

PREFACE

With the second half of v9 it becomes obvious that Paul is combining in this list Spirit-gifts of what we might call a more “normal” or “ordinary” type (*word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith*) and those of a more “spectacular” or obviously “supernatural” type (*healing, effecting of miracles, prophecy, distinguishing of spirits(?), tongues, interpretation of tongues*). It is probably not necessary for me to point out that not everyone agrees on which gifts fall into which category—and no matter which camp one is in, some of these gifts could fall into a gray-zone in between, or be included in both. Note that Paul does not make such distinctions himself. As Garland points out, “Gifts do not need to be spectacular to be manifestations of the Spirit.”

Of one thing we are certain: The apostle makes the assumption that the more “supernatural,” or what we might term, “charismatic” gifts, such as tongues, miracles, and healing were, as Carson puts it, “everyday occurrences within this Spirit-endowed community.” As we know, whether or not these are manifested in the church today is a matter of opinion.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:7-11.**v9B**

...and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit.

This is the first and only item in the list explicitly identified as a charisma: *charismata iamaton* (literally, gifts of healings [as in NKJV]). It is noted by Fee that by using the plural form (gifts, healings), Paul suggests that this was not a permanent gift, but that each occurrence of healing is a “gift” in its own right. That is, by this he means that someone would not become a “healer,” empowered by the Spirit to heal anyone and everyone. Nevertheless, healing was a signifying sign of Christ Jesus’ deity, and of the true apostles.

Read Romans 15:18-19.

Except in the case of Jesus, this does not mean that those who healed could *always* heal. Paul did not heal his fellow Epaphroditus, who was deathly ill (Philippians 2:25-27), and he left Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20).

and to another the effecting of miracles,

The gifts of healing and miracles go together like the gifts of wisdom and knowledge; that is, the line of distinction between them is blurred. The “effecting [or working] of miracles” (*energema dynameon*) seems to apply to any “actualization of God’s power in mighty deeds” (Garland) beyond healing. As to the question of whether or not these two gifts are still in effect, we must remember that since these are all of God, He can do anything today that he did in the first century. Does the Lord God still perform miracles? Of course. Does He still perform them by means of a gift in a human? He certainly *can*, but such occurrences seem to be rare.

Whether one believes these two miraculous gifts are still active today is tied to whether one believes there are still apostles today, for the primary reason they were so active in the first century is that they were attesting signs of legitimate apostleship.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:11-12.

The Greek *apostolos* means “someone sent,” and derives from the verb “to send out” (*apostellein*). Validated apostles were necessary in the first century because they and they alone carried the word of God to the rest of the world. Whether in spoken or written form, once Christ ascended they alone were left to substantiate His life, the reason for His death, and the truth of His resurrection. The compiled word of God (the Bible) was not yet in existence, other than portions of what we call the Old Testament, so it fell to the apostles to speak for God and for Christ Jesus. They were validated, at least in part, by the “signs” they performed; these signs—healing miracles, prophecy, etc.—attested to the fact that God was working through them and so should be believed—this was true even for Jesus. If one needed to hear the truth about Christ in the first century after His resurrection, one required an apostle.

Today, in the twenty-first century, we have God’s inerrant written word, and so no longer need apostles to speak *ex cathedra* for Him. If we do not need apostles, we no longer need their attesting signs of validation. *Can* God still work these miraculous gifts through individuals? Nothing is impossible with God. Does He need it to validate a spokesperson? No.

and to another prophecy,

If there is controversy about the continuation of the healing and miraculous gifts, there *really* is controversy about the gift of prophecy. Much of this stems from how the term “prophecy” (*propheteia*) is defined. Does it refer to telling the future? Does it refer to speaking of things otherwise unknown? Or does it refer simply to preaching and teaching the word of God?

It is clear that prophecy was an integral part of the early church; for the apostle Paul it was a desired and preferred gift of the Spirit, for it was instrumental—perhaps even essential—in the “edification and exhortation and consolation” of the church.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:1-5.

Paul’s parting counsel in his first letter to the Thessalonians included a command to honor “prophetic utterances.”

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22.

So we need not question or debate the use and importance of prophecy in the early church. That leaves us only to consider whether or not it remains so in the church today or whether it belonged only to the “apostolic” era—and *if* it remains, how is it to be identified and implemented. That is, is the Spirit-gift of prophecy still given today?

Paul’s understanding of the prophetic gift was informed by his Jewish background. To him the prophet was someone who spoke to God’s people under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Fee). As implemented in the early church, it was far less about foretelling the future (although we have at least one instance of that by Agabus in Acts 11:28), than that of bringing an edifying, encouraging word from God by means of the Spirit. And since all believers now had the Spirit within, everyone was equipped with the means to do this, if God so willed.

Our primary commentators for this study (David Garland, Gordon Fee, and John MacArthur) all agree that the Spirit-gift of prophecy remains in effect today. But we need to clearly define it, and define the differences between it and the gifts of the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge (teaching and preaching). When I prepare these lessons, I prepare to teach by reading, studying, and praying; as I am doing this I write down in my notes what I will be teaching. In other words, when a teacher teaches and a pastor preaches there is *preparation beforehand*, and, more often than not, some form of written notes to guide his or her thoughts. With prophetic utterances there is none of that. The individual just speaks, for the benefit of others, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

...and to another the distinguishing of spirits,

What “interpretation of tongues” is to “various kinds of tongues,” “distinguishing of spirits” is to “prophecy.” It is almost as if this teaching and the Constitution of the United States stem from the same source, for both implement a form of “checks and balances.”

Later in this verse—and especially in Chapter Fourteen—Paul will place a check on tongues by adding “interpretation of tongues,” and here he places a check on prophecy by adding “distinguishing of spirits” (*diakriseis pneumaton*).

Read 1 Corinthians 14:29.

In v14:29 Paul uses the verb form of the same word translated in v12:10 (*diakrino*) to command that whenever an individual in the church prophesies, those who are present, who hear the prophecy, are to “pass judgment” on the veracity of what has been said.

Every believer is to discern, distinguish right prophecy from wrong prophecy—and, in practical terms, this would also extend to every form of preaching, teaching, or commentary. We are to always gauge what we hear against the truth of God’s word, which presupposes that the believer is sufficiently familiar with Scripture to make that test!

There are in the kingdom, however, certain individuals that have the Spirit-gift of “distinguishing of spirits.” These individuals are able to quickly and accurately test what has been spoken to determine from which spirit it has come: the Holy Spirit, or an evil spirit. This is one of the most important gifts in the church, for the Christian is literally *surrounded* by evil counsel from *false* prophets, which must be sifted through the clarifying screen of God’s word. Today there are church pulpits, television screens, radios, and countless web sites from which is spouted wrong doctrine, preaching “a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6) and “another Jesus” (1 Corinthians 14:12).

Garland: Prophecy, in Paul’s estimation, is the most valuable for building up the church, but it requires testing and evaluation, just as tongues, the least valuable gift for building up the church, requires interpretation.

John MacArthur: Those to whom God has given the gift of discernment have a special ability to recognize lying spirits, and this gift is the Spirit’s watchdog. Some ideas that are given as scriptural and that on the surface *seem* scriptural actually are clever counterfeits that would deceive most believers. Those with the gift of discernment are the Holy Spirit’s inspectors, His counterfeit experts to whom He gives special insight and understanding. The gift was especially valuable in the early church because the New Testament had not been completed. Because of the difficulty and expense of copying, for many years after its completion the Bible was not widely available. The Holy Spirit’s discerners were the church’s protectors.