



HOLY SPIRIT GIFTS

Reading: Acts 8

The apostles are given Holy Spirit gifts

We learned in Lesson 20 that the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles on the day of Pentecost, about ten days after the Lord Jesus had ascended to heaven. It was given to help them remember what Jesus had said and done, so that they could teach others.

The apostles were also able to perform miracles (Mark 16:17,18). The Lord Jesus had instructed them to *“go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation”* (Mark 16:15). Without their Lord and Master, this was a huge task. People were unlikely to listen to ordinary, uneducated men, especially if they preached about a man being raised from the dead after three days in the grave. Just as Jesus had performed miracles to show that he was God’s Son, so the apostles were able to perform miracles to show that they were sent by God and the Lord Jesus. The miracles were a sign that their message was from God.

Before he ascended into heaven the Lord Jesus said to them,

*“But **you will receive power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, **and you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”* (Acts 1:8).

Mark 16:20 tells us: *“And they (the apostles) went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and **confirmed the message by accompanying signs.**”*

The day of Pentecost

Having received the Holy Spirit, the apostles immediately went and preached to the Jewish crowd who had gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. The people who listened had come from many different countries and spoke many different languages, and:

“they were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?’ ” (Acts 2:7,8).

Many realised that the apostles were speaking in languages that they had never learnt, so they could see that this was God’s Spirit at work. This special ability of speaking in other languages helped the apostles to preach the Gospel to people from other nations. In this way the gifts of the Holy Spirit supported their preaching.

The Spirit gifts were also given to set up the first churches

As a result of the preaching on the day of Pentecost, about 3,000 people were baptized (Acts 2:41). This was the start of the Christian church. Such a large group of believers would need guidance and to be shown how to worship. They could not learn from the New Testament because it was not yet written. So the Holy Spirit was given to early baptized believers, to help them set up and organise the first Christian churches.

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-22 the apostle Paul shows how different members of the church possessed different gifts. He also shows that each member was to work for the good of the others. In verse 28 he says,

“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.”

Special times

This was a special time in the development of God’s purpose. There are only a few other such occasions in the Bible when God empowered people in this way; that is, when He





gave selected people special abilities and powers, to help them do a particular work for Him. When that work was finished, the special abilities and powers finished too.

The New Testament was written through inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Today, we can read about the life of Jesus, the preaching of the apostles, and letters that the apostles wrote to the first churches. But the early baptized believers had no written record, and so apostles, prophets and teachers with special abilities from God were very necessary.

The Holy Spirit gifts were given at this time:

- to show that the true Gospel was being taught
- to support the preaching work
- to help set up and organise the first Christian churches
- to help write the New Testament.

When Christianity was established and the New Testament complete, these gifts were withdrawn. No-one has these Holy Spirit gifts today.

The apostles passed on the gifts to baptized believers

The Holy Spirit gifts were passed on to baptized believers by the laying on of the apostles' hands. We read of the apostles Peter and John doing this in Acts 8. A believer called Philip (not the apostle) was preaching in the region of Samaria. He performed great miracles to support his preaching (Acts 8:6). The story is continued in the table.

ACTS	BIBLE PASSAGE	NOTES
8:12	<i>But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.</i>	Philip preached the Gospel (the good news about God's kingdom and the saving work of Jesus Christ). Many believed and were baptized.
8:13	<i>Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.</i>	A man called Simon believed and was baptized. Simon had been a magician (verse 9) and had deceived the people of Samaria with his clever tricks. Naturally, he was amazed at Philip's genuine miracles. He realised that Philip was empowered by God's Spirit.
8:14,15	<i>Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit,</i>	All the apostles were still in Jerusalem (8:1). Peter and John had to travel to Samaria to help Philip. The apostles prayed that the newly baptized believers might receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
8:16	<i>for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.</i>	Even though Simon and the others were baptized, they had not received the Holy Spirit. This shows that Holy Spirit gifts were not automatically given whenever a person was baptized.
8:17	<i>Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.</i>	The newly baptized believers received the Holy Spirit from the apostles (Peter and John), not from Philip.
8:18,19	<i>Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."</i>	Even though Simon had received the Holy Spirit from the apostles, he could not pass it on to others. This is what he wanted to be able to do.





8:20	<i>But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!"</i>	Peter told him that he was quite wrong to try to buy the ability to pass on the Holy Spirit gifts. This also shows that although he possessed the Holy Spirit he could still do wrong.
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From this we learn that Simon, who was given the gifts of the Holy Spirit, could not pass them on to others. Similarly, Philip, who was able to do great miracles that impressed people, was unable to pass on the gifts to others. Instead, the apostles Peter and John had to travel all the way from Jerusalem to pass on the gifts to the newly baptized believers. This shows that very few people, perhaps only the apostles, could pass on to others the gifts of the Holy Spirit. After their death, the gifts could no longer be passed on to others and so they gradually disappeared. Holy Spirit gifts do not exist today.

