

Spiritual Gifts, Part 1

The Apostleship

[Brian Schwertley](#)

When the Holy Spirit came to the new covenant church at Pentecost, He equipped the church by giving diverse gifts to its members. The apostle Paul discusses a number of these spiritual gifts in his epistles (e.g., Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12-14; Eph. 4:7-13). A study of these gifts is needed both to dispel some common misconceptions regarding some of them, as well as to help our understanding of how the body of Christ is to operate.

Before we consider the diversity of spiritual gifts, some things related to this topic need to be considered for clarification. First, there is a biblical distinction between gifts that all believers partake of and gifts that are particular and diverse. Everyone who is a real Christian has received the gift of the Holy Spirit, regeneration, saving faith, repentance, a new heart that is spiritual, that loves Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:3 ff.; Ac. 11:18; Eph. 2:8; 2 Tim. 2:25; Tit. 3:5; etc.). All believers are sealed and united to the body of Christ by the Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13, 4:30). All Christians have one thing in common. We are all saved by Christ and baptized with the Holy Spirit. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many (1 Cor. 12:13). However, when Paul discusses spiritual gifts he emphasizes that this unity (this includes what all believers have in common), this organic spiritual body has an eye, a foot, hand, ear. That is, the spiritual body has many gifts and ministries to serve the church (1 Cor. 12:4-7, 13 ff.).

Second, the Bible regards all gifts whether “regular” and continuing or “supernatural” and limited to the apostolic era to be spiritual gifts. This assertion is proved by the fact that all the gifts in the church originate from the same source: the Holy Spirit. The diversity regards the character of the gifts not the source. Note, also that the “manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one” (v. 7). That is, every recipient of the Holy Spirit is given a manifestation of the Spirit. Every believer without exception is gifted in some manner by the Spirit for Christian service. The spiritual gifts are not reserved for an elite few. The point is strengthened by Paul in his analogy of the one body consisting of many members (12:12 ff.). The apostle wants the Corinthians to understand that every gift is important and necessary, that every believer has a contribution to make. Gifts that some regard as of little importance are to be honored for they contribute to the well-being of the whole body. If a distinction is to be made in the spiritual gifts it should be between sign gifts (prophecy, tongues, miracles) that were given to the apostolic church to lay the foundation and continuing gifts (teaching, helps, etc.) that operate until the second advent.

Third, the lists of gifts found in the epistles are not intended to be exhaustive or perfectly organized. In Romans 12:6-8, seven distinct gifts are listed (prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, showing mercy). In 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 nine are specified (the

word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues). In Ephesians 4:11, four or possibly five gifts are listed (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers) if one interprets pastors and teachers as two separate offices which is unlikely. Whenever Paul mentions the church offices he follows a specific pattern: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor-teacher. The apostle enumerates the offices according to the order of authority. The other gifts show no discernable pattern.

Fourth, some of the gifts listed are broad in nature encompassing many activities while others overlap in function with other gifts mentioned. The gift of ministry or service (*diakonian*; Rom.12:7) embraces all kinds of service to strengthen the body of Christ. Showing mercy (*hilaroteti*, Rom.12:8) refers to a large variety of merciful activities. A number of times Paul places gifts next to each other that are complimentary and very similar to each other: word of wisdom-word of knowledge (1Cor.12:8); teaching-exhorting (Rom.12:7-8); healing-miraculous powers (1Cor.12:9-10). Knowledge obviously must be accompanied by wisdom to be of good use; healing involves miraculous powers; good teaching involves exhortation. We should not think of everything enumerated by Paul in terms of airtight categories.

