



## *The Purpose and Value of Spiritual Gifts*

*By: R.B. Chapman*

Many today would tell us there is no longer any need for the miraculous gifts which were manifested in the Early Church, because their purpose and value have been negated by our normal educational and scientific developments through the centuries.

### The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

To comprehend the true situation let us primarily examine the real purpose of spiritual gifts. To assist us in this examination let us first view the matter from a negative aspect and see what the purpose is not.

#### Not to promote personality

Though it is necessary to say this with deep regret and reticence, we all must have met those who have sought to advance the popularity of their personality and even hoped to increase their chances of promotion to office by a demonstration of such gifts. Into this despicable category, of course, would fall Simon Magus of whom we read in Acts 8. He earnestly desired to be an outstanding personality, to attain the heights of privilege and popularize himself by staggering the community with the demonstrations of power and ability.

Alas, he has had many unworthy disciples in the centuries that have followed. Many selfishly, yet cloaked with a seeming piety, have desired these gracious gifts under the plea of advancing God's work when, sad to say, the real motive has been only to promote the power of their own popularity and personality. This was never the true purpose for them.

#### Not to show supposed spirituality

It may not meet with ready approval if one says the operation of the gifts does not necessarily indicate that they are emanating from one of spiritual and consistent life. Unfortunately many people are blindly swayed by such manifestations and with awe and wonder almost place a halo around those who frequently exercise the gifts, Such an attitude was firmly rebuked by Peter long ago when he observed the awestruck wonder that mesmerized the gathering in Solomon's porch and he chided: "Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man walk?" (Acts 3:12).

Sad to relate, some would glory in creating such an impression and sanctimoniously seek to establish their spiritual status by the usage of the gifts, feeling that the more frequent the manifestation, the more spiritual they would be deemed. This view does not bear the light of Scripture. Remember that the church at Corinth "came behind in no gift," yet the Bible reveals that it was quite an unspiritual church. Within it were faction, friction, and fornication; its members were said to be not spiritual but carnal; babes in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:1), and they even came to the Lord's Table in unworthy and unseemly manner (chapter 11).

We have all known of those whose spiritual standard has not been compatible with the sacredness of these manifestations, but we must never forget that the purpose behind the gifts was not to proclaim the spiritual superiority of the operator. The spiritual position of the recipient may have been high at the time of reception, but since the "gifts and

calling of God are without repentance” (Romans 11:29) the gift can remain when the spiritual standard and relationship may have deteriorated.

Not for excessive emotional enjoyment

There is little doubt that for some people emotional excitement is the only purpose in the gifts, though they would be deeply offended if confronted with this searching truth. To them these sacred gifts are an exciting stimulant that is little more than many another mundane medium of sensational, personal pleasure. If there were no such sensation, there would be no exercise at all by these people.

Nowhere in Scripture can we find any support for such a low level and deplorable attitude. Yet, at times churches can be inflicted to their detriment with this selfish sensationalism that was never the intended purpose for these gifts. Having thus viewed the situation negatively let us now take the positive aspect and see what the real purpose is as revealed in the Bible.

To arrest the attention of the apathetic

The clearest demonstration of this was displayed on the day of Pentecost, “They were all amazed and marveled, saying ... How hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?” (Acts 2:7,8). Apparently many of these people previously had no interest whatsoever in Jesus Christ, but the display of the gifts here arrested them, aroused their attention, and finally contributed to their salvation, for from among this company 3,000 decisions were registered. Similarly, too, with the operation of the gift of miracles and the restoration of the lame man at the beautiful gate of the temple, interest was aroused and arrested and this resulted many making a decision for Christ (Acts 4:4).

To convince the critical and the cautious

This fact was abundantly revealed in the house of Cornelius when again the gifts were manifested. Their operation convinced the traditionally critical, distinctly cautious members of the conservative circumcision party within the church (Acts 11:18; 25:8). The same solemn challenge is referred to by Paul when under inspiration he stated: “If all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced ... and so falling down on his face he will worship God” (1 Corinthians 14:24,25). Thus, we see that the purpose is to sweep away criticism and convict men of their need of Christ.

To manifest the divine dynamic

There is no doubt that in the Early Church, when these gifts were first in manifestation, there was a tremendous demonstration of supernatural power which was largely responsible for enormous turning to God at that time. Harken to Mark’s resounding testimony: “They [the apostles] went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following” (Mark 16:20).

Paul could humbly bear witness to the same phenomenal conditions prevailing in his own dynamic ministry. “My preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should ... stand ... in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:4). Paul added that those who had seen the gifts in operation would be forced to “report that God is in you of a truth” (1 Corinthians 14:25). Thus, God’s purpose is fulfilled in revealing Himself and His power.

