

# THE CESSATION OF MIRACULOUS GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. There are a number of lists of gifts of the Holy Spirit: Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians, 12:4-11, 28, Ephesians 4:7-11. Not all of these are miraculous or supernatural in nature (ministry, teaching, exhorting, giving, ruling, showing mercy, governments, evangelists). Among the miraculous gifts, at least one is almost universally recognized as having been limited to the first century, that of Apostle.

2. Christ had promised that signs would accompany those who believed (Mark 16:16-20). A sign is not an end within itself, but rather points to something else. In this context the sign pointed to the divine origin of the message being preached (see also Hebrews 2:1-4, 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14).

3. A miraculous gift was intended for the "common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7), but the person who had received the gift had control over the use (1 Corinthians 14:32), and could use it in a way not beneficial to the church. This is, of course, that which occasioned the writing of 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14.

4. Paul says that while the miraculous gifts would one day cease (1 Corinthians 13:8), other qualities that were more basic and substantial would continue on (faith, hope, and love - 1 Corinthians 13:13). The miraculous gifts would cease when the "perfect" ("to teleion") is come. The nature of the "perfect" has long been discussed. Some have said it is Christ. This offers some difficulty, since faith and hope and love are to continue after the perfect has come. It is difficult to see the function of at least some aspects of faith (see Hebrews 11:1), and hope (see Romans 8:24-25) after the return of Christ. Faith will be sight, and what is hoped for will have become a reality. Also, scholars suggest there is some difficulty with this interpretation in the Greek construction of the text. Dr. Frank Pack said the word "perfect" in the Greek is a neuter singular adjective used as a noun and accompanied by the Greek neuter article. It is his claim that this is not the usual reference to a person (Tongues and the Holy Spirit, p. 117). Others make the case that what is here referred to as the "perfect" is love. For the following reasons, it is this writer's belief that the "perfect" is the completed, revealed word (see John 16:13, 2 Peter 1:3, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, James 1:25).

5. There are some important parallels in the passage under discussion. Childhood is to give way to manhood. A dim or out-of-focus view or reflection is to give way to a clear reflection (face-to-face). A partial

knowledge is to give way to a full knowledge. In each instance, a continuum is suggested showing how a less perfect developmental state or condition gives way to a more perfect state or condition farther along the continuum. The principle can be diagramed as follows:

- a. **imperfect** childhood **perfect** manhood
- b. **imperfect** cloudy image **perfect** clear image
- c. **imperfect** prophecy, knowledge and tongues as a means of instruction  
**perfect** the completed and written word as a means of instruction

Note that in each instance something less perfect gives way to something more perfect of the same nature or kind. Prophecy, knowledge, and tongues were for instruction or edification (1 Corinthians 14:26-28). That they would give way to a person (Christ), or to a quality (love), seems to be a shift in kind or type (introduces something not on the same continuum), and thus not consistent with the examples given. On the other hand, the idea that prophecy, a divine infusion of knowledge, and tongues would give way to a more useable, accessible and complete instructive mode (a written one that could be freely carried around and shared), would be consistent with the parallels given. Without overly belaboring the point, it seems a principle is being given - the less perfect in the developmental process is preparatory to and is to give way to the more perfect which follows. The application would be that the miraculous, as a mean of instruction and guidance, was not the ultimate in the developmental process, but only a temporary "way station" intended to give way to something more adequate which would follow. ...just as childhood is a "way station" which merges into and gives way to adulthood. It can be readily seen that a few persons with miraculous gifts used to teach, confirm, instruct, guide, and edify, would fall short in their utility to the Church by comparison with the usefulness of the written revelation from God which everyone could take home and read and study at will. Also, the short period that one could prophecy and teach as guided by the Holy Spirit could not in such a brief time impart the whole content of God's message to the church as we have it in written form in the New Testament. Since the Corinthian letters were among the earliest of the letters contained in the New Testament, it cannot be denied that the New Testament was not complete at that time. Nor can it be denied that the passage in question does point to a time when the miraculous gifts in question would be done away. That it most easily refers to the revealed word seems to be supported at least in part by the fact that since the end of the first century, it has been consistently questioned by

many believers that the age of miracles was to continue. In addition, it seems painfully clear that no one since the first century has been able to work either the quality or number of miracles characteristic of Christ and the Apostles.

6. There are passages which indicate that it was not the intention of the Lord to continue indefinitely to work miracles. The case that is made is that once miracles are written down as a testimony to the truth of Christ and His message, that is adequate, and does not have to be repeated for every age (see John 20: 30-31, Romans 10:6-8). While on the one hand, sign seeking is discouraged in the Scriptures (Matthew 16:4, John 4:48); on the other hand, it is clearly stated that all that is needed is contained in Scripture (1 Corinthians 4:6, 2 Timothy 3:16-17). This seems sustained by the fact that as the New Testament comes nearer completion, fewer miracles are mentioned and most all are done by the Apostles. "The last recorded miracle in the New Testament occurred around A.D. 58 with the healing of Publius' father (Acts 28:7-10). From A.D. 58 to 96, when John finished the Book of Revelation, no miracle is recorded. Miracle gifts like tongues and healing are mentioned only in the earliest epistles such as 1 Corinthians. When you get into Ephesians and Romans, both of which discuss gifts of the Spirit at length, no mention is made of the miracle gifts. By that time the commonness of miracles was already looked on as something in the past because God's word and revelation were already substantially confirmed and established. It is reasonable to assume that by the end of the first century the church was committed to the Word, and tongues along with the other sign gifts had ceased to serve any purpose. The death of the apostles would also end their use since they were specifically tied to them" (2 Cor. 12:12, Heb. 2:34) (The Charismatics, J.F. MacArthur, Jr., Zondervan 1978, p. 66).

