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THE HOLY SPIRIT

CESSATION OR CONTINUATION OF THE GIFTS?

Lesson 5

Christians have disagreed throughout the history of the Christian Church as to whether all, none or some of the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament are functioning in the Church today.

There are many views but only four essentially have merit: 1) Some Christians hold that all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament have passed out of existence, and the Holy Spirit merely uses our natural talents today; 2) Some Christians believe that all the gifts are active in the church today with full intensity, just as they were in the first century church; 3) Some Christians believe that some spiritual gifts, like apostle, prophet, tongues, healing, miracles and prophecy were temporary gifts that were needed only in the first century but have passed out of existence, and 4) Still others like myself state that all the gifts are potentially in the church today but not all may be active or operate with the same intensity they did in New Testament times. All gifts are potentially in the universal church, but some may not be active at any give time in a local church.

Why is it important that we study these positions? The goal of all our doctrine should be love for one another. We must learn to love the brothers and sisters that do not agree with us on certain issues. We are commanded to love all true believers in Christ, and this is how the world will know we are Christ's disciples. *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (Jn. 13:34-35).*

THE CESSATIONIST'S POSITION

Those who believe that all the extraordinary gifts like prophecy, tongues, miracles, healing, etc. have passed away today argue their case a certain way.

Sign Gifts for the Apostles

The spectacular gifts (prophesy, tongues, miracles, healing, faith, interpretation of tongues) were given to the original Twelve Apostles as sign-gifts for the propagation of the gospel and/or attestation to the Apostles in the first century. *"Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."* After the church was established, there was no need for Apostles and Prophets. *"The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance: (2*

Cor. 12:12). The Apostle's or apostolic representatives alone had the extra-ordinary gifts. “***This salvation . . . was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will***” (Heb. 2:3-4).

Closed Canon

Once the church had matured and/or received the inspired New Testament canon of Scripture, there was no longer any need for the spectacular gifts.

Gifts Ceased

The gifts of tongues and prophecy have ceased, and we can assume the other spectacular gifts have also ceased. “***Love never faith. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away***” (1 Cor. 13:8).

Church History

Church history bears this out for after the second century, there is very little if any emphasis on the spectacular gifts.

THE CONTINUATIONIST'S POSITION

Those who believe that all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament are in existence today argue their case a certain way.

No Clear Statement

No Scripture asserts clearly that any of the spectacular gifts were given only for the purpose of attesting the Apostle's ministry and message.

Some Gifts Were for Edification

“***Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7). “But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort” (1 Cor. 14:3).***

Some Gifts Continue But Not the Office

Today there is no official office of Apostle. Only the original Twelve lived with Christ, saw His miracles and witnessed His resurrection. Only the Twelve will sit on the throne judging over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28) and in the eternal city will have twelve foundations with names of the Twelve Apostles (Rev. 22:14). Again, one must distinguish between the office and the gift of apostle. Technically the office of Apostle passed away but the gift of apostle still continues on in a non-technical sense. The word “apostle” means “sent one.” It

would be equivalent to the modern day missionary or church planter. We know the Bible refers to James (Gal. 1:19) and Barnabas (Acts 14:14) as apostles. Others of lesser status were also called apostles such as Epaphroditus (Philip. 2:25) and Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16:7).

This same kind of argument could be made for the office of Prophet. There is no official office of Prophet today that gives forth inspired revelation without error. However, the gift of prophecy could be in the church to a lesser degree today for encouragement of the church.

Gifts Continue Until the Second Coming of Christ

I Corinthians 1:7 implies that the Corinthian Christian had all the gifts in their body and they would continue until the Second Advent of Christ. ***"Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed" (1 Cor. 1:7).***

All Gifts Could Cease

"This salvation . . . was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will" (Heb. 2:3-4). This verse not only speaks of signs, wonders and miracles but “the gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” If the sign gifts are temporary, then why not all the spiritual gifts?

Experience

While experience is not a good argument for any doctrinal position, it should be noted that about 360 million Christians today claim to believe in and practice the ordinary and extraordinary gifts.

Explanation of 1 Corinthians 13:8

This verse clearly teaches that tongues and prophecy will cease, the question is when will it happen? They will cease ***“when perfection comes” and “the imperfect disappears.”*** It is a time when ***“we shall see Christ face to face”*** and the Christian ***“shall be known fully, even as he (I) is fully known” (1 Cor. 13:9-12).*** Most commentators take this as a reference to the Second Advent of Christ.

Some remind us that 1 Corinthians 13:8 says, ***“Where there are tongues, they will be stilled (cease).”*** This is in the middle voice in the Greek and could be translated “shall still themselves” or “cease themselves,” indicating that the gift of tongues will cease in and of itself. They believe there is strong evidence that tongues passed off the scene of history after the first century.

Several points need to be pointed out. *First*, when it says tongues will cease themselves (middle voice), it does not necessarily mean the subject stops under his own power. For instance, when Jesus rebuked the wind and the raging waters, the storm stopped. ***“He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm” (Lk. 8:24).*** The verb “subsided” is the same verb as “to still” or “to cease.” It too is in the middle voice, yet the raging sea did not stop under its own power. Christ stopped it by His mighty power. So Christ will stop all gifts at the Second Advent. *Second*, Neither tongues nor prophecy nor

miracles ceased at the end of the first century. They continued at least into the third century and have recurred sporadically if not consistently ever since. The relative disappearance of these gifts during after the fourth century can be attributed to their abuse in certain circles.

CONDITIONS FOR THE USE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

While all twenty or so spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament could be in the church today, there are five fundamental points that qualify this position: 1) The canon of scripture of the Old and New Testaments is closed and scriptural revelation is full, complete, supreme and final; therefore, Scripture alone may bind the conscience; 2) There are no more Apostles or Prophets who speak or write inspired, infallible communication; 3) all spiritual gifts are to be tested by and submitted to the infallible, inspired Scripture; 4) No person with the any gift can inerrantly predict the future; and 5) Much of the modern day charismatic movement abuses and misuses the spiritual gifts as did the Church of Corinth (1 Cor. 12-14).