Cornelius

Acts 10 records how the apostle Peter was instructed by God to visit a Roman centurion, Cornelius, who was being called to salvation. Until this time only Jews had been baptized. While Peter was speaking to Cornelius and the other Gentiles with him, *"the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word"* (Acts 10:44). These Gentiles began to speak in tongues (other languages). Peter and those who were with him *"were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles"* (verse 45). This was a clear sign from the Lord that Gentiles could also be Christians. This is why Peter realised that they should be baptized with water.

This is the only example of Spirit gifts being given before baptism. It was a special case to show Peter that Gentiles could be also baptized. As Acts 8 showed, the gifts were only given to baptized believers, by the laying on of the apostles' hands – it was not automatically given at baptism.

The end of the gifts

By the end of the first century Christianity was established and the New Testament complete and God now guided and helped people through His written Word, the Bible, so the Spirit gifts were taken away. The apostle Paul showed that the gifts were temporary. He said that they were given:

"to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God ..."
(Ephesians 4:12,13).

Hebrews 6:5 describes the gifts as *"powers of the age to come"*, showing that in God's kingdom there will be more gifts than ever. So if the gifts were to be taken away but will also be given again when Christ returns, then we must be in the time when they do not exist.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

"Love never ends. As for prophecies (from the gift of prophesying), they will pass away; as for tongues (the gift of speaking foreign languages), they will cease; as for knowledge (the gift of knowledge), it will pass away" (1 Corinthians 13:8).

Verse 8 shows that the Spirit gifts would be taken away; verse 13 shows that faith, hope and love would remain:

"So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Therefore, hope and faith are needed longer than the Spirit gifts. But hope and faith will not be needed when the Lord Jesus has returned (since our **hope** is that Christ will return, and we have **faith** that it will happen). So at some time between the days of the apostles and Christ's return the Holy Spirit gifts would be taken away.

We should not be surprised that the Holy Spirit gifts were only temporary. In Matthew 10 we read of Jesus giving his twelve disciples the power to do miracles. This power did not remain with them for long because it had to be given to them again at Pentecost.





Does anyone possess these gifts today?

Some people claim to have the gifts of the Spirit today. In particular, they claim to be able to speak in tongues and to heal the sick. How can we test this claim?

1. The miracles in the Bible were immediate and complete, and they never failed. The blind could see clearly, the lame stood up immediately – all totally healed. Even the dead were raised. But today, no-one can raise the dead or perform miracles like those listed in Mark 16:17,18:

*“And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and **they will recover.**”*

2. The Holy Spirit gifts were given to help the true church. They also showed that the true church believes and preaches the Word of God. Most, if not all, of those people who claim to have these powers today preach things not taught in the Bible.

Matthew 7:21-23 Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

Their claims therefore cannot be true. Jesus gave a strong warning about those who would falsely claim to have the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 7:21-23).

Holy Spirit gifts never made people do what was right

Certain people in the Bible received Spirit gifts from God. However, none of them became morally better because of this. In the Old Testament, men were given gifts to help them build the Tabernacle, yet they disobeyed God and died in the wilderness. The apostle Paul and the apostle Peter both possessed the Holy Spirit but disagreed about what was best to do. Paul accused Peter of being in the wrong and of showing a bad example to others. So even apostles, who had the Holy Spirit, could do wrong (Galatians 2:11-14). The Holy Spirit was never given to make people righteous. We are only accounted righteous by God when we use our own free will to believe and obey Him. There are very few times in Scripture when God made it possible for people to do miraculous or supernatural things. Even great men of God, like Abraham and David, did no miracles, yet God considered them righteous. It is the influence of God’s Word in our lives that can change us and help us to grow more pleasing to God.

God is still working

God’s Spirit is still at work today. It keeps all of creation alive – Job 34:14,15 shows that everything would die if God did not support His creation in this way. By His Spirit, God controls world affairs as He works out His purpose; and by His Spirit, God also answers believers’ prayers. However, God no longer gives men and women special abilities and powers of the Holy Spirit. God speaks to us through His Word – we do not need any other revelations.

Summary

Holy Spirit gifts were given to selected people at special times, to help them do a particular work for God. When that work was finished, the special abilities and powers finished too. No-one possesses Holy Spirit gifts today.

A verse to learn: 1 Corinthians 13:8

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

Verses to read: 1 Corinthians 12 and 13

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