

GIFTS IN PROPER PERSPECTIVE

TEXT: I Corinthians 12:27-30

Thus far in our study of **I Corinthians**, we have learned that every believer has been blessed with a spiritual gift or gifts.

Obviously, there is a lot of disagreement about spiritual gifts.

How do we know who is right or wrong? Paul began **chapter 12:1 by saying, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant."** Paul is plainly stating that when it came to spiritual gifts, we should know what is right and what is wrong.

I believe there are 3 keys to understanding spiritual gifts.

I.THE RECORD OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS!

Although, the historical place of spiritual gifts is not the first and final basis for coming to a proper conclusion about spiritual gifts, a look at the history of spiritual gifts in operation can provide insight that is helpful.

The historical record of Spiritual gifts that I refer

to is the historical record found in the Bible.

There are certain books in the New Testament that are historical in nature such as the four Gospels and the Book of Acts. As you look in these books, particularly the Book of Acts, you find a history of spiritual gifts in operation. Let me point out 2 things about this historical record.

A. IT IS INSPIRED

We have a historical record that is divinely prepared, presented, protected, and preserved.

We read in **I Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God."** First, the Bible is **"scripture."** It is "holy writ." The Bible is not an ordinary book. It is God's Holy Word.

Secondly, it is **"inspired."** It is a "divinely breathed" book. The Bible came from God; therefore it is perfect, without error, flaw, or contradiction. Understanding this about the Bible makes what it says important, authoritative, and trustworthy. It is a divine record. Saying that, let's trace the history of certain spiritual gifts through its divine pages. For the sake of time, let's focus upon one

particular spiritual gift. Let's look at the gift of TONGUES

This gift seems to be the one gift that was at issue in the Church of Corinth and even in our day. Therefore, let's use it as our historical focus.

The first time in the New Testament that we have reference to speaking in tongues is found in **Mark 16:17, "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues."**

This is the first time that anything is said in the New Testament that indicated that such a gift would exist. **Jesus said, "they shall speak with new tongues,"** indicating that such a gift was not in operation at the time, but would be in the future.

It is when we come to the Book of Acts that we see this gift in operation.

I find it interesting that in the divine historical record, there are only 3 occasions that we actually find someone speaking in tongues.

The first record is found in Acts 2:3-4, "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. [4] And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

The scene is the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit filled the disciples and they began to speak in tongues.

The second record of someone speaking in tongues is found in Acts 10:46, "For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God..."

The Lord had heard the prayer of Cornelius, a Gentile, and sent Peter to him. While Peter was preaching the Holy Ghost fell upon them that heard him preach and there were those who spoke in tongues.

The third and final record of someone speaking in tongues is found in Acts 19:6, "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied."

The scene finds Paul entering into the city of Ephesus and talking to some of the disciples of John the Baptist. Paul laid hands on them and they began to speak in tongues.

Now these 3 passages give you the entire record of speaking in tongues as found in the Bible. Again, as I said earlier, it is mentioned and discussed in other places, but these 3 occasions give us the entire historical record of speaking in tongues.

A. IT IS A INSPIRED

B. IT IS INCIDENTAL

Which means secondary/minor/compared to the main event

In our day and time, certain spiritual gifts are interpreted in light of certain events in more modern history. For example, what occurred in 1906 at Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California has become a defining moment for the modern day Charismatic movement and synonymous with the modern day Charismatic movement.

W.J. Seymour and a small group moved into a run-down building at 312 Azusa Street, Los Angeles, California. The group experienced what they called the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" and soon the small group was speaking in tongues.

It was not long before the building was filled to capacity.

For over three years, the Azusa Street "Apostolic Faith Mission" conducted 3 services a day, 7 days a week, where thousands received the gift of tongues. What happened there spread rapidly around the world giving us our modern day charismatic movement.

The history of the modern day charismatic movement is often defined by what happened at Azusa Street. Yet, we cannot let Azusa Street and the year 1906 serve as a definitive basis for what we believe. From a historical standpoint, the divine record must be the definitive record.

First, I point out that in the divine record there is not a lot of attention given to speaking in tongues. As we have seen, there are only 3 such incidents recorded.

It did not happen everywhere involving everyone. It is quite the contrary today.

In the divine record there is a very limited expression of the gift. The Book of Acts gives a very selective occurrence of the gift, rather than a widespread phenomenon among all believers.

In fact, the Book of Corinthians was one of the earlier books written. In the books that followed, nothing is said about speaking in tongues.

