



QUEST LESSON F-2

GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT TO THE CHURCH

The Problem: During His ministry Jesus promised that, after His resurrection from the dead, He would give His faithful disciples special gifts so that they could be effective witnesses for Him. Some of these gifts had been promised hundreds of years before by Old Testament prophets. Jesus taught that, after His return to heaven, the Holy Spirit would be His representative in every believing heart. The Spirit would bring comfort and spiritual strength, and He would give to each person special gifts needed by the church in the performance of its evangelistic mission. These gifts would be so liberally distributed that non-believers would be convinced that there is power in the Christian Gospel.

As soon as we begin discussing this subject of spiritual gifts, we are confronted by many questions. Some Christians are convinced that, as a validation of acceptance by God, every believer should demonstrate that he possesses certain major spiritual gifts. The gift of speaking in tongues is thought to be a sign that the individual is genuinely filled with the Spirit. And all are expected to demonstrate this ability as an indication that the Lord has taken over in their lives. In the absence of this special gift of tongues, there is supposed to be something wrong with the individual's Christian experience.

We have no interest in depreciating anyone else's faith or Christian practice. Our concern is to know what the Bible teaches on this subject. What does the Bible say about spiritual gifts? Is everyone expected to have the same gifts, or are there individual differences? Is the gift of tongues for everyone or only for some believers? According to the Bible, what is involved in having the gift of tongues? Are the "tongues" languages known to man, or some kind of ecstatic utterance that is understood only by the Holy Spirit? When a person is exercising the gift of tongues is his mind functioning so that he knows what he is saying? Or is his mind dormant because he is in a trance-like state? Is the person speaking in tongues able to control his feelings and lapse into silence if that is desired? Or is he so possessed by the Spirit that he cannot control his utterances? | What was the purpose of the gift of tongues in the apostolic church? We are not investigating the gift of tongues as practiced in any contemporary church, or in the life of any particular person. We are investigating what the Bible says this gift, and other spiritual gifts, are intended by God to involve.

Naturally every genuine Christian believer is keen to receive all the blessings that Christ wishes to bestow upon him. No one wants to miss out on some spiritual gift because of unbelief, or sin in the life, or lack of earnest seeking for the Lord. On the other hand, no one who is really serious about being a genuine Christian wishes to practice some kind of spurious, counterfeit spiritual gift. By the Word of God we are all made aware that Satan and his demons are masters of counterfeit. We must be sure that the spiritual gifts we possess come from the Holy Spirit, not from "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2).

For this reason, our only safety is to search the Scriptures for an understanding of God's will and way in respect to spiritual gifts in general, and speaking in tongues in particular.

Objectives

First, we note that the gift of a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit was promised long before it occurred.

Second, we study the events of the day of Pentecost, after the resurrection of Jesus.

Third, we consider the special gifts of the Spirit promised to the church.

Fourth, we discover the Bible teaching in regard to the gift of prophecy. We shall see how both the Old and New Testaments define this gift.

Fifth, we study the gift of tongues in the light of the previous four sections.

I. The Gift Of The Holy Spirit Promised

The disciples of Jesus had every reason to expect a special remarkable manifestation of the Holy Spirit after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. They knew that God's promises were sure to be fulfilled.

The Word

1. What special gift from God did Old Testament prophets predict for the church? [doe] 2:28-31; Isaiah 44:3.
2. According to John the Baptist, what special baptism would Christ provide? Matthew 3:11.
3. What promise did Jesus give before His death? John 14:16-18.
4. After His resurrection, what did Jesus instruct His disciples to do? Acts 1:4-5.

Explanation: Joel and Isaiah wrote their prophecies centuries before Jesus' day. Joel foresaw a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the people of God before the end of time. It is interesting to compare Joel 2:30-31 with Matthew 24:29-31. We shall discover that Joel's prophecy is subject to a dual interpretation; it applied at the beginning of the Christian era, and it will apply again very near to the end. The crucial issue is that Joel predicted such an outpouring of the Spirit upon God's people that phenomenal things would result: "your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions." (Joel 2:28).

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ. It was his special work to prepare Israel for the ministry of the Messiah that was about to begin. He told the people that the special baptism of the Holy Spirit would come from Christ.

Towards the end of His ministry, Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit after His resurrection and ascension to heaven. The Holy Spirit, Jesus said, would dwell within every believer, would teach the truth to the believer (compare John 16:13), and would be Christ's own presence in the heart (John 14:18). The union of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is so close that the presence of One is the presence of the other two (compare John 14:23).