7. The New Testament challenges believers to not accept everything they are told in religion, but to test the credentials of those who speak (1 John 4:1, Revelation 2:2). Warning is very frequently given against those who use signs and wonders to deceive (Matthew 7:21-23, 24:24, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, Revelation 13:14, 16:14, 19:20). The idea of trying to use the power of the Holy Spirit for monetary gain was not unknown in the time of the Apostles (Acts 8:18-23).

8. Those who quote John 14:12-14 where Jesus says those who believe in Him will do greater works than He, are hereby challenged to prove by their works that Jesus meant miracles. If that is the meaning, when has that promise ever been fulfilled? On the other hand, that the greater works refer to the miracles of redemption and salvation in the Church through the blood of Christ seems much more reasonable. Any

person in the Kingdom is "greater" than John the baptist (although none in his/her natural state is greater...see Luke 7:28), because John died before the Kingdom came into being in Acts 2. John never had the privilege during his life of being credited with Christ's righteousness as this could not occur until after His death and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-5, 17, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Heb. 9:13-17). Therefore, we can understand that the works now possible by the word in the Kingdom are greater than even the greatest of miracles before the death of Christ and the establishment of His Kingdom/Church. It is the difference between the temporary benefit of the miracle, and the eternal benefit of being made spiritually whole in Christ.

9. Since tongues (languages) are given such prominence today, a word is in order. In Acts 2, 10, and 19 the tongues were clearly contemporary languages (note the interchange of the words tongue and dialect in Acts 2). It is clear to this writer that 1 Corinthians 12-14 also deals with contemporary tongues and not the so called ecstatic speech because:

a. The word "unknown" tongue is not in the Greek, only the usual word for tongue or language.

b. "Foreign language" makes sense if inserted throughout the passage, "ecstatic speech" does not.

c. The tongues spoken here could be translated. The Greek word "heremeneuein" in its usual use in the New Testament and the LXX means "to translate." J.G. Davies says, "...the word used by St. Paul of interpreting glossolalia carries with it the strong suggestion of translating a foreign language" (Jr. of Theological Studies, April 1952, p. 230).

d. Ecstatic speech was well known in the world of the 1st century and was widely associated with pagan religious forms (as at Delphi). It exists today among various pagan groups such as Spiritists in Brazil, and in some forms of mental illness (schizophrenia).

e. Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:11 in 1 Corinthians 14:21. Isaiah refers to the Assyrian tongue.

f. In 1 Corinthians 14:22, Paul says tongues are a sign to unbelievers. This would be true only with known languages which could be shown unknown to the speaker as at Pentecost (Acts 2).

10. It should further be stated that "tongues" are really not central to the New Testament narrative. Quoting again from MacArthur, "First

Corinthians is the only epistle where tongues are even mentioned. Paul wrote at least twelve other epistles and never mentioned tongues again. Peter never mentioned tongues; James never mentioned tongues, John never mentioned tongues. Neither did Jude. Tongues appeared briefly in the early days of the church as the new word of God was being spread and the church was being established. But once this occurred, tongues were gone. They stopped" (Ibid., p.169). MacArthur quotes a scholar-missionary, Cleon Rogers, who wrote, "It is significant that the gift of tongues is nowhere alluded to, hinted at or even found in any writings of the Post Apostolic Fathers" (Ibid.). MacArthur further states, "During the first four or five hundred years of the church, the only people reported to have spoken in "tongues" were followers of Montanus who was branded a heretic (as was) his disciple Tertullian" (Ibid.). Criswell states, "At the most, it (the gift of tongues) was a rare phenomenon found only in a few places, and, as far as we know, in only one church (Corinth), and that not a spiritual church but a carnal one filled with every problem and disorder" (The Holy Spirit in Today's World, W.A. Criswell, Zondervan, 1966, p. 211). An interesting addendum to the above is found in the report of a study of modern day "speaking in tongues" commissioned by the American Lutheran Church. Dr. John Kildahl, a clinical psychologist and Dr. Paul Qualben, a psychiatrist conducted the ten year study. Dr. Kildahl who wrote the report had this to say of his impressions: "Tongue speaking does not look very uniquely spiritual to me after many experiences of watching people teach other people how to speak in tongues. I have observed the same routine everywhere I have been: (1) a meeting devoted to intense concentration on tongue-speaking, followed by (2) an atmosphere of heightened suggestibility to the words of the tongue-speaking leader, after which (3) the initiate is able to make the sounds he is instructed to make. It is the same procedure that a competent hypnotist employs. Like the hypnotist, the tongue-speaker leader succeeds with some subjects and with others does not. I have reached the conclusion that tongue-speaking is a learned phenomenon"

11. By way of confirmation of the above, this writer was at a symposium in San Jose, Costa Rica on Wycliff translation activities in Latin America several years ago. After his lecture, the speaker who was over the Wycliff program in Latin America asked if there were questions. I took the occasion to ask him how many persons with the gift of tongues had helped them in their translation work. His answer was that none ever had, I then asked how many missionaries he had encountered who had the gift of tongues and could speak a native language without having to study it. He said he had personally never encountered any. God was concerned on the Day of Pentecost that all present receive His message to them in their own languages (Acts 2). Therefore, he provided the Apostles with the languages represented in

their audience. I believe if the miraculous gifts were intended for today, God would certainly provide the linguistic abilities necessary to get the message to remote peoples in their language immediately rather than taking ten or more years as it does today.

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