

THE PURPOSE OF SPECIAL (MIRACULOUS) GIFTS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

I. INTRODUCTION.

A. That The Purpose For Miraculous Gifts In The Early Church Is Seriously Misunderstood Today Is Evident By Reading Any Religious Section From Our News Media.

1. There are denominational ads inviting the public to come to their *Charismatic church*.
2. In the same publication, there may be a news article informing the public that certain congregations of their fellowship have been banned for advocating charismatic services.
3. Even within the church, there are those who are endeavoring to lead us into charismatic services.

B. What Do We Mean By Charismatic?

1. The English word is from the Greek word χάρισμα (*charisma*) which Thayer defines as "a gift of grace; a favor which one receives without any merit of his own;... in the technical Pauline sense *χαρίσματα* {A.V. gifts} denote extraordinary powers, distinguishing certain Christians and enabling them to serve the church of Christ, the reception of which is due to the power of divine grace operating in their souls by the Holy Spirit ..." p. 667. Thus, the gifts of 1 Corinthians 12, would be charismatic gifts.
2. Prior to the 70's, the word was used so seldom in religious circles that few of the desk dictionaries have the word listed. Since that time, however, the charismatic movement has become so popular that even the paperback editions carry the word.
3. Under the section of "Religion" in the 1974 Americana Year Book appears the following: "CHARISMATIC AND EVANGELISTIC MOVEMENTS. In both Protestant and Roman Catholic circles, interest in Pentecostal and other charismatic

movements featuring spiritual healing and speaking in tongues continued to grow. There were gatherings in North America and Europe, including one of Roman Catholics...and of Episcopalians... Interdenominational prayer groups were formed, and Protestants participated in Christian communes." p. 500.

4. The divisions over charismatic (special) gifts in the church today indicate confusion over what the Bible teaches on this subject.

II. AIM.

- A. To Learn The Purpose Of The Special Gifts Of The Early Church.
- B. To Learn That This Purpose Was Fulfilled And These Gifts Ceased.

III. OUTLINE.

- A. THE PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN THE EARLY CHURCH WAS TWOFOLD: (1) TO REVEAL TRUTH IN THE ABSENCE OF A CONFIRMED WRITTEN DOCUMENT (*1 Cor. 14:26, 29-33*), AND (2) TO CONFIRM THE TRUTH BEING SPOKEN. (*Mark 16:19-20; Heb. 2:1-4*)
 1. The purpose of spiritual gifts may better be understood by viewing God's miraculous work throughout the Bible.
 - a. God introduced each new dispensation with miracles, but perpetuated His plan with natural law.
 - 1) Creation (Patriarchal).
 - a) Following the creation, God did not say that He would not continue creating vegetation, lower animal life, or man and woman.
 - b) It is implied that God would not continue creating, however, in that He established laws of procreation to perpetuate vegetation by bringing forth seed after their kind (*Gen. 1:11-13*), the lower animal life was to reproduce after their kind (*Gen. 1:20-23*), and man and woman were to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. (*Gen. 1:28*)

c) God still has the creative power, but has chosen to replenish His earth through natural law established at the beginning.

2) The Mosaic Age.

a) The signs given to Moses were for the purpose of confirming God's word to Moses, to the people of Israel, and to Pharaoh. (*Ex. 4:1-9*)

b) The ten plagues upon Egypt were for the purpose of confirming God's word spoken by Moses.

c) The children of Israel were miraculously provided for in the wilderness - pillar of cloud and fire; manna and water; etc.

d) Following the confirming of God's promise to Israel, He withheld the manna, and Israel continued to be provided for according to natural law. (*Josh. 5:10-12*)

3) The Christian Age.

a) Like the other ages, the Christian age was begun with miracles.

(1) The virgin birth of Christ.

(2) The miracles performed by Christ.

(3) The resurrection of Christ.

(4) All these miracles confirmed the fact that Jesus was the Son of God. (*John 20:30-31; Acts 2:22-24; Rom. 1:4*)

b) The beginning of the church was characterized by miracles.

(1) The Holy Spirit coming on the day of Pentecost. (*Acts 2:1-3*)

(2) The gift of tongues. (*Acts 2:4, 6, 8*)

(3) The miracles of the apostles.

