



Holy Spirit Gifts

READINGS FOR THIS LESSON:– Ephesians 4; 1 Corinthians 14.

Jesus promised his disciples that they would be given the holy spirit. He said to them,

"And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name will they drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."
(Mark 16:17-18).

Why were these promises made to the disciples?

They proved that the message of the disciples was from God. Jesus had been crucified; God had raised him from the dead. He had gone into heaven, leaving his group of disciples to follow his command to,



"Go into all the world, and preach the good news to all creation." (Mark 16:15).

It was a big task. Would people listen to them? Surely they would not believe the story of a man brought back to life after being dead for three days?

So the disciples were given the power to work miracles, as a sign that their message was from God.

In Acts 2, we read how, on the day of Pentecost, they preached to the Jews at Jerusalem in languages that they had never learnt, and could not have spoken, but for the power of God.

This was called, "*speaking in tongues*".

No wonder the people were amazed; and no wonder they listened.

The Spirit gifts helped to guide the early believers

As a result of the preaching on the day of Pentecost, 3,000 men and women joined the disciples, and became followers of Christ (Acts 2:41). And so the early believers had made a good start.

But just think about the difficulties there would be. Such a big family of believers would need someone to guide and teach them, and to give them advice about the arrangements they would have to make for worship. They could not learn from the New Testament, as it had not yet been written.

So the gifts of the spirit were sent, not only to convince others of the truth of the apostles' message, but also to help and teach the early believers, and to set the first congregations in order.

What were these gifts?

In 1 Corinthians 12:22, the apostle Paul showed how different members of the ecclesia possessed different spirit gifts, and how each member was to work for the good of the others. Then in verse 28 we read of these gifts,

"And in the church (Greek = ecclesia or congregation) God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues."

The first three gifts - the most important ones - were for teaching the early believers.

The end of the gifts

We have already seen that in the days of the first believers, there was no New Testament – it had not then been written. This is one reason why these gifts were so necessary.

We can read about the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we can read the letters (epistles) of the apostles. But they had no written record. Therefore the apostles, prophets and teachers, with their spirit gifts, were a very necessary help to the first congregations of believers.

When the writing of the New Testament was finished, there was no longer any need for this special help from God. All that believers need to know is written down for them in the Bible. So the spirit gifts stopped as the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10,

"Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears."

The word "perfection" means "completion". When the last book of the Bible, the Revelation was written, the Scriptures were completed.

The spirit gifts were not suddenly taken away at the exact time that the New Testament was completed. The Apostles had the power to pass on these gifts through the laying on of their hands. After the Apostles had died, and when those who received the gifts from the Apostles had also died, then the holy spirit gifts were no longer available.

Does anyone possess these gifts today?

Some people make the claim to have the gifts of the spirit today. They especially claim to be able to speak in tongues, and to heal the sick. How can we test those that claim to work miracles by the holy spirit of God?

Firstly, we remind ourselves that the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, that a time would come when these "gifts" would cease. If this period did not begin when the New Testament was completed, then when does it begin? Certainly not in the coming of God's Kingdom, because then the holy spirit will be poured out on all who are made immortal.

In Hebrews 6:5, the holy spirit gifts are, in fact, called "the powers of the coming age", and the early disciples had the "firstfruits" of these gifts as we read in Romans 8:23.

"..but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit..."

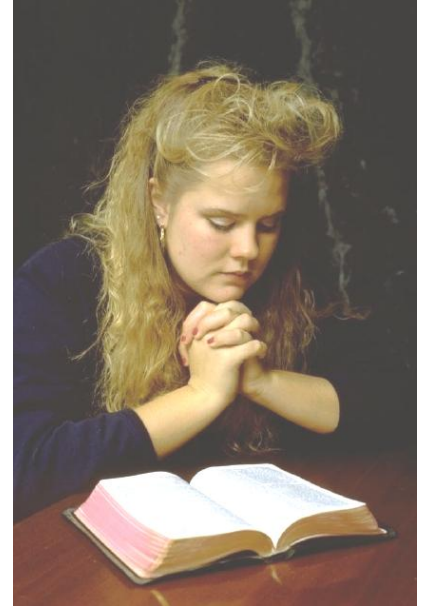
Secondly, we note that holy spirit gifts were given to help the true followers of Christ who believed and preached the Word of God. Those who claim to have these powers today preach things that are not taught in the Word of God. We must, therefore, reject their claims.

Thirdly, we have to confess that we are not convinced by many of these so-called miracles. Many of the cures are soon seen to be no cures at all; and others of them can be explained scientifically. Hypnotists and those who can put thoughts into a person's mind can often get the same results.

Those who believe all that is written in the Bible will not claim to have the spirit gifts, for they know that these gifts ceased when the writings of the New Testament were complete. The Bible is now the only guide for us, as Paul said to the believers living in Ephesus. His words are recorded in Acts 20:32,

"Now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

Finally, yet another reminder that when we read the Bible we are, in a sense, receiving of the spirit of God because it is His Word. If we want to be saved, let us show that we appreciate this wonderful gift of God to us, by reading it as much of the Bible as we can.



Summary

1. The holy spirit gifts were given to the early believers.
2. They were for two purposes:
 - (a) To be a sign to unbelievers,
 - (b) To help to build up the early congregations of believers.
3. They were only given until the New Testament writings were completed. After that they were to "vanish away".
4. No one since has been able to work miracles by the power of the holy spirit.
5. Those who claim to work miracles today do not possess some strange power. No one possesses the power of the holy spirit today.

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