Fifth, all the lists emphasize that the source of the gifts is God and His grace. The word gifts (Greek-charismata indicates that all the gifts the Christians have are manifestations of God's grace. Paul says that believers have differing gifts "according to the grace that is given to us" (Rom. 12:6). "The gifts exercised cannot be attributed to the moral nobility of human beings. They are evidence of the graciousness of God, who has supplied his church with means to strengthen the community. The text implies that all believers have such gifts, for Paul says 'having gifts' ..., which suggests that all believers enjoy such gifts."¹ The apostle emphasized that all gifts are gifts of grace to make sure that believers use their gifts properly, for the sake of the whole body. The fact that all gifts and offices are bestowed by the unmerited favor of God, should eliminate both pride and envy. "If Christians are all members of the same body, having different officers and gifts, instead of being puffed up one above another, and instead of envying and opposing each other, they should severally discharge their respective duties diligently and humbly for the sake of the whole, and not for their own advantage."² Jay Adams writes, "The modern idea-so prevalent in some quarters-of the personal orientation of gifts (they were given to me; for my benefit) is entirely wrong. They are gifts not to individuals but to the church as a whole. This is made clear not only from their intended use (to serve the rest) but also from the fact that each Christian is considered not to be an owner or possessor of a gift but a steward of it [see 1 Pet. 4:10]."³ When Paul warned the Corinthians to reject sinful pride that leads to divisiveness in the church he wrote: "For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it" (1 Cor. 4:7)?

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 655.

² Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974 [1835]), 387.

³ Jay Adams, *Trust and Obedience: A Practical Commentary on First Peter*, 132.

Sixth, all of the spiritual gifts can be subsumed under two broad categories: word or teaching gifts and deeds or service gifts. This observation, however, does not mean that these two major categories do not overlap in any way; they often do. Apostles, pastor-teachers and ruling elders are often involved in deed ministry (helping the poor, visiting the sick, etc.) and those involved primarily in deed ministry such as deacons often are involved in counseling (e.g., teaching the poor how to manage money). When the apostle Peter discusses spiritual gifts in his first epistle, he does not give a detailed list of spiritual gifts, but rather simply sets forth the two broad categories. “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 4:10-11). Gaffin writes, “Not inappropriately these verses may be taken as providing a brief, compressed overview of the entire New Testament teaching on spiritual gifts. Notice how a number of the considerations already discussed combine here: the variously distributed character of the gifts given to the congregation, the gifts as particular manifestations of the grace of God, the ministerial nature of the gifts, and the dual profiling of gifts in terms of word and deed.”⁴

Seventh, the fact that all gifts come by the grace of God does not mean that every gift is supernaturally bestowed in a moment of time. Some of the gifts such as prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles and healings are given in such a manner. Other gifts such as the ability to teach, govern, administrate and do works of mercy are developed over a period of time. As believers are progressively sanctified and become more experienced in their particular area of service, they will get better at serving or teaching others. In many cases God will providentially prepare people for a life of service before they are converted to Christ. It is not an accident of history that some of the church’s greatest teachers and theologians were advanced in secular intellectual scholarship before their conversions. Augustine, for example, was a first class intellectual before his conversion at the age of 38. Also, some of the most effective elders received a lot of experience dealing with people in the business world.

If we combine the lists in Romans, 1 Corinthians and Ephesians and combine terms that are virtually synonymous, there are roughly ten separate gifts listed: (1) apostles, (2) prophets, (3) evangelists, (4) pastor-teacher (exhortation), (5) leading-administrations, (6) showing mercy-helps, (7) giving, (8) miracles-healings, (9) tongues, (10) interpretation of tongues. As we considered the various gifts enumerated by Paul, keep in mind (as noted above) that the gifts listed are not meant to be exhaustive and there is an overlapping of function between gifts. (e.g., ruling elders must be able to teach [1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9] and teaching elders must be able to rule).

What is the Apostleship?

The gift and office that Paul always places first is that of apostle. This position is understandable given the apostles’ unique authority. Although the word originally had a non-

⁴ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 52-53.

technical meaning of “messenger” or “one sent out,” it is used in the New Testament to describe men appointed by Christ for the special function of laying the foundation of the church. The special authority of the apostolic office and its temporary nature is evident in the following observations.