Immediately before His ascension, Jesus commanded His disciples to remain in Jerusalem studying and praying until the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit would occur.

Relevance: The same promises are for us today. If we turn to the Lord with all our hearts, study the Word, and seek Him in prayer, we shall receive the same wonderful gift of the Spirit.

II. The Outpouring Of The Spirit On The Day Of Pentecost

The long expected promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection of Christ. This day was known in ancient Israel as the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22), of First Fruits (Numbers 28:26), and Harvest (Exodus 23:16). It was the festival of the wheat harvest and one of the three festivals at which all Hebrew men were required to "appear before the Lord" in Jerusalem (Exodus 23:17). As observed through Israel's history, the day was a type of the events that occurred 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus.

The Word

5. When the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the early Christians, what happened? Acts 2:1-4.
6. What were the "other tongues" that the Spirit-filled disciples spoke? Acts 2:5-8.
7. What was Peter's explanation of the phenomenon? Acts 2:14-21.
8. What great result followed this special manifestation of the Holy Spirit? Acts 2:37-41.

Explanation: There were three remarkable manifestations of the Holy Spirit's presence on the day of Pentecost. First, there was a sound like a "rushing mighty wind" (verse 2). That was very appropriate because the New Testament word for Spirit is pneuma that means "wind," or "breath." The breath of God was dramatically breathed upon the waiting

disciples. Second, the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of "cloven tongues like as of fire," that rested upon each disciple (verse 3), Third, the disciples, filled with the Spirit, began to speak with other tongues (verse 4).

These other tongues were definitely known foreign languages, because the foreigners present in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost heard the disciples speaking their languages. And there were many such languages represented (verses 5-11).

The Lord had given the disciples a gift that would make it possible for them to communicate the Gospel effectively and rapidly to those who could not speak their native Aramaic, or even Hebrew. Since the Jews had been scattered all around the Mediterranean world, they had taken on the languages of the countries in which they were living. Now to their surprise they heard their languages spoken very capably by the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. That was a very effective sign that God was, indeed, with Christ's followers, and that their message was the truth.

In his explanation of the occurrence, Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32. This great outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. But since Joel predicted the outpouring of the Spirit to precede the last signs before the coming of Jesus, we can expect another fulfillment just before the end of time. It seems quite evident that this is what John the Revelator is speaking about when he says that a mighty angel will come towards the end of time, who will enlighten the whole world with his glory (Revelation 18:1). It is then that the Gospel will go with great power to the whole world (Matthew 24:14), and the final invitation will be given for people to leave the religions of man and accept the religion of Jesus Christ.

The results they saw on the day of Pentecost will be repeated a short time before Jesus' second coming. Thousands of people were convicted of sin and responded to the pleas of the disciples that they should accept Christ as Lord and Savior.

Relevance: All that happened then will happen again. The purpose of the gift of tongues was to make it possible for the disciples to teach the Gospel to foreigners. The Lord can do that again if He so chooses, so that the last-day message can be more quickly heralded around the world. But we cannot tell the Lord how best to facilitate the preaching of the message! He knows best in such matters. We can request the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us, and we can be sure that the promise will be fulfilled to us also (Acts 2:39). Then we will have great power and effectiveness as witnesses for Christ.

III. The Special Gifts Of The Spirit

There were many gifts that the Holy Spirit imparted to early Christians. As we study these we are impressed that no one person could have them all. They were not given to exalt man, but to make it possible for the Gospel to be taken rapidly to the whole world.

The Word

9. When Christian believers receive the Holy Spirit into their hearts, what does He impart to them? For what purpose? Ephesians 4:7-8, 11-16.
10. Do all believers have the same gift? What are some of the gifts bestowed? 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 29-31.
11. How did Paul illustrate the importance of co-operation between Christians having varying spiritual gifts? 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.
12. What is the most important spiritual gift to be possessed by every believer? 1 Corinthians 13:1-13.

Explanation: Each Christian believer is given some gift of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:7; 1 Corinthians 12: These gifts may qualify a person for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12), or they may qualify him to be a dedicated lay worker (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). One person is given the gift of wisdom, another knowledge, another faith, and so on. The point is that the Holy Spirit works through the talents of the individual believer making it possible for him to achieve his full potential as a worker for Christ.

Included are the gifts of prophecy, of tongues speaking, and interpretation of tongues. What was involved in these three gifts we will discover in our next two sections of this study.