For one thing, in each record of speaking in tongues found in the Bible there is always one of the original apostles present.

Furthermore, I find that when anyone spoke in tongues it was always in the presence of Jews. Now there is a reason why there is a limited example of speaking in tongues; why an apostle and Jews were present. We will see that later, but I point these out because the divine record and the more modern record have great differences.

The point that I am making is that the divine record must serve as a definitive record. We must sift all Church history through God's historical record. When we do so, you can't help but form certain foundations and develop certain conclusions about spiritual gifts.

I. THE RECORD OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS!

II. THE RECOGNITION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS!

The Bible is the first and final authority for what we should believe. The teachings of the Bible form the basis of what we believe is right and what we believe is wrong.

If the Bible teaches it, we should believe it, accept it, and embrace it. If the Bible teaches something that is contrary to what we believe, we should change what we believe.

Much of what is happening in our day is experience driven and historically founded rather than being based on the teachings of the Bible.

It all boils down to who is properly interpreting the scripture. A person can make the Bible teach just about anything they want. But the issue is not making the Bible teach something. It is not a matter of believing something then seeking to back it up with the Bible. It is the simple matter of letting the Bible teach what it means.

Let me give you a couple of rules to help you determine what the Bible means and help you properly interpret the Bible.

A. THE CONTEXTUAL SETTING OF THE SCRIPTURE.

An important rule of Bible study is to interpret a passage of Scripture within its context. By that I mean, you must interpret a statement in light of the verses around it.

No, the way you interpret that verse is in light of the verses around it. When you consider it in light of its context you get the proper interpretation of what is meant.

When you do interpret the verse in light of its context you find out that when it came to the gift of prophesy and tongues, neither were a gift given to women. Paul was telling the Corinthian Church that women were not permitted to prophesy or speak in tongues. They were to be silent.

A. THE CONTEXTUAL SETTING OF THE SCRIPTURE.

B. THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

Scripture to Scripture. That is, what is taught in one place, must be compared to what is taught in another place.

1 Corinthians 2:13, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

That which is taught by the Holy Ghost, given to us in the Bible, is to be interpreted by comparing it with other truth.

In other words, if you interpret a verse one way that is not back up with other Scripture you have misinterpreted the verse.

The Bible will not teach you one thing in one place and another thing in another place. That would be a contradiction and there are no contradictions in the Bible.

I say all that to say this. When it comes to understanding spiritual gifts you must properly interpret the Bible in order to have a proper understanding of spiritual gifts.

I. THE RECORD OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

II. THE RECOGNITION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

III. THE ROLE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

There is a third key to understanding spiritual gifts and that is properly classifying or dividing the gifts into their role and purpose.

If the gifts are not properly divided and classified you will never come to a proper understanding of them.

At the very beginning we read the 3 places in the Bible that you have a list of spiritual gifts. If you counted them, there are 19 gifts listed among these 3 lists.

Let's look at them and put them into 3 divisions, which I believe is critical to properly understanding them.

A. SPEAKING GIFTS!

As I study the scripture I had find 8 gifts found in the 3 lists given in the Bible.

Notice **Ephesians 4:11 "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers."**

Verse 8 indicates that these are spiritual gifts given to the Church by God. Look at them individually.

First he mentions that God gave "apostles."

The word speaks of "one sent with authority."

This is a unique class of men for we find in **Acts 1:21-22** that there were certain requirements for being an apostle.

They had to have been an eyewitness of the resurrected Lord.

These qualifications tell us that there were a limited group of gifted men.

There would be no apostles in our day. If there were, they would be almost 2,000 years old.

The second group that is mentioned is "prophets." The word "prophet" is translated from the word that means, "to speak forth." We often think of a prophet as one who predicts the future. A prophet was one that spoke forth God's Word. These were men to whom God revealed His Word and they declared His Word.

In our day we do not need prophets. We have God's Word. But you must remember that in the early Church they did not have a Bible. God gifted men to whom He revealed His Word and in return they spoke forth that Word. Their message came immediately from God by the Spirit. We do not need prophets for as **2 Peter 1:19 tells us, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy."**

Both the gift of "apostles" and "prophets" existed as foundational roles in the Church. We read in **Ephesians 2:20, "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone."**

Once the foundation of the Church was established these two roles and gifts passed away and are no longer operative in the Church.

The next group that is listed is "evangelists."