(4) The various gifts given to the early Christians by the laying on of the apostles' hands.

c) After the confirmation of the Gospel as the word of God (i.e. the seed, *Luke 8:11*), the special gifts ceased and the seed now reproduces after its kind.

b. In each dispensation, after God's original purpose was established and confirmed, His miracles were withdrawn.

2. From the above, it is evident that miracles were designed to reveal and confirm truth.

a. Miracles were performed to confirm truth which those then living had not previously known.

b. If, therefore, there are miracles today, there must be additional truth which was previously unknown and which now needs confirmation.

c. What is the new truth which those who claim to have special gifts are now confirming?

1) Some may claim they have special gifts to confirm the truthfulness of the Bible, but this has already been confirmed and needs no further confirmation. A document once confirmed, stands forever confirmed.

2) It must be noted that Moses did not perform signs to confirm that which God had spoken to Adam or Noah, but rather to confirm the claim that God had spoken to Moses and had commanded what Moses was saying. (*Ex. 4:1-9*)

3) Neither Paul, Peter, nor any of the other apostles, performed miracles to prove that God had spoken through Moses or one of the prophets some 1500 years earlier, rather the special signs which they did were to confirm that what they said was the word of God. (*Acts 4:8-10; 1 Cor. 2:4-5; 2 Cor. 12:12*)

B. THAT SPECIAL GIFTS ARE NOT INTENDED FOR THE CHURCH TODAY IS SHOWN BY A THREEFOLD EVIDENCE: (1) THE PURPOSE FOR THE GIFTS HAS BEEN FULFILLED, (2) THOSE WHO

CLAIM TO HAVE THE GIFTS CANNOT REPRODUCE THE GIFTS REVEALED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, AND (3) PAUL SAID THE GIFTS WERE TO CEASE.

1. The purpose for the gifts has been fulfilled.
 - a. The purpose of the gifts was to show that God was with the one teaching the doctrine of Christ. (*Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:1-4*)
 - b. All truth was to be delivered during the lifetime of the apostles, according to the promise of Christ. (*John 16:13-14*)
 - c. That Jesus fulfilled His promise is confirmed by *Jude*, who commanded that we: "...contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all {ἅπαξ} delivered unto the saints." (*ver. 3*)
 - 1) The expression "the faith" is often used in scripture to refer to the revelation of the gospel. (*cf. Acts 6:7; Gal. 1:23; 1 Tim. 4:1*)
 - 2) The faith (gospel) has been "once for all {ἅπαξ} delivered..."
 - a) Once for all means "...no other faith will be given." Milton S. Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964, p. 211.
 - b) Vine gives the meaning as: "{ἅπαξ} ...once for all, of what is of perpetual validity, not requiring repetition." W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Vol. III, p. 137.
 - c) "Do we desire to know what the true Faith is? St. Jude here tells us - that which was once, and once for all, delivered to the Saints. Every doctrine, which can be shown to be posterior to that Faith, is new; and every doctrine that is new is False." (Charles Wordsworth, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in the Original Greek: with Introduction and Notes*, London: Rivingtons, Waterloo Place 1862). Quoted

from J. D. Bales, The Finality of the Faith, 1972, p. 103.

- d. Peter wrote that "Christ also suffered for sins once {ὁπαξ} the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;" (1 Pet. 3:18).
 - 1) The suffering and death of Christ for sinners was once for all time. It is not necessary that Christ come to earth, suffer and die for each generation born. His suffering, death and resurrection has been accomplished once for all time.
 - 2) Just so, it is not necessary that the truthfulness of this message be confirmed with miracles for each generation. Having once been confirmed, it stands forever confirmed.
 - e. From the above, it is obvious that the purpose of special gifts has been fulfilled, and there is no further need for special signs today.
2. Those who claim to have the gifts cannot reproduce the gifts revealed in the New Testament.
- a. If one of the special gifts of the early church was to continue, all were to continue; yet when claims for these gifts are made, the gift of tongues and the gift of healing are the ones most often alleged. When these claims are examined, however, they differ greatly from the gifts revealed in the New Testament.
 - 1) The tongues in the New Testament were languages spoken, which one had not studied (*cf.* Acts 2:4-8), in contrast with "ecstatic utterances" which those who claim to have the gift of tongues today engage in.
 - 2) Those who claim to perform miracles today fail to cure any real organic disease and excuse their failure on the basis of the lack of faith of the one who is ill. No such failures are recorded in the New Testament after the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

b. If the gifts are available today, those who possess them should be able to have:

- 1) The gift of wisdom. (*cf. Acts 6:10; 1 Cor. 12:8*)
- 2) Inspired knowledge, yet some do not have an adequate knowledge of the Bible to rightly divide the word of truth. (*1 Cor. 12:8*)
- 3) The gift of faith - not the kind received by hearing the word of God (*Rom. 10:17*), but the kind involved in working miracles. (*cf. 1 Cor. 12:9; 13:2*)
- 4) Gifts of healing. (*1 Cor. 12:9*)
- 5) Working of miracles (*1 Cor. 12:10*) - something more than healing, which Paul mentioned above, yet those who claim to have these gifts cannot distinguish between the two.
- 6) The gift of prophecy (*1 Cor. 12:10*) - where is the man who can speak God's word without studying it today?
- 7) Discerning of spirits. (*1 Cor. 12:10*) How is it that some within the movement have been deceived and none "discerned" the deception until it was brought into the open for all to see?
- 8) Tongues (languages, as noted above). (*1 Cor. 12:10*)
- 9) Interpretation of tongues - i.e., ability to translate from one language to another. (*1 Cor. 12:10*)

c. If these special gifts are present today, the following must be explained:

- 1) Why do people who claim to have the same gifts from the same spirit, teach doctrines which contradict one another?
- 2) Why is it that sooner or later their doctrine contradicts the teaching of the New Testament?

- 3) Why is it that one has not been able to raise the dead, restore a withered limb, etc.?

3. Paul said the gifts would cease.

a. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul gives the most elaborate discussion of spiritual gifts found in the New Testament.

- 1) Chapter twelve deals with the diversities of gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit for the profit of the Body (church).

- 2) Chapter thirteen outlines love as the more excellent way and plainly states that the *gifts are to fail*, while faith, hope and love are to abide.

- a) Note that Paul mentions tongues, prophecy, mysteries and faith in the first two verses of chapter thirteen. These are some of the gifts mentioned in chapter 12:8-11.

- b) Now note the sharp contrast which Paul draws:

- (1) Prophecies shall be done away (*fail* K.J.V.) (13:8 cf. 12:10)

- (2) Tongues shall cease. (13:8 cf. 12:10)

- (3) Knowledge shall be done away (*vanish* K.J.V.) (13:8 cf. 12:8)

- c) It cannot be denied that Paul plainly declares that spiritual gifts shall *fail, cease, vanish away, and be done away*.

b. The time for these things to cease is when "*that which is perfect* {το τελειον} shall come."

- 1) Some contend that "*that which is perfect* {το τελειον}" refers to the end of the present age and that miraculous gifts are to continue until the second coming of Christ.

- a) This interpretation cannot be accurate because *faith*, *hope* and *love* must continue to abide after the miraculous gifts have ceased.
- b) At the end of this age *faith* will give way to sight and *hope* will end in realization, and Paul affirms that we no longer hope for that which we have in possession. (*Rom. 8:24*) *Love*, the greatest of these, will continue on into eternity.
- c) See chart below, developed by Roy H. Lanier, Sr. Firm Foundation, Aug. 28, 1973, p. 553.

	"In Part"	"The Perfect"		
Pentecost	Spiritual Gifts	Gifts Ceased	Eternity	
	FAITH	HOPE	LOVE	LOVE

- 2) *That which is perfect is more easily understood when we understand the meaning of the Greek {τὸ τέλειον}: "brought to its end, finished, wanting nothing necessary to completeness, perfect."*
 - a) At the time Paul was writing, revelation was being given in parts (*John 16:12-13*), but there would come a time when revelation would be complete, finished, full.
 - b) Jude affirms that there is such a body of faith that has once for all time been given and that we are now to contend earnestly for that faith.

IV. CONCLUSION.

- A. From This Study, We Have Learned That The Purpose Of Special Gifts In The Early Church Was To Confirm The Truthfulness Of Christianity Until It Could Be Fully Documented.
- B. Now That Christianity Has Been Documented By God (*Heb. 2:1-4*), There Is No Further Need For Special Gifts.