To give great glory to God

Following the healing of the man at the temple gate we read that “all men glorified God for that which was done” (Acts 4:21), and this is ever the fundamental purpose behind every divine and supernatural gift graciously endowed. These gifts were never designed to bring any glory of any kind to any man, church, or denomination, but solely and only to the Lord who is the giver of “every good and perfect gift.”

It is for these purposes that the gifts are still given in this present day. May those entrusted with knowing these gifts

see that they are used for these purposes and these alone.

### The Value of Spiritual Gifts

Let us now examine the value of spiritual gifts within the Church today. The value is governed largely by the position they are allowed to occupy. If the gifts are allowed to rise into the ascendancy and usurp the supreme place, their value will be nil. There are certain factors that enhance the value of spiritual gifts.

#### Subject to the sovereignty of the Savior

Only one can hold the supreme position; that one must ever be the Giver and never the gift; otherwise, the gift will have become an idol and those who have thus over-elevated it will become idolaters. There are those who have lifted the authority of the gift even above the expressions of the living Word as recorded in the written Word. When this has happened, not only has the value of the manifestation been lost but tragedy has also resulted.

#### Confirmed by character and conduct

A careful and conscientious reading of the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 13 clearly causes any unbiased mind to appreciate the nothingness behind even these sublime and stupendous divine gifts if the life and conduct of the operator are incompatible and uncharitable. The absence of active love nullifies even the most powerful of the gifts and repudiates the person as a worthless and useless thing. This love produces character and conduct of the highest caliber, displaying patience and kindness; thoughtfulness and humility; good manners and unselfish disposition; a forbearing and unenvying spirit. It develops an integrity that neither thinks about nor finds pleasure in things that are wrong but only delights in truth and is prepared to endure anything to maintain them. Unless this more excellent way is known and lived, the value of all our spectacular demonstrations and supernatural manifestations will quickly disappear like the setting of the golden sun beneath the western horizon. Only the chill air of the dim night of disappointment and frustration will remain.

#### Conforming to biblical truth

The Word of God — which is our only sure court of appeal — has laid down the regulations, controls, restrictions, and operations relating to the gifts and these must be adhered to resolutely or else the value quickly diminishes. Often this clear briefing has not been plainly taught; more often, it has not been graciously enforced. The result is depreciation in the value of these sacred phenomena and consequently a casual, sometimes critical attitude has developed in many lives toward them. Everything must conform to the pattern of divine truth.

Unless these conditions are fulfilled, the value of the cherished operations will be minimized. Failure of correct function has been largely responsible for the absence of many of these gifts today because some have mistakenly felt the only safeguard against irregularities and excesses has been complete renunciation and prohibition. In other words, they have done away with the valuable and serviceable ox in order to keep the crib clean (Proverbs 14:4). Instead, let us take the trouble to keep the stable in order that we may enjoy the increase and retain the service of the Divine Paraclete.

Finally, let us assess some of the indispensable values that will be found in evidence within a truly Pentecostal church where the gifts of the Spirit are rightly regulated, obediently operated, and accompanied by consistent and consecrated conduct.

In this church each individual member will be built up and established (1 Corinthians 14:4). Everything in the church will be directed toward the building of a well-grounded and established Body (1 Corinthians 14:12) that through the gifts will be enlightened, inspired, and consoled in a way far exceeding the highest human endeavors (1 Corinthians 14:3).

This church will know the “more excellent way” of life. They will be a people in whom is found not only Christian characteristics but also real Christian character of the noblest order (1 Corinthians 12:25 to 14:1). Its members will

will have a practical care and consideration for one another and among them there will be no trace of schism or division (1 Corinthians 12:25). Peace and not confusion will prevail in their midst (1 Corinthians 14:33) and everything will be regulated in a decent and orderly fashion (1 Corinthians 14:40).

The individuals of such an ekklesia will each be a powerful witness (Acts 1:8), possessed of a deep filial affection for the Lord, fearing lest they should hurt or grieve Him. The demonstration of God's power will be the normal function of their community (Acts 4:33), who will be held in favor and respect by all and to whose company will come a daily increase as souls are saved (Acts 2:47).

We can only justify our existence as a Pentecostal church by seeking to produce such assemblies as this because that is both the purpose and the value behind the glorious gifts of Pentecost. Churches may carry the name of "Pentecost," but are they anything like true Pentecostal churches? It is no use having a name unless one is living up to that name. The standard set may appear to be of the highest, but life proves that we invariably fall well short of our highest standards and consequently the lower the standard the lower the achievement. Let us always, therefore, fix the standard at the highest level, never forgetting that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself set the true standard when He said: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

May our Pentecostal movement aim high, and aim in the right direction.

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