

Session 9: Spiritual Gifts

Series: Is It So?

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Introduction

- Common evangelical view: spiritual gifts as essential to Christian life and ministry.
- Belief in permanence and universality of spiritual gifts based on key New Testament passages (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4).
- Challenge to this view: examining the historical context, purpose, and manifestation of spiritual gifts in Scripture.

The Original Use of Spiritual Gifts

What Was Their Purpose?

- Manifestation of the Spirit as evidence of God's power (1 Corinthians 12:7).
- Public, supernatural displays for church edification and Gospel advancement.
- Authentication of the apostolic message through signs, wonders, and miracles (Hebrews 2:3-4).

Who Had Them?

- Gifts distributed broadly among believers according to the Spirit's will (1 Corinthians 12:11).
- All members of the church empowered uniquely to serve and contribute.

How Did They Know They Had Them?

- Spiritual gifts were unmistakable, visible, and verifiable.
- Examples:
 - Speaking in tongues as public, intelligible foreign languages (Acts 2:4-11).
 - Prophecy delivering accurate, divine messages (Acts 11:28).
 - Healing and miracles were dramatic and undeniable (Acts 3:6-8).

Were Spiritual Gifts a Permanent Reality?

Were They Needed in the Old Testament?

- Spiritual gifts absent; the Spirit's work was selective and task-specific (e.g., Samson, Bezalel).
- Absence challenges their necessity for all believers across all times.

Were They Needed in the Gospels?

- Miracles performed by Christ and apostles were specific commissions, not distributed gifts.
- Lack of gifts in the Gospels raises questions about their universal or ongoing role.

Why Are They Not Displayed in the Later Pauline Epistles?

- Shift in emphasis: later epistles focus on virtues and church governance, not gifts.
- Absence suggests a unique, temporary role of gifts in the Apostolic age.

Issues with a Permanent View of Spiritual Gifts

The Need to Redefine

- Modern redefinitions diverge from the clear, public, supernatural manifestations in Scripture.
- Examples:
 - Tongues as private prayer languages instead of foreign languages (Acts 2:6-11).
 - Prophecy as vague impressions rather than accurate, authoritative messages.
 - Healing as gradual or anecdotal instead of instant and undeniable.

The Non-Existent List

1. **Differing Counts:** No consensus on the number of gifts (e.g., 9 in 1 Corinthians vs. 20+ elsewhere).
2. **Inconsistent Classifications:** Disagreement over what qualifies as a gift (e.g., celibacy, administration).
3. **The Question of Temporality:** Debate over the continuation of "sign gifts."
4. **Added Gifts:** Inclusion of non-biblical items like intercession and music.

Resorting to Jung and Pop-Psychology

- Adoption of secular psychology (e.g., Jungian personality theory) to identify gifts.
- Reduces spiritual gifts to human traits, bypassing the Spirit's role.
- Commercial exploitation through assessments and resources.

Conclusion

- Spiritual gifts served a specific purpose during the Apostolic age for authentication and Gospel spread.
- Their necessity ceased with the conclusion of that dispensation.
- Modern pursuit of gifts leads to confusion, unbiblical methods, and consumerism.
- Believers should focus on practical service and rely on Scripture for guidance (2 Timothy 3:16-17).