

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit



Part 5/6

Who Is the Holy Spirit?
By Derek Prince

In this Teaching Letter series, *Who Is the Holy Spirit?*, our objective has been to increase our understanding of the role and impact of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This teaching focuses on the wonderful gifts available to each of us as believers through the Holy Spirit.

Earlier in this series, I pointed out that the servant of Abraham who found Isaac's bride was a type of the Holy Spirit. In that story, when Abraham sent his servant from Canaan to Paddan Aram to seek a bride for Isaac, the servant took ten camels loaded with gifts, including precious jewelry.

When the servant found the young woman who was to become Isaac's bride, his first act was to place on her face a very conspicuous nose jewel. By accepting this gift, Rebecca committed herself to become Isaac's bride.

Had she refused the gift, she would have rejected and dishonored Isaac, eliminating her opportunity to be his bride. Today, in a similar way, God has sent His Holy Spirit with abundant provision for the bride of His Son Jesus—the Church. Included in that provision are nine beautiful spiritual gifts. By accepting these gifts, the Church is marked out as the one who is committed to become the Bride of Christ.

Nine Supernatural Gifts

The nine gifts of the Holy Spirit are listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. To bring out their exact meaning, I offer the following literal translation:

1. A word of wisdom;
2. A word of knowledge;
3. Faith;
4. Gifts of healings;
5. Workings of miracles (literally, powers);
6. Prophecy;
7. Discernings of spirits;
8. Kinds of tongues;
9. Interpretation of tongues.

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All these gifts are “manifestations.” The Holy Spirit Himself is invisible. But through these gifts, He impacts our senses in ways that we can see, hear, or feel.

All of these gifts are “for the profit of all” (1 Corinthians 12:7). Through them, Christians can minister to one another. They all serve some practical purpose. They are tools, not toys. All these gifts are supernatural. They are not the product of natural ability or special education.

Available to All

It is often suggested that these gifts were withdrawn at the close of the apostolic age and are not available today. However, Paul thanked God for the Christians at Corinth because “you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed” (1 Corinthians 1:7). Obviously, therefore, Christians are expected to continue to exercise spiritual gifts until the return of Christ.

The first two gifts Paul lists—a word of wisdom and a word of knowledge—are related in a practical way. A word of knowledge gives us the facts about a situation. Then a word of wisdom shows us how God wants us to deal with that situation.

Some of the gifts are plural in both parts: e.g. gifts of healings; workings of miracles; discernings of spirits; kinds of tongues. This indicates that each healing, each miracle, each discerning, each utterance in a certain tongue (language) is a gift. If a certain gift regularly manifests itself through a certain person, we may say that the person has that gift.

Received—Not Earned

It must be emphasized that all these are gifts of God’s grace. They are received by faith. We can never earn them. We can never be “good enough” to exercise them.

In 1941 in the middle of the night, I had a powerful, life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ in a barrack room of the British Army. About a week later, in the same barrack room, I spoke for the first time in an unknown tongue. Then —quite unexpectedly—I went on to speak out the “interpretation” in beautiful, poetic English. It was an outline of God’s plan for my life and ministry, which was fulfilled—stage by stage—throughout the course of my life.

From 1957 to 1961, I served as Principal of a Teacher Training College for African teachers in Kenya. During that time, we had a sovereign visitation of the Holy Spirit in our college. In meetings with my students, I saw all nine gifts of the Spirit in operation among us at various times. I also saw two of my students—on different occasions—raised from the dead. They both testified later of what they had experienced while their spirits were out of their bodies.

Workings of Miracles

Later, in America, I received an unexpected “gift” for ministering to people who had leg problems. As I seated them in a chair and held their feet in my hands, the shorter leg would grow out in front of my eyes and they would be healed. Some people, however, suggested that this was not an appropriate ministry for a dignified, scholarly Bible teacher. I decided to ask the Lord about this, and I felt He gave me this answer: “I have given you a gift. There are two things you can do with it. You can use it and get more. Or you can fail to use it and lose it.” There and then I decided to go on using what God had given me, and indeed I did receive more.

On occasion I have seen a short leg grow out as much as two inches. Also, the release of God’s supernatural power in this way triggered other miracles. In one place, without any special prayer being offered, a man was healed of three major infirmities and delivered from nicotine addiction.

I remember one lady who came with a paper bag in her hand and a 1½-inch buildup on the heel of one shoe. When I took her feet in my hands, her short leg grew out 1½ inches. Then she opened her paper bag and took out a pair of new shoes with perfectly normal heels. They fitted her perfectly. I eventually decided that the scriptural name for my gift was “workings of miracles (power).”

Limitations of Spiritual Gifts

It has been exciting to witness and recount the ways in which the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit have been manifested. At the same time, however, it is important to understand that there are definite limits to what we can expect from spiritual gifts.

First of all, spiritual gifts are limited to the present life. Speaking of the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and the word of knowledge, Paul says:

> But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. (1 Corinthians 13:8-10, niv)

We are still living in the "imperfect" age. But when we pass from time to eternity and then put on our resurrection bodies, we will no longer need the fragmentary blessings that come to us through tongues or prophecy or a word of knowledge. The same applies to other gifts such as healings or miracles. Our resurrection bodies will never need them!

If people are excessively preoccupied with spiritual gifts, it often indicates that they are more concerned with the matters of time than eternity. Such people need to heed Paul's warning: "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:19, niv).

A Matter of Character

More important still, the exercise of spiritual gifts gives no indication of a person's character. Let me illustrate with a crude example. Suppose a person who is lazy, deceitful, and conceited receives an unearned gift of one million dollars. His character will not be changed at all. He will still be lazy, deceitful, conceited. In fact, he may even be more conceited because he has a million dollars in his bank account!

