks God is bringing something to mind which should be reported to the congregation, there is

nothing wrong with saying, “I think the Lord is putting on my mind that...” or “It seems to me that the Lord is showing us...” or a similar expression.

5. A Spontaneous “Revelation” Made Prophecy Different From Other Gifts
 - When Paul refers to a “revelation” given to someone (1 Cor 14:30), he is referring to something that God may suddenly bring to mind in such a way that that person has a sense that it is from God. When the person shares this with the congregation in his or her own words, it is prophecy in the New Testament definition.
6. The Difference Between Prophecy and Teaching
 - All New Testament prophecy was based on spontaneous prompting from the Holy Spirit.
 - By contrast, no teaching in the New Testament is said to be based on “revelation.” Rather, teaching is often an explanation or application of Scripture.
 - Therefore, prophecy has less authority than teaching, and prophecies in the church are always to be subject to the authoritative teaching of Scripture.
 - If a message is the result of conscious reflection on the text of Scripture, containing interpretation of the text and application to life, then it is (in NT terms) a teaching. But if a message is a report of something God brings suddenly to mind, then it is a prophecy.
7. Objection: This Makes Prophecy “Too Subjective.”
 - Often those making this objection are the very ones who need this subjective process most in their own Christian lives!
 - This gift requires waiting on the Lord, listening for him, hearing his prompting in our hearts. While an excessive reliance on subjective impressions is dangerous, we must recognize this subjective aspect of the Christian life.
8. Prophecies Could Include Any Edifying Content
 - Prophecy is not only “predicting the future.” In fact, anything that edified could have been included. (1 Co 14:3)
 - An additional indication of the value of prophecy was that it could speak to the needs of people’s hearts in a spontaneous, direct way.
9. Many People in the Congregation Can Prophecy (1 Cor 14:31)
 - This does not mean that all will actually be able to prophesy. (See 1 Cor 12:29)
 - It does mean that anyone who receives a “revelation” from God has permission to prophesy within Paul’s guidelines, and it suggests that many will.
10. We Should “Earnestly Desire” Prophecy (1 Cor 14:1)
 - Should we not actively seek this valuable gift in our congregations today?
11. Encouraging and Regulating Prophecy in the Local Church
 1. Pray seriously for the Lord’s wisdom on how and when to approach this subject in the church
 2. There should be teaching on this subject in the regular Bible teaching times
 3. The church should be patient and proceed slowly—church leaders should not be “domineering,” and a patient approach will avoid frightening people away or alienating them unnecessarily.
 4. The church should recognize and encourage this gift in ways it has already been functioning in the church.
 5. Opportunities for the gift of prophecy to be used might be made in less formal worship services/small groups.
 6. If the gift of prophecy begins to be used in a church, the church should place even more emphasis on the superior value of Scripture as the source to which Christians can always go to hear the voice of the living God.
- B. Teaching: Teaching is the ability to explain Scripture and apply it to people’s lives. (Acts 18:11)
 - Far from being based on a spontaneous revelation that came during the worship service of the church (as prophecy was), this kind of teaching was the repetition and explanation of authentic apostolic teaching. (1 Cor 4:17)
- C. Miracles (1 Cor 12:28)
 - The Greek word for “miracles” is the plural form of the word dynamis, (“power”). This means that the term may refer to any kind of activity where God’s mighty power is evident.
 - Since Paul does not define “works of miracles” any more specifically than this, we can say that the gift of miracles may include the working of divine power in deliverance from danger, in intervention to meet special physical needs, in judgment on those who oppose the gospel message, in spiritual warfare, and in any other way in which God’s power is manifested in an evident way.

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D. Healing

1. Introduction: Sickness and Health in the History of Redemption

- Physical sickness and death came as a result of the fall of Adam.
- Christ redeemed us from that curse when he died on the cross. (Is 53:4-5; Matt 8:16-17; 1 Pe 2:24)
- The atonement of Christ has purchased not only complete freedom from sin but complete freedom from physical weakness and infirmity. Our full experience of this freedom will not come until his return. However, sometimes God may give a foretaste of the physical healing that will fully be ours at Christ's return.