This gift is involved the matter of sharing the Good News. It speaks of certain ones that travel from place to place preaching the gospel. The word would include missionaries.

The final group mentioned in this list is "pastor and teachers." These two gifts are combined. God gifts certain ones to be a pastor. The word means "shepherd" and speaks of those God has placed over His flock. The pastor also has the gift of "teaching" which enables him to teach the flock and instruct them in doctrinal truths.

Now all these gifts have to do with speaking, communicating, and sharing God's Word.

A. SPEAKING GIFTS!

B. THE SERVING GIFTS.

Notice **Romans 12:6-7**, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; [7] Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching."

Notice in particular the word "ministry."

It speaks of service and ministry, thus the classification of serving gifts. Paul is saying that certain believers have gifts that enable them to serve in certain capacities. As I look into the Bible I find 5 such gifts of ministry

Let's notice the list given to us in **Romans 12** first and point out certain gifts of service.

First we see in verse 8 we see the gift of "giving." We read, **"he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity..."** There are some people that have a God-given ability to earn and make money in order that they can give generously to the Church. Every believer is to be a giver but there are some blessed with more money than others so that they can give in special ways to God.

Also in verse 8 we see the gift of "ruling." We read, **"he that ruleth, with diligence..."** This verse relates to **I Corinthians 12:8** where Paul uses the word **"governments."** It is a word that was used to speak of a pilot guiding a ship through a storm.

There are certain ones in the Church that are given the ability to provide leadership. They are able to give good, sound, spiritual leadership to the people of God.

We also see in verse 8 the gift of "showing mercy." We read, "he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness." The word "**mercy**" speaks of a compassionate heart. There are some that have been given a big heart by God that cares for others and reaches out to others in compassion and provides help to the hurting.

Notice 1 Corinthians 12:9, "To another faith by the same Spirit." This gift speaks of those who are given a special faith in God. All believers are to walk by faith, but some are enabled to trust God in a unique and special way.

Notice 1 Corinthians 12:28, "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."

Notice the gift of "helps." The word speaks of giving assistance, giving a hand. It speaks of those who are gifted to serve in a supportive role. This would be the behind the scene people in the Church.

A. SPEAKING GIFTS!
B. THE SERVING GIFTS.

C. THE SIGN GIFTS.

Let me just mention the gifts in this class and explain what I mean by sign gifts. The gifts in this class would be the gifts of miracles, healing, speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues.

It is precisely here that the greatest error is made concerning spiritual gifts. The reason people believe in practicing such gifts today is that they have failed to see that these were sign gifts and had a specific role at a specific time. Once that role was fulfilled these gifts passed away and were no longer operative.

Notice **Mark 16:17-20**, "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; [18] They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. [19] So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. [20] And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen."

Jesus made it clear that certain gifts that would be given would be "**signs.**" Such signs Jesus mentioned was casting out devils, speaking in tongues, taking up serpents, drinking deadly things, healings the sick, etc.

What kind of sign were these miracles and gifts to be and what was their purpose? Notice carefully **verse 20, "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen."**

These miracles and gifts was a sign that God was with the disciples and they served to confirmed the Word they preached.

The disciples were going forth with a new message. It was a message that Jesus was the Messiah and had risen from the dead. That was not a message that would be favorably accepted. Yet the signs that accompany them was to show that they were real and their message was real.

Notice 1 Corinthians 14:22, "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe."

Paul clearly stated that tongues were a sign. Not for believers but for unbelievers. The same thing was true for the gift of prophesying. In other words, tongues was a gift that was given to show that what was being declared was true and from God.

Notice Acts 2, the great Pentecostal chapter. We read in **verse 5**, "**And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.**"

What caught the attention of these Jews from every nation? They were amazed at how these men were declaring the wonderful works of God in their own language. The gift of speaking in tongues confirmed the word they preached.

Notice Acts 2:22, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know."

The word "**approved**" means "to demonstrate." Jesus was demonstrated by the miracles He performed that He was who He claimed to be.

This was the purpose of these unique gifts. These signs gifts were given to authenticate the apostles and their message.

Where many are misled is they fail to see that such gifts as tongues, healing, etc were sign gifts and not gifts that were to be a part of the Church throughout history.

To come to a proper understanding of spiritual gifts, the division of gifts is critical.

1Co 13:8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

{done away: Gr. vanish away}

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. {done away: Gr. vanish away}

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. {done away: Gr. vanish away}

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. {done away: Gr. vanish away}