(1) The apostles were chosen and designated apostle by Christ Himself (Mt. 10:2ff; Mk. 3: 13-19; Lk. 6:13). Even the apostle Paul who was born out of due time (1 Cor. 15:8) had to receive a personal call from Jesus to this service. Interestingly, Paul says that he was the last living person to see the risen Lord (1 Cor. 15:7-8). This inspired comment completely rules out the claims of some Pentecostal groups to have living apostles among them. While it is true that a number of modern “faith healers” claim to have spoken to the resurrected Christ in person, given the clear testimony of Scripture on this matter one can safely assume that such men and women are liars.

(2) The qualifications for the apostolic office are unique and limited to people living during the life time of the Messiah. According to Acts 1:21ff, in order to be an apostle, one had to be a disciple of Jesus from the time of our Lord’s baptism by John to His ascension into heaven. One also had to be an eye witness of the resurrected Christ. In other words, one had to be an eye witness of all the great redemptive events and receive personal training from Jesus to lay the foundation of the church. Paul appears to be a partial exception to these qualifications. However, one must keep in mind that Paul was a witness of the resurrected Messiah (Ac. 9:3-6; 26:16-18; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8); and that Paul received personal training from the Lord in the wilderness before he assumed his special responsibilities (Gal. 1:1, 12, 16-19; 1 Cor. 11:23).

(3) The apostles had a special authority that came directly from Christ. Paul repeatedly identified himself as an apostle called by Jesus Christ or God (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; etc.). “Paul, in Gal. 1:1, as well as in other passages, asserts that apostleship was neither derived from men nor conveyed through the instrumentality of men, but conferred directly by God through Christ.”⁵ John Murray writes, “Paul’s identification of himself as an apostle in this salutation [Rom. 1:1] as in all others except Philippians, I and II Thessalonians and Philemon, indicates the importance which Paul attached to his apostolic office. On occasion, when circumstances required it, he vigorously defended his apostleship (cf. I Cor. 9:1, 2; II Cor. 12:11-13; Gal. 1:1, 15-17). This consciousness of commission and authority as inherent in the apostolic office reflects the unique position occupied by the apostolate in the institution of Christ (cf. Matt. 15:17-19; 19:28; Luke 22:29, 30; John 16:12-14; 20:21-23; Acts 1:2-8, 15:26; Eph. 2:20). It is for this reason that apostolic teaching and preaching are invested with the authority of Christ and of the Holy Spirit.”⁶

Unlike the New Testament prophets who were occasionally inspired for the church’s edification, the apostles had a much more abiding and permanent inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Thus, “they were the infallible and authoritative messengers of Christ.”⁷ As such, the apostles

⁵ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1856]), 2.

⁶ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 65), 1:2.

⁷ Charles Hodge, *Romans*, 389.

could give authoritative commandments to all the churches (1 Cor. 7:17; 16:1; cf. 11:34; 1 Th. 4:2). Peter wrote, “Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle...that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior” (2 Pet. 3:1-2). The apostles could even give orders to ordained ministers of the gospel (1 Tim. 1:3; 6:14; Tit. 1:5). Yet, when meeting in a church council or Presbytery, the apostles did not exercise a separate autocratic authority. “When the question of the observance of the Mosaic ritual by Gentile Christians arose at Antioch and was referred to Jeru[salem], it was ‘the apostles and elders’ who met to discuss it (Acts 15:2, 6, 22), and the letter returned to Antioch was written in the name of ‘apostles and the elders, brethren’ (ver. 23).”⁸

(4) As those who had a unique authority from Christ, who along with the prophets laid the once for all foundation of the Christian church by giving us the inspired New Testament canon, the apostles had the ability to perform authenticating sign miracles. Note, the apostle Paul tells the Corinthians that the miracles he performed proved his apostolic authority. “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds” (2 Cor. 12:12). If miraculous signs were common in Paul’s day, the apostle’s statement would have proven nothing. The author of Hebrews asks, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will” (Heb. 2:3-4)? This passage refers to those who heard Christ--the apostles. The apostles’ ability to work amazing miracles is noted in the book of Acts. “And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people” (5:12; cf. 3:6-11; 5:15-16; etc.). The verb tense (imperfect) indicates that miracles “continued taking place.” When Paul and Barnabas preached, the Lord “was bearing witness to the word of His, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands” (Ac. 14:3).