2. The Purposes of Healing

- A "sign" to authenticate the gospel message and show that the kingdom of God has come.
- To bring comfort and health to those who are ill, demonstrating God's mercy toward those in distress.
- To equip people for service as physical impediments are removed.
- To bring God glory as people see physical evidence of his goodness, love, power, wisdom, and presence.

3. What About the Use of Medicine?

- Certainly we should use medicine if it is available.
- We should use medicine with thankfulness to the Lord. (Ps 24:1)
- When it's available & we endanger ourselves and others by refusing it, it seems we are forcing a test on God.
- Of course, it is wrong to rely on doctors/medicine instead of on the Lord, a mistake made by Asa. (2 Ch 16:12)
- Used in connection with prayer, we should expect God to bless & often multiply the effectiveness of medicine.
- Even when Isaiah had received from the Lord a promise of healing for King Hezekiah, he told Hezekiah's servants to bring a cake of figs and apply it (a medicinal remedy) to Hezekiah's boil (2 Kings 20:7).

4. Does the New Testament Show Common Methods Used in Healing?

- The most frequent method was laying on of hands. Other aspects involved anointing with oil and faith on the part of the sick person or those praying over the sick. (Luke 4:40; James 5:14-15)

5. How Then Should We Pray for Healing?

- Certainly it is right to ask God for healing. (3 Jn 2)
- Whenever we take medicine or seek medical help, we admit we think it is God's will that we seek to be well.
- Our first assumption should be that God would be pleased to heal the person we are praying for.
- We should go to God with the simple request that he give physical healing in time of need. But we should remember that we must pray for God to be glorified in the situation, whether he chooses to heal or not. We also ought to pray out of the same compassion of heart that Jesus felt for those he healed.

6. But What if God Does Not Heal?

- We must still believe that God is at work even in lingering sickness. (2 Cor 12:9)
- When God chooses not to heal, even though we ask him for it, then it is right that we "give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess 5:18) and realize that God can use sickness to draw us closer to himself.
- The emphasis of the New Testament is to seek God for healing and trust him to bring good out of the situation, whether he grants physical healing or not. The point is that in everything God should receive glory and our joy and trust in him should increase. (See Also: James 1:2-4; Rom 8:28; Ps 119:67, 71)

E. Tongues and Interpretation

1. Tongues in the History of Redemption

- The phenomenon of speaking in tongues is unique to the new covenant age.
- In Genesis 11, unified language was used in rebellion against God to build the tower of Babel. To stop this, God "confused the language of all the earth" (Gen 11:9) and scattered people abroad.
- In God's call of Abraham, one language out of all the languages of the world was used in service to God, whereas in Genesis 11 God was not praised with any language.
- If we look at eternity future, we see that once again unity of language will be restored for God's praise.
- In the New Testament church, there is something of a foretaste of the unity of language that will exist in heaven, but it is given only at some times, and only in a partial way. This is shown at three levels:
 1. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to preach such that visitors to Jerusalem heard of God's mighty works in their own languages.
 2. In the church worship service, speaking in tongues plus interpretation gives further indication of a promise that one day the differences in languages that originated in Babel will be overcome.
 3. Private prayer in tongues is another indicator of restoration of fellowship with God (1 Cor 14:14-15).

2. What is Speaking in Tongues?: Prayer or praise spoken in syllables not understood by the speaker.

a. Words of Prayer or Praise Spoken to God

- They are unlike prophecy, which is directed from God to people in the church. (1 Cor 14:2).
- Paul categorizes speech in tongues as praying and giving thanks (14:28). Therefore speaking in tongues apparently is praying or praise directed to God, and it comes from the "spirit" of the person who is speaking.