Some people are qualified by their special spiritual gift to be leaders in the church, pastors, evangelists, teachers, and administrators. Others are given less conspicuous, but nonetheless vital roles to play. Paul's point is that, although not everyone is given the same gift (1 Corinthians 12:29-31), it is Christ's wish that all co-operate, as the various parts of our physical body work together to bring us health and efficiency (1 Corinthians 12:14-21). No part of the body, however humble or insignificant it may seem to be, is unimportant. Just so, each part of Christ's body is to respect each other part, so that there can be Christian harmony and love in the performance of the tasks given us by heaven.

The most important gift of all is love! (1 Corinthians 13). Every believer is to manifest that gift all the time. It supersedes all other gifts in significance and effectiveness. It is the most vitally important evangelistic tool in the Christian church. To love as Christ loved (John 15:12) means to allow Him to live in your heart by the Holy Spirit and work through you for others (Galatians 2:20). No other spiritual gift has any real significance apart from love. Without the love of Christ reigning in our hearts, our witness for Him is meaningless.

Relevance: There are various gifts of the Spirit, and no one has them all. The Lord chooses who shall have which gift. All are to have the gift of love, but all do not have some of the other gifts. The obvious implication is that, if someone lacks the capacity to speak in tongues, that does not suggest that his relationship with Christ is at fault.

IV. The Gift Of Prophecy

Here is a gift that everyone may have in one sense but not in another. The word "prophecy," as used in Scripture is ambiguous. It means two different things. Let us note what the Bible says about it.

The Word

13. Next to love, what spiritual gift did Paul urge believers to seek? 1 Corinthians 14:1.
14. What two kinds of divinely appointed prophets were there in Old Testament times? Numbers 12:6; 2 Kings 2:3-7, 15; (compare 1 Samuel 10:5, 10-11; 19:20).
15. Give two examples of prophets since the time of Jesus who have received inspired visions and dreams from God? Revelation 1:1-3, 10-20; (compare 2 Corinthians 12:1-7).
16. What was the function of the second kind of prophets in the early Christian church? 1 Corinthians 14:3, 24, 31; Acts 19:6.
17. How long will both kinds of prophets be needed in the church? Ephesians 4:11-13; Joel 2:28-31.

Explanation: 1 Corinthians 14:1 reads in the Revised Standard Version: "Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy." Love is the supreme gift for all believers, and prophecy is next in importance. Prophecy is a gift that all are to exercise (1 Corinthians 14:31), considered as the gift of explaining the truths already revealed by inspired prophets. There have always been two kinds of prophecy: (i) that of prophets who receive direct, special revelations from the Lord; (ii) that of all Christian believers who, guided by the Holy Spirit, teach the truths of the Word of God to others. When Paul urges the Corinthian believers to seek the gift of prophecy, he does not mean that they should all covet the privilege of having visions and dreams, or direct, special revelations from the throne of grace, as were given to Moses, Isaiah, John the Revelator, and other Bible prophets. He means that they should all seek the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit so that they can explain to others the truths of Scripture.

Both kinds of prophets will be needed in the church until Jesus comes. Certainly Joel's statement (Joel 2:28-31) proves conclusively that the Lord intends to give special visions and dreams to some of his servants a short time before the second coming of Jesus. And, of course, the church will always need the kind of prophets of whom Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians chapter 14. Each of us is to seek for the Holy Spirit's guidance and inspiration as we study and explain to others the Word of God.

Relevance: In 1 Corinthians chapter 14, the apostle Paul is concerned that the church be edified by Spirit directed exposition of the Word. His point is that only as people can understand what is spoken will they be built up in the faith. Prophecy, in the sense of explanation of the Scriptures, and sharing with others the special blessings that the Lord has bestowed upon us, is a vital activity for the edification of others. Hence, we are all to seek for this gift. But Paul is not implying here that all are to be prophets in the sense of having direct revelations from heaven.

V. The Gift Of Tongues

Apart from Acts chapter 2, the important New Testament chapter dealing with the gift of tongues is 1 Corinthians chapter 14. We turn now to this chapter to find what Paul means by the gift of tongues.

The Word

18. What did Paul mean when he said that the person speaking in another tongue (language) speaks "in the spirit"? 1 Corinthians 14:2, 4, 14-17.
19. What did Paul mean when he said that "the understanding" of the tongues speaker is "unfruitful." 1 Corinthians 14:14, 16-17.
20. Was the person speaking in tongues in an ecstatic state that he could not control? What was he instructed to do? 1 Corinthians 14:27-33.
21. When only was the gift of tongues to be used in the church? What was its purpose? 1 Corinthians 14:12, 22, 23, 27, 28.

