



## *The Gift of the Gifts of Healings*

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The expression *charismata iamaton* occurs just three times in the Bible, and all three of these occurrences are in 1 Corinthians 12. It is an odd fact that the one unvarying original expression is given two different translations in the King James Version in these occurrences: “To another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:9), and “Have all the gifts of healing?” (1 Corinthians 12:30), but “God hath set some in the church . . . gifts of healings” (1 Corinthians 12:28). The correct form, “gifts of healings,” should properly have been used all three times rather than only once, for this double plural has a significance that ought not to be passed over.

If we follow with consistency and symmetry a listing of spiritual gifts in the form “the gift of the word of wisdom” or “the gift of faith,” then we ought to speak of “the gift of the gifts of healings” in identifying this gift of the Spirit that occurs number four in the list of nine. All the standard presuppositions and qualifications that apply to the other gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:8–10) apply to this gift also: (1) bestowed according to the will of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11b), (2) abiding within the Spirit rather than in the human worker (note that in strict scriptural language gifts are neither imparted nor bestowed, but “manifested” [1 Corinthians 12:7]); (3) exclusively and wholly supernatural and of the Spirit and in no way whatsoever of the natural human self (1 Corinthians 12:11a); and (4) given for the good of the body as a whole, that is, “to profit withal” (1 Corinthians 12:7).

The expression “the gift of the gifts of healings” implies both that the Spirit’s manifestation to the human channel is a gift, and that which He gives that channel to perform is in turn the giving of a gift. We might paraphrase the relationship: “The human channel receives a package of healing remedies to be shared as gifts with others.”

In both occurrences of the word “gift,” the original is a form of charisma that implies a grace, a favor, a free gift, a kindness, or a help. It is not “gift” in the sense of that which is possessed by a gifted performer whose skill impressively copes with the task; rather it is “gift” in the sense of a possession gratuitously made available at an appropriate moment as a resource or a tool to meet a need. Thus, the exact scriptural designation twice asserts that this fourth gift of the Spirit is a matter of a “charitable bestowment of a specific application.” This is the nature of what is given to the human worker, and this is what he receives to give to others. At both levels it is, as it were: divine charity, and not human merit or even human faith.

In seeking to explain the double plural of “gifts of healings,” Pentecostal authors have adopted a rather uniform position.

Ernest S. Williams writes: “It is reasonable to believe that God might anoint one person with faith for certain diseases, another with faith for others.”<sup>1</sup>

Howard Carter says: “Where all the gifts of healing are in operation, there all classes of disease could be healed.”<sup>2</sup>

Harold Horton asserts: “A believer possessing one or more of them will be used of God in certain cases of sickness, but not necessarily in others.”<sup>3</sup>

Donald Gee varies the formula with two alternatives: “The simplest explanation is probably that there can be different gifts for different classes of disease. . . . Another explanation is that the Spirit will direct in different ways of conveying His healing power.”<sup>4</sup> (He has in mind prayer, laying on of hands, anointing with oil, and so forth.)

However, the total significance of the plural “gifts of healings” seems to exceed any of these explanations. A fact that must not be overlooked is that out of only three Scripture references, two imply a limit on the distribution of the gift: “God hath set some in the church” and “Have all the gifts of healing?” Yet the Bible by no means restricts its presentation of God’s provision for human healing to a limited scattering of gifted “healers,” each with powers for only certain kinds of infirmities. Scripture presents in explicit detail God’s plan for His impartation of healing to His people. “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up” (James 5:14,15). In this Scripture, healing is simply made a matter of meeting God’s conditions and it is freed from all capriciousness and uncertainty. If this is God’s plan for the bestowment of healing, then it is clear that the gift of the gifts of healings is primarily directed toward some other purpose than bestowing healing for healings sake.

Now the gift of the gifts of healings shares with tongues and miracles the special status of being given on a twofold basis: to the individual (1 Corinthians 12:7) and to the Church (1 Corinthians 12:28). Its identification with these two other gifts becomes a further fact in understanding its nature and its divinely intended purpose. These are sign gifts, given in fulfillment of the Lord’s farewell promise: “These signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; 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” (Mark 16:17,18). As it were, these are the credentials God provides His servants, both individually, and corporately as a church, so they are enabled to carry out His commission: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). We read of the ministry of Philip: “The people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did” (Acts 8:6).

It becomes clear that the primary purpose of the gift of the gifts of healings is to validate the ministry of God’s people. Donald Gee recognized this fact when he wrote:

“It appears to be a spiritual gift especially connected with the ministry of an evangelist, and granted to those called to fill that office. . . . It often gave the apostles an open door in their evangelistic work; as, for instance, the healing of the father of Publius by Paul (Acts 28:8–10). Its exercise attracted the attention of the people to the gospel of Christ in a way that was both arresting and calculated to produce a sympathetic hearing.”<sup>5</sup>

The significance of the plural harmonizes with this interpretation when we understand that God is telling us certain Christian workers are granted the exercise of a supply of healing portions. It is their privilege to be channels for the distribution of these in such a way that they will have a favorable effect upon the overall gospel outreach. Primarily, the issue is not a matter of the nature of the confronting infirmity, for all infirmities are equally impotent before divine power. It is, rather, just a case of that which best confirms the ministry of the servant of the Lord.

If the foregoing interpretations are sustained, we may derive conclusions as follows:

1. The significance of the plural “gifts of healings” inheres in the fact the gift provides individual, specific healing portions to be distributed one by one to certain infirm persons.
2. God intends that this gift function, not as a channel of healing for its own sake, but to prosper God’s purposes in the life and ministry of an individual or a church.
3. The gift may be exercised upon either believers or unbelievers depending on the will of God. The responsibility of its ministry is retained within the sovereignty of God, for it is a sign gift confirming the ministry of a human servant in a particular situation.
4. The pursuit of healing by the believer is meant normally to conform to the pattern of James 5:14,15. Only on those occasions when the divine sovereignty warrants will the believer’s healing be an instance of the exercise of the gift of the gifts of healings.

## Endnotes

1. Ernest S. Williams, *Systematic Theology* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1953), III, 71.
2. Howard Carter, *The Gifts of the Spirit* (London: Defoe Press, 1946), 93.
3. Harold Horton, *The Gifts of the Spirit* (Bedfordshire: Redemption Tidings Bookroom, 1934), 116.
4. Donald Gee, *Spiritual Gifts in the Work of the Ministry Today* (Los Angeles: B.N. Robertson, 1963), 86.
5. Donald Gee, *Concerning Spiritual Gifts* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, n.d.), 38.

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