

## Did Any of the Spiritual Gifts Cease?

### I. The case for the cessation of apostles and prophets.

#### A. The unique role of apostles limited their presence to the first century.

1. They were witnesses to the resurrection (Acts 1:21-25; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:7-9).
2. They were founders of the church (Eph. 2:19-22)

<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, <sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22 (NASB)

3. They were the authoritative and infallible interpreters of the life and work of Jesus (Eph. 3:3-5; 1 Cor. 14:32; 2 Thess. 2:15; Jude 17; John 14:26; 16:13-15).

<sup>3</sup> that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.

<sup>4</sup> By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,

<sup>5</sup> which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; Ephesians 3:3-5 (NASB)

#### B. The role of prophets limited them to the early church. However the gift of prophecy will return in the Last Days.

1. The prophets along with the apostles and Jesus provided the early church with God's revelation (Eph. 2:19-22).
2. The gift of prophecy will return in the last days before the Day of the Lord (Acts 2:17-21) (It will probably return after the church is raptured.)

<sup>17</sup> 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS;

<sup>18</sup> EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup> 'AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. <sup>20</sup> 'THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE Lord SHALL COME. <sup>21</sup> 'AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE Lord WILL BE SAVED.' Acts 2:17-21 (NASB)

II. The case for the (temporary) cessation of tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, and miracles.

- A. Some of the spiritual gifts are labeled as “signs” such as tongues and prophecy (1 Cor. 14:22) and healing (Acts 4:16- literally “a sign has taken place through them.)
- B. The special signs (miracles) performed primarily but not exclusively through the apostles helped confirm their message (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:1-4).

<sup>1</sup>For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*. <sup>2</sup>For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, <sup>3</sup>how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, <sup>4</sup>God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. Hebrews 2:1-4

- C. God has often confirmed his prophet/representative by signs.
  - 1. Moses (Exod. 4:1-9)
  - 2. Elijah (1 Kings 18)
  - 3. Jesus (Acts 2:22)
- D. As seen above, the apostolic age and the giving of new revelation ended in the early church. Paul was able to say the Scriptures were completely sufficient for a person to be equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and Jude described the faith as once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).
- E. Tongues also had a purpose to be a sign to unbelievers of God’s approaching judgment on Israel (1 Cor. 14:20-22; cf. Isa. 28:11-12; 1-3). This judgment was carried out in AD 70 when the Romans conquered Jerusalem and Israel ceased to exist. Since the key purpose for tongues ceased, it is not surprising that tongues also ceased. However, with the reemergence of Israel and the approaching Tribulation, tongues could once again serve their original purpose.

<sup>20</sup> Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

<sup>21</sup> In the Law it is written, "BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME," says the Lord.

<sup>22</sup> So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy *is for a sign*, not to unbelievers but to those who believe. 1 Corinthians 14:20-22 (NASB)

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, He will speak to this people Through stammering lips and a foreign tongue, <sup>12</sup> He who said to them, "Here is rest, give rest to the weary," And, "Here is repose," but they would not listen. <sup>13</sup> So the word of the Lord to them will be, "Order on order, order on order, Line on line, line on line, A little here, a little there," That they may go and stumble backward, be broken, snared and taken captive. Isaiah 28:11-13 (NASB)

<sup>1</sup> Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim, And to the fading flower of its glorious beauty, Which is at the head of the fertile valley Of those who are overcome with wine! <sup>2</sup> Behold, the Lord has a strong and mighty *agent*; As a storm of hail, a tempest of destruction, Like a storm of mighty overflowing waters, He has cast *it* down to the earth with *His* hand. <sup>3</sup> The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim is trodden under foot. Isaiah 28:1-3 (NASB)

- F. The book of Acts and the NT letters seem to support the diminishing of the sign gifts as time went on.
1. Early in Paul's ministry he had amazing healing powers so that even clothing he touched could heal others (Acts 19:12). Later in his ministry he could not heal his fellow workers or himself (2 Cor. 12:8; 2 Tim. 4:20; 1 Tim. 5:23).
  2. Both Paul and Peter experienced miraculous deliveries from prison and death, but in the end both died at the hands of the State.
  3. 1 Corinthians, which deals with the sign gifts is an early Pauline letter. His later pastoral epistles (1,2 Timothy and Titus) do not mention them.
  4. A study of the book of Acts, indicates less and less mention of miracles toward the end of the book, supporting the idea that the miraculous gifts were ceasing.
- G. Biblical history supports the idea of the dynamic ebb and flow of the miraculous. Miracles increased and congregated around certain points in Israel's history (the Exodus, the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, the ministry of Jesus and the apostles) and diminished during the times in between.
- H. Church history also reports the same kind of ebb and flow of the miraculous. Irenaeus (130-200 AD), Tertullian (160-220 AD), and Novatian (257 AD) report on the existence of sign gifts. Augustine (354-430) and Chrysostom (347-407) said that tongues had ceased. Prophecy and tongues are reported to have appeared in the ascetic movement in Egypt and Asia Minor in the 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries and in the renewal movements in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Manifestations of the Spirit occurred in the revivals of John Wesley, George Whitfield and the Great Awakening. The simple reality that we can date the birth of Pentecostalism or that I can even argue for the cessation of certain gifts of the Holy Spirit would be laughable if church history was one continuous unbroken pattern of NT miraculous activity. Everyone knows that is not the case.

### III. Conclusions.

- The gift of apostleship ended permanently
- The gift of prophecy ended but will return, most likely during the Tribulation.
- The other "sign" gifts (tongues, interpretation of tongues, healings and miracles) appear to have ceased for a time but seem to reappear intermittently, following the general historical pattern of miracles. Tongues may once again fulfill its function as a sign to unbelievers of God's coming judgment on Israel.