Explanation: When Paul said that the person with the gift of tongues speaks "in the spirit" (verse 2), he meant that he speaks with his mind, understanding what he is saying, and receiving personal edification from the message. Other people could not understand him because they did not know the language he was speaking. So they were not edified. Edification, or spiritual blessing from the message, was associated with understanding. People are not blessed by that which is unintelligible to them. Since the tongues speaker "edifieth himself" (verse 4), he understood what he was saying and it had spiritual meaning for him.

The key verse in the chapter is verse 14. A study of the important words in the verse ("spirit" and "understanding" KJV) reveals that, because of their possible meanings, and the immediate context in which they are used, the verse is correctly translated: "For if I pray in a language, my mind (faculty of comprehension) prays, but my meaning" 7s unproductive (useless, fruitless)." This translation raises four questions:

1. How can we be sure that the underlined words are correct translations of the original Greek words? The two words are mind" (Greek: pneuma) and "meaning" (Greek: nous). Let us take note of how those two words are used in the Greek Scriptures.
 - a. Pneuma, often translated "spirit," when applied to mankind refers to his inner self, including the emotions, intellectual functions, and attitudes of will. In both the Septuagint (LXX: Greek Old Testament) and the New Testament, the word often refers to man's faculty of comprehension. Consider the following verses:

Exodus 28:3 RSV "And you shall speak to all who have ability, whom I have endowed with an able mind [LXX: pneuma]."

1 Chronicles 28:12 RSV "... and the plan of all that he had in mind [LXX: pneuma] for the courts of the house of the Lord."

Job 20:3 KJV "... and the spirit [LXX: pneuma] of my understanding causeth me to answer."

Matthew 26:41 KJV "... the spirit [pneuma] indeed is Willing, but the flesh is weak." [Willingness cannot be exercised apart from the faculty of comprehension.]

Romans 1:9 KJV "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my 'spirit [pneuma] in the gospel of his Son..." [Surely spirit here refers to Paul's inner self including his faculty of comprehension.]

1 Corinthians 1 KJV "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit [pneuma] of man which is in him?" [Here the spirit of man is the knowing part, the faculty of comprehension, the mind.]

1 Corinthians 6:20 KJV "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit [pneuma], which are God's." [The spirit is the inner self including the mind. Otherwise the glorifying of God would be unintelligible.]

2 Corinthians 2:13 RSV "... but my mind [pneuma] could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there."

- b. Nous, often translated "understanding," "mind," may refer to the product of man's mind, "thought," "sense," "meaning." Notice the following passages of Scripture which use the word in the original Greek.

Luke 24:45 KJV "Then opened he their understanding [nous], That they might understand the scriptures." [Jesus gave them an understanding of the meaning of the Scriptures.]

Romans 11:34 KJV "For who hath known the mind [nous] of the Lord? [The mind of the Lord surely refers to His judgments, His ways, His thoughts, and plans.]

Romans 12:2 KJV "... but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind [nous]." [The Christian is not given a new brain, but he is given new thought patterns. The product of his mind is now pure.]

1 Corinthians 1:10 KJV "... be perfectly joined together 'in the same mind (nous) and in the same judgment.'" ["Mind" here means the product of mind; thinking, opinion, judgment, point of view. Phillips translates this verse: "All together you should be achieving a unity in thought [nous] and judgment."]

2. Is our translation of 1 Corinthians 14:14 consistent with the context? The translation that we have given, resulting from our word study is: "For if I pray in a language, my mind (faculty of comprehension) prays, but my meaning (thought, product of mind) is unproductive (useless, fruitless)." To be consistent we have to translate verse 15 like this: "What is it then? I will pray with the mind (faculty of comprehension), but I will pray also with meaning (understanding for those who are listening); I will sing with the mind, but I will sing also with meaning."

The contrast is not between two faculties within Paul, one of which is involved in praying (spirit), and the other of which is inoperative (mind). The contrast is between (i) praying 'in a language which Paul understands but others do not, and (ii) praying in a language which is also meaningful to the listeners.

Verse 16 tells us why speaking in a language is unproductive. We would translate it: "Otherwise if you bless with the mind (spirit) how will he who fills the place of the unlearned say, 'Amen,' at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?" The meaning or thought of the tongues speaker would be unproductive because the listeners would not understand the language.

