

Purpose of the Gifts



Gifts of the Spirit (Part 1)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you at the beginning of a new week, sharing with you out of truths that life has taught me, truths that have made the difference between success and failure in my life and can do the same for you.

Let me begin by saying "Thank you" to those of you who have been writing to me. Before I finish this talk, we'll be giving you a mailing address to which you may write. Feel free to share with us your personal needs, your problems, your prayer requests.

Today, and for the rest of this week, I'll be speaking to you on a very interesting and important subject: "The Gifts of the Holy Spirit." These gifts have always been there in the Bible and they have always been available to the Church. And yet for a long while, among the majority of Christians, they have gone unrecognized and unused. Then in the last few decades there has been a spontaneous rediscovery of these gifts, with the result that in almost every section of Christendom today, across the whole spectrum of denominations, we find increasing numbers of men and women, ministers and lay people, whose lives and ministries have been revitalized, re-empowered and redirected by the exercise of these spiritual gifts.

In my first talk today, I'm going to speak about the nature and the purpose of these spiritual gifts. I'll begin by reading from 1 Corinthians 12:7–11, where Paul lists the gifts. He lists nine specific gifts of the Spirit, beginning at verse 7:

> "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." (NAS)

Let me go back and just read out the list of gifts without adding any other words. The first one, the word of wisdom; the second, the word of knowledge; third, faith; fourth, the gifts of healing; the fifth, the effecting of miracles; the sixth, prophecy; the seventh, distinguishing of spirits; the eighth, various kinds of tongues; the ninth, the interpretation of tongues.

Now I want to point out four important facts that concern all these gifts. The first fact is that they are gifts. They cannot be earned or worked for. They are not merit badges. They are given by God at His sovereign discretion and they must be received by us by a simple response of faith. It doesn't take any time to acquire spiritual gifts.

Secondly, both at the beginning and the end of that list, Paul uses the phrase "to each one." At the beginning he says, "to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." And then at the end he says, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." So both at the beginning and the end of that list of spiritual gifts Paul emphasizes that they are for each one—they are available to all believers. My personal conviction is that God wants all believers to participate in the exercise of these gifts. They are not reserved for a certain denomination or a spiritual few or a privileged minority. They are for each one.

The third fact is that Paul describes these gifts by a key word "manifestation." This is what distinguishes this particular way that the Spirit moves in our lives from the many other ways that He moves. The word "manifestation"—that indicates something that is perceptible by human senses. The Holy Spirit Himself, as a person indwelling the believer, is invisible. He cannot be perceived by the senses, but through these gifts the Holy Spirit manifests Himself through a believer in a space/time world. As a result of these gifts, we are aware that the Holy Spirit is there because of what we actually perceive with our senses. So the key word there is "manifestation." Every one of these gifts has an impact somehow in a space/time world that can be perceived by our senses.

The fourth fact is that the gifts are supernatural. They are manifestations of God Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit and they always are on a higher level than mere human ability or education would enable us to achieve on our own.

Let me repeat those four facts. First of all, they are gifts—they cannot be earned. Secondly, they are available to each one. Thirdly, the key word is "manifestation." They produce results that can be perceived by our senses. And fourthly, they are always supernatural. They are always on a level higher than we can achieve by our own natural ability.

Now the next thing I want to say to help you get a grasp on these gifts is that for the purposes of our consideration and throughout this week, I'll be dividing them up into three groups—three groups each containing three gifts.

The first group is the gifts of revelation, and under this heading we have the word of wisdom, word of knowledge, and the distinguishing or discerning of spirits.

The second group I will call the gifts of power. Under this heading we have faith, miracles, and healings.

The third group are the vocal gifts, gifts that necessarily operate through human vocal organs. Under this heading we have tongues, the interpretation of tongues, and prophecy.

Now I want to speak to you about the purpose for which these gifts are made available to us by God. I want to suggest to you four purposes which they fulfill. The first one is that the gifts make room for God's sovereignty. This is something that contemporary Christianity does not always make much room for. But God is in supreme control of His church and He doesn't want anything in the church which is purely under human direction and leaves no room for His intervention or overruling. But through these supernatural gifts, God can intervene and manifest His sovereignty, His ultimate supreme control of the whole church.