The same applies to a person who receives a dramatic spiritual gift such as prophecy or healings or miracles. If that person was weak and unstable before, he or she will be just as weak and unstable afterwards. But this person's new gift will give greater influence with people and the added responsibility of exercising it in a way that is righteous and pleasing to God.

A major problem in Christianity is that people tend to assess ministers more by their gifts than by their character. Yet repeated experience has demonstrated that it is possible for a person to exercise dramatic, impressive gifts and yet have a very defective character. Sometimes such people may even use their gifts to cover up the imperfections of their characters.

As a young preacher, I greatly admired an older man who had a spectacular ministry of miracles. He also taught very forcefully that it is possible for a Christian to live without ever sinning. Yet eventually, he divorced his wife, married his secretary, and died an alcoholic. Other well-known and successful preachers have experienced similar personal tragedies.

Fruits—Not Gifts

When confronted with cases such as these, people often respond, "But surely if a person misuses one of these gifts, God would take it away!" But the answer is, "No!" The gifts of the Spirit are exactly what the name implies: genuine gifts. Not loans with conditions attached or a repayment schedule.

> For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. (Romans 11:29)

Once we receive one of these gifts, we are free to use it, misuse it, or just not use it at all. Ultimately, however, God will require an account of what we have done—or not done—with the gifts He has given us through His Holy Spirit.

We need to always bear in mind the admonition of Jesus:

> You will know them by their fruits. (Matthew 7:16)

Not by their gifts, but by their fruits—which will be the focus of our next Teaching Legacy letter.

Another Warning

Jesus followed up this admonition in Matthew 7 with an explicit warning—that the exercise of spiritual gifts is not necessarily a passport to heaven:

> Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matthew 7:21–23)

This warning indicates that it is possible for a person to exercise spiritual gifts and at the same time to "practice lawlessness." What is "lawlessness?" It is an arrogant assumption that God's moral and ethical standards no longer apply to those who are able to exercise gifts of supernatural power.

How Do We Respond?

When we see this arrogance regarding the gifts of the Spirit, it confronts us with the need to make difficult personal decisions. How should we respond?

First of all, we must keep in mind Paul's warning to Timothy:

> Do not ... share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure. (1 Timothy 5:22)

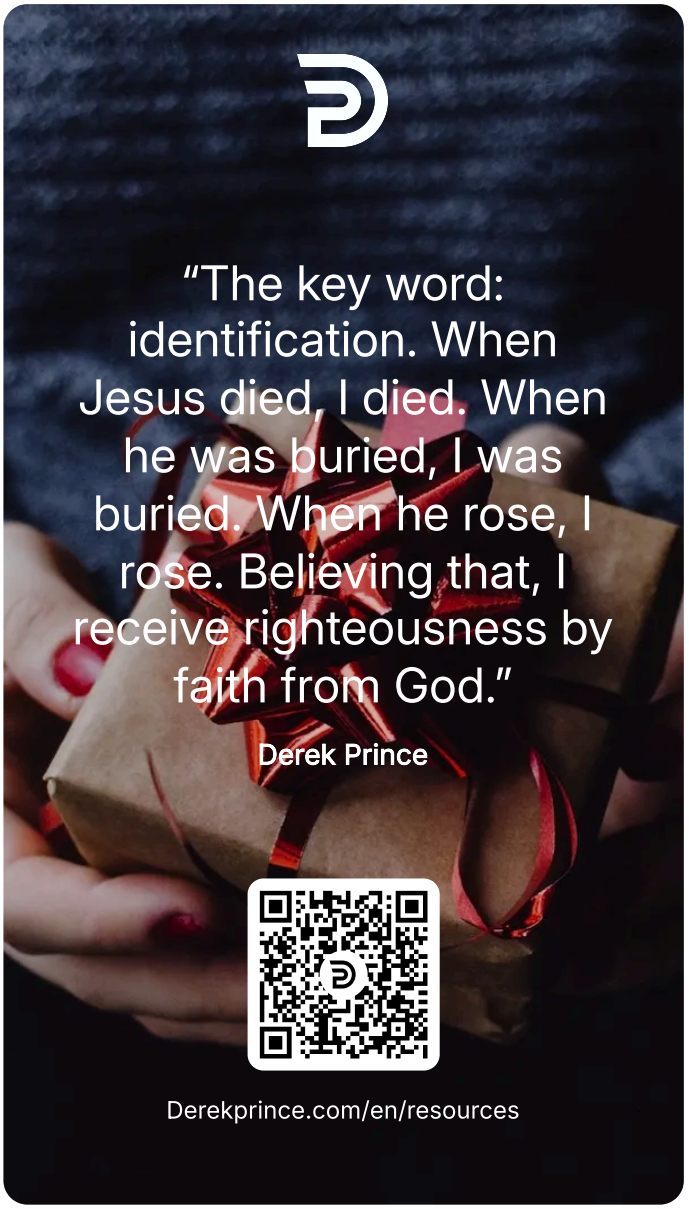
Second, in regard to these unethical ministries, there is the reminder Jesus gave—that heaven is for those who do the will of the Father. You and I need to ask ourselves: "What is the will of God in my life? What does my Father expect of me?"

For my part, I feel the Lord has given me a clear, simple answer: "This is the will of God, that you should be holy." (1 Thessalonians 4:3) To this the Holy Spirit has added a warning: "Without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14, niv). It is my determination to "pursue holiness."

How about you? Would you take a moment now to commit yourself to the Lord in the proper use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

Dear Lord, Thank You that You have made these wonderful gifts of the Holy Spirit available to me. I receive them now, and ask that You would help me to move in them properly and humbly. I commit myself to this path, and ask for Your guidance. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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