Paul is not saying that the mind of the speaker is inoperative (verse 14). He is saying that the meaning of the words spoken is unproductive, useless, fruitless for the listeners because they do not know the language being spoken. [The Greek word "unfruitful" (verse 14) is akarpós. It means "unfruitful, fruitless, useless, unproductive." But it does not mean "inactive," or "inoperative."]

In verses 18 and 19 Paul refers to his own practice. He thanks God that he speaks in languages more often than do the Corinthian believers. But in a church where such languages are not understood, he says that he would rather speak five words "with understanding of me, so that I might teach others also." Again the contrast is clearly between speaking a language which others can understand and speaking a language which they cannot understand. Paul prefers to do the former, because he wants others to be taught (edified) also.

Now the meaning of verse 2 is clear. It reads literally: "For he who speaks in a language is speaking not to men but to God, for no one understands, but with the mind [pneuma] he is speaking mysteries." Why is he speaking not to men but to God? Because no one understands the language he is speaking, except the speaker himself. He is edified (verse 4) because he understands what he is saying. But no one else is edified, because they do not understand.

3. Does 1 Corinthians 14 describe an ecstatic experience which cannot be controlled by the speaker in tongues? The answer is a definite negative. Paul was objecting to the overpowering, uncontrolled emotion of the Corinthian believers. They were all speaking at once (verses 23, 27), so that non-members were justified in assuming that they were insane. The mode of tongues speaking that Paul urged upon them was to be controlled. It did not involve overpowering of the senses. The mind of the speaker was thoroughly operative and in control (verses 14-16). The speaker in a tongue was to be silent unless he or someone else could interpret (verse 28). Then the church would be edified because the people would understand the message. The tongues speaker was able to choose not to exercise the gift in the church (verse 28). He was not to speak when someone else was speaking, nor after three others had already spoken (verse 27).

There is no trance-like state described in 1 Corinthians 14. The speaker was not being used as an unthinking instrument of the Holy Spirit.

Paul sums up by saying, "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (verse 32). He meant that the Christian, under the influence of the Holy Spirit as he teaches others the truth, is able to control the direction of his own thoughts and behavior. The tongues speaker, who 'interpreted for the church, or had someone else interpret for him, was a prophet in the sense of one who explains the Word of God. According to Paul, he could control his thoughts, words, and behavior. He was not subject to an ecstatic experience in which his mind was inoperative and his emotions uncontrollable.

4. Were the tongues, which Paul wished the Corinthian believers to speak (verse 5) languages known to man? As far as the listeners in the Corinthian church were concerned it made no difference. They could not understand, whatever the languages happened to be (verse 2). It would seem that the genuine gift of tongues described in Acts chapter 2 had been perverted by the Corinthian believers who had not given up the ecstatic type of worship involved in their former heathen religious practice.

Believers who had received the true gift of tongues could speak foreign languages. They would no doubt wish to demonstrate the miracle that the Holy Spirit had performed for them by speaking those languages in a church where they were not understood. Paul urged that this should be done only if the particular language spoken were interpreted, so that the church could be blessed.

The only evidence elsewhere in the New Testament is that the true gift of tongues involved speaking languages known to man for the express purpose of teaching others the Gospel. There is no evidence in 1 Corinthians 14 that the true gift involved some kind of heavenly language.

Relevance: The gifts of the Spirit are special endowments granted by heaven to Christian believers, enabling them to be effective in their efforts to win others to Christ. The important consideration is that we seek the Lord with all our hearts for the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He chooses what spiritual gift to bestow upon us, and opens the doors for us to use that gift effectively in His service. We do not use the Holy Spirit; He uses us! We must wait upon Him for His blessing and direction. Never will He take possession of our minds and hearts without complete willing surrender on our part.

Jesus wants to dwell within your heart by His Spirit, and live out His life through you. Are you willing to allow Him to do this?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. The mind of the person who has the true gift of tongues is inoperative while he is exercising his gift.
 - b. "Prophecy" in the Bible only means prediction of the future?
 - c. On the day of Pentecost, the believers were given the ability to speak foreign languages.
 - d. Not everyone is expected to have all the same spiritual gifts.

2. Discuss: Can you summarize the conditions under which Christ gives His Holy Spirit to an individual? What is to be the condition of the church before the great outpouring of the Spirit can occur at the end of time?