Secondly, the gifts, as I've described them, lift us above the realm of our natural ability. This is very important. I once set out to discover for myself what place the manifested supernatural had to play in Christianity and in the life and work of the church. I decided that the best record to go to was the book of Acts, which is the only actual scriptural historical record of Christianity in action. So I read through the book of Acts, which has 28 chapters, trying to find out what would happen if I removed all reference to the manifestly supernatural. Do you know what I discovered at the end of reading those 28 chapters? If I removed all reference to the supernatural, not one of those 28 chapters would be left intact. So I became intellectually convinced that according to the New Testament that according to the New Testament, Christianity is a supernatural faith. And we can never talk of New Testament Christianity that is lived out purely on the natural level.

The third reason of purpose for the gifts is that they confirm our testimony of Jesus Christ. This is very clearly stated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:4–8, where he says this to the Corinthian Christians:

> "I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched by Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (NAS)

Notice what Paul is thanking God for on behalf of the Corinthian Christians, that the testimony of Christ was confirmed, or strengthened, or established, among them and it was done by the fact that they were not lacking in any of the gifts. And he particularly specifies gifts of speech (that is what we would call the vocal gifts), the gifts of knowledge (what we would call the gifts of revelation). So we see that one main purpose of these gifts is to confirm or strengthen the testimony of Jesus Christ in His people, the church.

We also notice that Paul says that these Christians were not lacking in any gift awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. And then he says, "God shall confirm you unto the end." In other words, Paul clearly envisages that the operation of the spiritual gifts will continue in the church until the end of the age.

The fourth reason for these gifts, or the purpose, is that they enable all believers to contribute for the common good, which is the reason Paul stated for them in 1 Corinthians 12. It's very significant that immediately after the listing of the gifts he speaks about the body and its members. Because the spiritual gifts are one of the primary ways in which the members of the body are enabled to contribute for the common good.

In 1 Corinthians 14:26, Paul says this about the coming together of the church:

> "What is the outcome then brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification." (NAS)

So you see that when the gifts are available, believers do not come to a meeting just to get or just to listen, but they get to contribute. To contribute out of those supernatural spiritual abilities which they have received through these gifts.

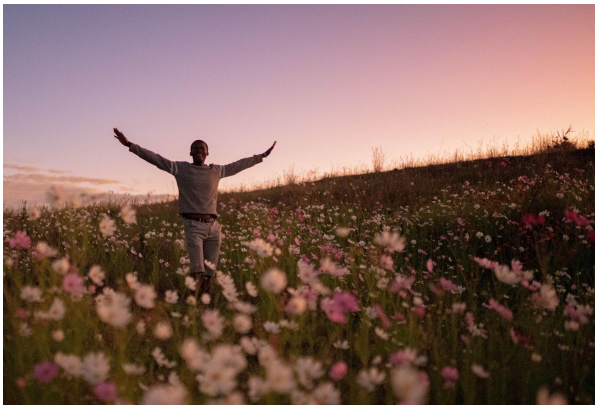
Now our time is up for today. But I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time, and I'll be continuing with this theme of spiritual gifts. Tomorrow I'll be dealing with the first of the gifts of revelation—that is the word of wisdom.

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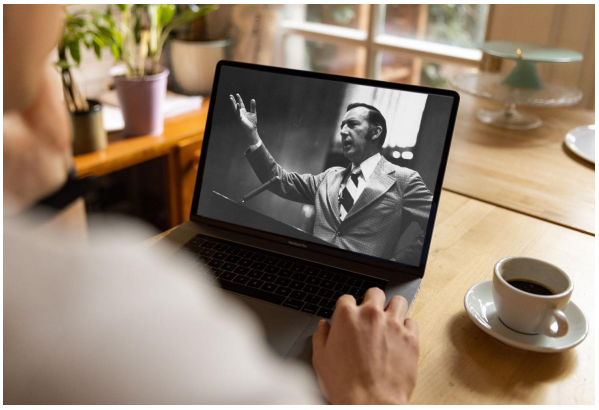
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