b. Not Understood by the Speaker

- In Acts 2, even though the listeners heard the message in their own languages, the speakers did not understand what they themselves were saying. Tongues may, at times, be in actual human languages.
- Some have objected that speaking in tongues must always consist of speech in known human languages, since that is what happened at Pentecost. But the fact that this happened once in Scripture does not require that it always happen that way, especially when 1 Cor 14 indicates the opposite. Paul does not say that foreign visitors to Corinth will understand the speaker, but “no one” will (1 Cor 14:2, 16).
- Also, 1 Cor 14 is Paul’s general instruction based on a wide experience of tongue-speaking in many different churches, while Acts 2 simply describes a unique event at a significant turning point in redemptive history.
- c. Prayer With the Spirit, Not With the Mind (1 Cor 14:14-15)
 - Paul is not talking about the Holy Spirit praying through us, but rather our spirit praying directly to God, even though his mind does not have to formulate words and sentences and decide what to pray for.
 - Why would God give such a gift? Perhaps to keep us humble and to prevent intellectual pride. Also, it reminds us that God is greater than our understanding; he works in ways that transcend our understanding. He works in the unseen, spiritual realm in regeneration, genuine prayer, worship “in spirit and in truth,” spiritual warfare, etc.
- d. Not Ecstatic but Self-controlled (1 Cor 14:27-28)
- e. Tongues Without Interpretation
 - As Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians 14:27-28 (see above), if no one known to have the gift of interpretation is present in the assembly, speaking in tongues should be done in private.
 - This practice of private speaking in tongues is confirmed by Paul’s words. (1 Cor 14:4,15)
 - Paul says if believers speak in tongues without interpretation in church, they will be acting/thinking as “children.”
 - In the context of Isaiah 28 (here quoted by Paul), God is warning the rebellious people of Israel that the next words they heard from him would be words of foreigners that they could not understand--the Assyrian army would come on them as agents of God’s judgment.
 - In 1 Cor 14:22, Paul uses the word “sign” to mean “sign of God’s attitude.” Tongues that are not understood by outsiders are a negative sign—a sign of judgment. By contrast, Paul says that prophecy is a positive sign of God’s blessing, which is “for believers” (22).
- f. Tongues With Interpretation: Edification for the Church (1 Cor 14:5)
 - In the case that tongues are interpreted, Paul says that the message in tongues is as valuable to the church as prophecy. He does not say they have the same function, but they have equal value in edifying the church.
 - Interpretation: Reporting to the church the general meaning of something spoken in tongues.
- g. Not All Speak in Tongues (1 Cor 12:30)
 - The implied answer to each of Paul’s questions is “no.” The context is clear that this is not only referring to public expression of this gift, but having the gift of tongues in any form.
 - It would not be surprising if the Holy Spirit gave a widespread distribution of this gift and many Christians received it.
- h. What About the Danger of Demonic Counterfeit?
 - This is not Paul’s concern, even in Corinth. (1 Cor 12:3)
- i. Is Romans 8:26-27 Related to Speaking in Tongues?
 - Paul does not mention speaking in tongues explicitly here, and the statement is a general one concerning the life of all Christians, so it does not seem correct to say that Paul is referring to speaking in tongues.
 - Paul is speaking of the inarticulate sighs and groans which we ourselves utter in prayer, which the Holy Spirit then makes into effective intercession before the throne of God.
 - There is some similarity with speaking in tongues in that we pray even though we do not understand fully what we are praying. Unlike tongues, we are aware of the situations or hardships which create such groanings.
- F. Word of Wisdom and Word of Knowledge (1 Cor 12:8)
 - 1) These are miraculous gifts which involve the ability to receive a special revelation from the Holy Spirit and on that basis to speak words that give wisdom or knowledge in a situation.
 - 2) These are non-miraculous gifts. The ability to speak a wise or knowledgeable word is not based on a special revelation from the Holy Spirit but on wisdom acquired in the ordinary course of life. These words are empowered by the Holy Spirit and made effective when spoken. This seems to be the favorable option.
- G. Distinguishing Between Spirits and Spiritual Warfare: A special ability to recognize the influence of the Holy Spirit or of demonic spirits in a person.
 - This gift is a foretaste of the full ability we will have in heaven of recognizing Satan and his influence.
 - Paul knew that the Corinthians were previously “led astray to mute idols” (1 Cor 12:2). John said Christians needed to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).
 - Possible that the gift would involve discerning between various types of evil spirits; i.e., a spirit of infirmity (Luke 13:11), a spirit of divination (Acts 16:16), a dumb and deaf spirit (Mark 9:25, 29), a spirit of error (1 John 4:6).

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