(5) The apostles continued the work of Christ in a special way. Our Lord’s statements in John 14:26; 15:27; 16:13-15 apply directly to the apostles. The Holy Spirit would take the men who had personally witnessed the ministry of Christ (His person, work and words) and give them an infallible remembrance of redemptive events. “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning” (Jn. 15:26-27). “The preaching and writing of the apostles and their companions taken together therefore provide both the basic historical evidence and the norm of interpretation through which alone future generations could reach the facts about Christ.”⁹ The resurrected Lord Himself by His Spirit gave the church an infallible history of redemption accomplished; provided a perfect and sufficient theological interpretation of redemption; and gave the New Covenant church all the

⁸ J. C. Lambert, “Apostle,” in James Orr, General Editor, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1936), 1:204.

⁹ R.E. Nixon, “Apostle” in Merrill Tenny General Editor, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 76), 1:218.

ordinances she would need to function until the second coming (e.g., church government, worship, etc.). That is why all Christians are dependent upon apostolic tradition (*paradosis* [tradition] from *paradidomi*).¹⁰ By tradition we do not mean the untrustworthy opinions of man handed down one to another through the ages but the instruction of divinely inspired men. For us who live after the death of the apostles and close of the canon the rule of faith is the Bible alone.

The apostles also had a foundational work in setting up the first churches in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the Roman Empire. Jesus' statement in Acts 1:8 is given directly to the apostles "(cf. v. 2 where the 'you' of v. 8 is explicitly identified as the apostles), and concerns the foundational task of bringing the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome completed by them (cf. Col. 1:6, 23). It does apply today, but only derivatively, as we build on the apostolic foundation and hold fast to their foundational gospel witness."¹¹

What of Apostolic Succession?

The teaching that we have considered on the apostolate not only stands as a rebuke to radical Charismatics who claim to have living apostles but also to the Roman Catholics and high church Episcopalians who claim apostolic succession. The Romanist idea is that Peter became the fixed and settled apostle in Rome (who as the head of the apostles was the first pope) and that he had the ability to transmit to successors the same power and authority that he himself possessed. This process of apostolic succession has supposedly continued to the present day. The radically unscriptural nature of this idea is proven by the following observations: (1) The New Testament teaches that Paul was the last living apostle. He was "born out of due time;" the last person to see the risen Christ (see 1 Cor. 15:8). (2) When the apostle James (the brother of John) was executed by Herod (Ac. 12:2) no successor was ever appointed. "If the apostles were to be appointed by the church, undoubtedly the church would have appointed a successor to James there and then. But that was not done."¹² (3) No pope was ever appointed or chosen directly by Jesus and no pope has ever seen the resurrected Messiah. "The church-appointed popes do not claim that they have seen the risen Lord; but we have seen that this is the first essential qualification of an apostle."¹³ (4) The idea that Peter was the bishop over Rome (the first pope) is a fabrication invented centuries after the death of the apostles. Historians and scholars have virtually no reliable historical records regarding the life of Peter outside the New Testament. The eminent church historian Philip Schaff writes, "The time of Peter's arrival in Rome, and the length of residence there, cannot possibly be ascertained. The above mentioned silence of Acts and of Paul's epistles allow him only a short period of labor there, after 63. The Roman [Catholic] tradition of a twenty or twenty-five year's episcopate of Peter in Rome is

¹⁰ See Archibald Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:159.

¹¹ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 23-24.

¹² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 187.

¹³ *Ibid.*

unquestionably a colossal chronological mistake.”¹⁴ (5) The fact that popes have been teaching damnable heresies, worshiping idols and committing gross acts of immorality for centuries (murder, persecuting Bible-believing Christians, adultery, theft, homosexuality, sadism, etc.) alone proves that apostolic succession is a sham, a human tradition invented to acquire wealth and power.

Copyright 2004 © Brian Schwertley, Haslett, MI

[HOME PAGE](#)

¹⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991 [1910]), 1:252.