

The Gifts of the Spirit

by John R. Rice

The gifts of the Spirit are available today, but they are not for all the time and not for everybody, and the main thing God has in mind is to save poor sinners and get the Gospel to them.

Scripture: Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:4, 1 Corinthians 12:4-14, Ephesians 5:18

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Spiritual Gifts"

Description

John R. Rice preaches on the significance of speaking in tongues as seen in Acts 2, emphasizing that the ability to speak in different languages at Pentecost was a divine gift to share the Gospel with people from various nations. He delves into the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, highlighting that these gifts are given by the Holy Spirit for Christian service and work. Rice stresses the importance of seeking the power of the Holy Spirit for witnessing and winning souls, rather than focusing on speaking in tongues, as God distributes these gifts as He wills.

Transcript

I spoke last Sunday on Acts, chapter 2, which is the one great definitive case in the New Testament about speaking in tongues. There we learn that according to the Bible many people heard Christian people speak in their own language in which they were born. They said, 'Aren't these all Galileans? How is it we hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God?' That is, God gave, for a particular reason, Christians at Pentecost power to speak in the language of people who were there -- Jews out of every nation under Heaven. They heard the Gospel and the wonderful plan of salvation because it was given to some to understand and to speak in these languages.

The word "tongues" in the Bible simply means languages. Now, in I Corinthians, chapter 12, I call your attention to the first eleven verses. I want to talk to you about the gifts of the Spirit. The blessed Holy Spirit gives certain gifts to Christian people for Christian work and service.

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations; but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh

that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will " -- I Cor. 12:1, 4-11.

Yes God May Give the Gifts of the Spirit Today, as He

Chooses, Just as in Bible Times

Note that the blessed Holy Spirit gives certain gifts to people for the Lord's service. Do I believe we can have the power of the Holy Spirit just as in Bible times? I certainly do. Nobody had all these gifts in Bible times and, of course, nobody can have all these gifts now in modern times. But, as far as I know, the New Testament churches were set up the same way, and the Bible teaching was the same, and the practices were the same as we ought to have now.

Yes, I believe in the fullness of the Spirit, an enduement of power from on High. I believe in the gifts of the Spirit as God gives them.

Now, here are some lessons, as you see in verses 8 through 10. What are these gifts of the Spirit in verses 8 through 10? To one, the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge; to another, faith; to another, gifts of healing; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, discerning of spirits; to another, divers kinds of tongues; and to another, interpretation of tongues -- all these nine different gifts of the Spirit are mentioned here. Now, what are these gifts for and what about them?

Well, first of all, as far as I know these gifts are still available today. I do not mean available in the sense that you can ask for whatever you want about these gifts. The Bible never does teach that one can decide for himself what gifts to have. The Spirit divides "to every man severally as he will."

It is true that the Scripture says, "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." I take it that that must mean that some of these works of the Holy Spirit can be the property of every Christian but that one cannot necessarily decide for himself, except that all should seek to prophesy.

We are expressly taught to seek to prophesy. That means speak for God, witness for God, in the power of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:8 we are told, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me " That part we are taught to seek. We are supposed to "covet earnestly the best gifts," but we are never taught to covet the gift of tongues.

Now, are these gifts for today? They probably are. You would have to remember that they are not very often manifested even in the New Testament times. There is only one clear-cut case of talking in tongues in the Bible and that is in Acts, chapter 2. There are two other cases where languages are mentioned, but the Bible doesn't say a gift of languages, and maybe it was and maybe it was not. No one has authority to say it was the miraculous gift of tongues since the Bible doesn't say so. In the tenth chapter of Acts, in Cornelius' case, and in the nineteenth chapter of Acts, that of a number of Christians at Ephesus, they talked in foreign languages. So let us just say that it was not very often that people had some of these gifts in Bible times.

No One Ever Had All the Gifts of the Spirit

In his notes, Dr. Scofield says that every "believer is given a spiritual enablement and capacity for specific service. No believer is destitute of such gift (vs. 7,11,27), but in their distribution the Spirit acts in free sovereignty (v. 11). There is no room for self-choosing, and Christian service is simply the ministry of such gift as the individual may have received."

I am saying that the gifts are diverse and as God Himself decides to give. And the only gift of these named that we are particularly urged to seek for is the gift of prophecy, that is, to be filled with the Spirit to witness for Jesus and so to win souls. That we are told to seek for. The others we are told are divided severally as God wants them given.

Take the gift of healing. Do you suppose that many people these days have gifts of healing? Do you think many people ought to have the gift of healing? It was never so in Bible times. It is true that Peter and John at the Temple, recorded in the third chapter of Acts, had power to heal a man here, and other people brought the sick so the shadow of Peter might fall upon them and they were healed, but that was not an everyday business with all the Christians. It was not a usual matter then; it is not a usual matter now

I have had the joy of praying for some people who were wonderfully healed in answer to prayer. And in one case, the healing was clearly so miraculous. A dear woman who had had T.B. for years was about to die. God healed her, and in two weeks she was doing her own housework. I have kept in touch with her for thirty years and she has had no touch of that recurring disease. I know that was a miracle of God, but I don't claim that ought to be an everyday business. If I am in need of God's particular help, some miraculous healing, I would ask Him for it. He has wonderfully healed others.

There was the case of my daughter Grace with diphtheria; and my father who was about to die was wonderfully raised up in answer to prayer. But that is not an ordinary thing. And if I could name only six or eight such cases in a fifty years ministry, you need not expect that everybody would have such a gift ALL the time. I don't know of anybody who does. Now and then there is somebody whom God particularly uses and gives the gift of healing. It is not often. It is not for everybody.

Do you think everybody ought to go out and work miracles? Well, if they did work miracles, would they work them every day? It was not so in Bible times. John the Baptist never did work a miracle. And we don't know that many of the other good men did. We don't know that Timothy ever did, nor Titus, nor even Barnabas. We know that Paul did in a few cases, and even in Paul's case, it was not often.

So I am saying that in Bible times these gifts were not seen every day and they are rarely seen today.

Dr. Scofield says on this matter (and I think I differ with him), of speaking in tongues, "Tongues and the sign gifts are to cease, and meantime must be used with restraint, and only if an interpreter be present."

He in my opinion has the wrong idea about it. It is true that they are not very often now and they were not very often in Bible times. In truth, why should they be? Why should I, when everybody around me understands English, pray to talk in some language that couldn't do anybody any good? That wouldn't be like at Pentecost. As Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., used to say, "If it hasn't got any sense to it, God isn't in it." If there is not a good reason for it, God wouldn't do it. The one main thing God has in mind is to save poor sinners and get the Gospel to them. If that would glorify God, well and good, but in many cases, talking to a man in a language he can understand does a lot more good than saying something he cannot understand.

Why Not Seek God's Power as He Commands, Instead of Tongues He Never Commands?

These are gifts, but they are not for all the time and not for everybody. They are as God Himself divides "to every man severally as he will," the Scripture expressly says. Now, why can't you be content with that?

Note now this matter of tongues as a gift here. Not everybody has it. In this twelfth chapter we read in verses 29 to 31: "Are all apostles?" The obvious answer is no. "Are all prophets?" No. "Are all teachers?"

No. "Are all workers of miracles?" What would you say? And "have all the gifts of healing?" What would you say? "Do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?" Evidently, then, it is never intended that everybody should talk in tongues. There is no command to do it. Nobody is taught to seek to talk in tongues, and it is never given as a sign of anything in the Bible. Men make up a reason for it but God didn't.

Now good Christian people want the best God has. I'll tell you what you ought to do. Get a burden to win souls and have the endowment of the power of God on you to win souls. That is the fullness of blessing. That is the richest of all the Christian experiences. To have the power of God to witness for Him and win souls is the thing we are plainly told to covet. "Covet earnestly the best gifts."

Then the Lord says that Christian love is more important. "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" or Christian love and Christian affection. The Scripture says, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels -- if I talk in all kinds of languages and don't have love, it doesn't profit anything." So, tongues is never given a place of importance in the Bible. We are never taught to seek to talk in tongues. It is never said in the Bible that it is to be a sign of the power of God or a sign of anything else especially. In the case at Pentecost, for example, they talked to people in their own language in which they were born. In I Corinhtans 14 it is a sign to unbelievers. Sure, they heard the Gospel and they were amazed and so they were saved. But as far as it being a sign that a Christian is filled with the Spirit -- nothing like that is said in the Bible.

Every Christian Can Have Soul-Winning Power

Let us see further. Christians then should seek to witness, and that is the main thing. It is much better than talking in tongues. In this fourteenth chapter of I Corinhtans, we are to "follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy." Desire rather to speak in the power of the Holy Spirit, "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries."

Notice that we are not now talking about the heresy of tongues at Corinth. They did have a heresy. They talked in natural languages, different languages, but they made a show, using them in public. I will go into that further on. But the Lord is saying to never mind about tongues but seek especially that you may witness and prophesy and that you may speak in the power of God and that you speak so you can be heard. That is the best thing.

Now, these gifts rarely occur, so why don't you seek to have the power of God to witness for Jesus and win souls? God knows I need wisdom. With forty-five or fifty workers here in the office, with broadcasts on many stations, with THE SWORD OF THE LORD and its 150,000 weekly circulation, and with many, many engagements -- how I need wisdom and knowledge from God! And I have a right to ask it. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." I need God's Holy Spirit to help me, but I don't need something so as to put on a show and claim I have something everybody doesn't have, that I am better than you are, or that I have the Holy Ghost and I prove it with a jabber in some tongue nobody can understand and which does nobody any good. That is not God's plan.

Let us seek then to be filled with the Spirit, to have the power of God and do His blessed, blessed work. That is what He wants us to do. Now, remember, there are certain commands. One of them is to seek and "covet earnestly the best gifts." You can pray for wisdom and you can pray for the power of the Holy Spirit, and that would be what you ought to do. God will help you, then, to have the power He wants you to have.

Dear friends, remember this: We have a plain command in Ephesians 5:18, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." That is a command of God -- "Be filled with the Spirit." We need the fullness of God upon us. The Lord said in Luke 24, "Tarry ... until ye be endued with power from on high." In Acts 1:8 the Lord Jesus put it in these words: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." That is the plan of God. Let us seek that.

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