

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

by Harry Whittaker

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Chapter 1

The Problem

In recent years there has been a remarkable revival of what are usually called Pentecostal churches, or, in Africa and some other countries, Spiritual churches. There are varieties of these churches described by all kinds of different names and labels; but they all have one main idea in common. They claim that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, given to the disciples of the Lord Jesus on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), have always, been available to true believers and are enjoyed by themselves today. They regard these gifts of the Spirit as tokens of God's special blessing on their service for Christ.

The claim is made, not gently or with hesitation but confidently, that the miraculous, superhuman power exercised by Peter and Paul and others, is part of the true church's inheritance today. So you may be invited to hear someone speak with tongues, or perhaps, though not so often, this may be followed by what is supposed to be a Spirit-guided interpretation of that speech in an unknown tongue. You may perhaps witness the solemn laying of hands on sick and crippled people, and see them wondrously healed.

More important still, after hearing and seeing such things, you will be expected to come to the unshakable conclusion that these are clear signs that the Holy Spirit is at work; and that therefore the people who display these unusual powers are members of the true church.

Bible Teaching

The purpose of this booklet is to re-examine the whole question from this point of view: What does the BIBLE really say about it? and the conclusions, for which you will be given full Bible reasons, are these:

1. The early church was endowed with remarkable Holy Spirit powers, the special gift of Christ to his newly established church.
2. These gifts (healing and so on) were intended only for the early days of the church; they were not to last for all time.
3. Today when anyone claims to be able to exercise some gift of the Holy Spirit, that claim should be rejected.

Chapter 2

Outstanding Examples

First it will be helpful to look back over Bible history and see how, from time to time, the powers of the Holy Spirit were given to men on special occasions to enable them to carry out special work in God's service.

Here are three Old Testament examples:

1. Although many men are endowed with a natural cleverness in craftsmanship, yet when God planned the making of His sanctuary in Israel, He gave special powers to Bezaleel, of the tribe of Judah:

“I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every craft.” (Exodus 31: 3-5).

2. Similarly, by the operation of the Spirit of God ordinary men were given extraordinary wisdom in government:

“The Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel.” (Judges 3: 10).

And timid men were made courageous: “But the Spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon; and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him-” (Judges 6: 34).

3. The writing of the Bible was not the result of mere human intention, but came about through the direction and control of the Holy Spirit. God was directing the minds of these men, and thus their writings are very different and vastly superior to all others. Peter was referring to Old Testament prophets when he wrote:

“No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” (2 Peter 1:21).

An example of this is David's writing of Psalm 110, a prophecy about Jesus Christ:

- David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared, “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I put thy enemies under thy feet.” (Mark 12: 36).

Examples from the New Testament

1. In the New Testament outstanding examples of miraculous Holy Spirit power are seen in the birth and life of the Lord Jesus:

“And the angel said to her (Mary), “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, therefore the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God.” (Luke 1: 35).

At his baptism:

Jesus “saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him.” (Matthew 3:16).

This was an outpouring of divine power such as Jesus had not known up to this moment.

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” (Matthew 4: 1).

The first temptation was this:

“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

This temptation was possible only because the gift of the Holy Spirit from the Father meant that Jesus now had superhuman power at his command.

2. The apostles of Jesus were endowed with this Holy Spirit power. At one period during his ministry the Lord sent the Twelve out preaching in twos:

“And preach as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons ...” (Matthew 10:7, 8).

3. And similarly the seventy helpers who did the same kind of work:

“Lord, (they said, when their mission was concluded), even the demons are subject unto us in your name!” (Luke 10:17).

It is worth underlining that none of these examples of Holy Spirit Power had to do with commonplace events in the routine life of the church. Always the occasions were special and the work was special.

A Promise to the early Church

In the last few hours before Jesus was arrested by his enemies, he gave his disciples repeated promises of special divine power to help them when he was taken away from them. “But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (John 14:26).

These words are specially valuable because they give us a firm assurance that the four gospels are true, accurate and dependable records of what our Lord said and did. Those who wrote had the special help of perfect memories and a better understanding of everything concerning Christ, in just the same way that Old Testament prophets were “moved by the Holy Spirit.”

Pentecost

Jesus kept his promise. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles to the accompaniment of a great sound and what looked like tongues of fire (Acts 2: 2, 3).

From that day onwards, the power of the “Holy Spirit- shewed itself in these men in a number of impressive ways. They spoke with different languages, they were inspired to preach in a way which moved men to repentance, they were guided to faultless interpretations of the ancient scriptures, and they were able to bring honour to the name of Christ by doing miracles of healing such as he had done. No wonder people have called the book of the Acts of the Apostles “The Gospel of the Holy Spirit.”

The New Testament shows that these powers were for others, besides the apostles only. Other members of the growing church found themselves sharing in this rich overflow of blessing.

Chapter 3

Different Kinds of Gifts

One valuable scripture (1 Corinthians 12; 7-10, 27-30) provides a long list of the gifts of the Spirit. Here they are, with a comment or two about each of them.

1. **Apostles.** Besides the twelve there were special messengers of the churches who also carried this title. (e.g. Philippians 2: 25; 2 Corinthians 8: 23).
2. **Prophets.** Some were inspired to foretell coming events (e.g. Acts 11; 28). But prophesying really means “speaking forth the word of God.” So preaching and praise (as in 1 Corinthians 15: 3, 4) were also out-workings of the gift of prophecy.
3. **Teachers.** That is, instructors of those preparing for baptism, and, no doubt, for those already baptized, as well.
4. **Workers of miracles.** Not much is known about this gift, but it is mentioned as separate and distinct from the gift of healing.
5. **Healing.** This explains itself. The marvel wrought by Peter on the lame man (Acts 3) is a good example.
6. **Wisdom.** For the sound guidance of the church.
7. **Knowledge.** Not knowledge of science or mathematics, of course, but divine knowledge in addition to what the Scriptures taught, for at that time the Bible was not complete.
8. **Faith.** This gift was probably what enabled some believers to attempt and achieve what they could not have hoped to do in their own strength-dangerous preaching tours, selling up and giving the money for the well-being of their poor brethren, and so on.
9. **The ability to distinguish or discern spirits.** Here was a splendid and necessary safeguard against impostors. When men claimed to be speaking under the control of the Spirit, these had power and authority to confirm or deny the truth of the claim. When an epistle was received by one of the churches, some brother with this gift would be able to pronounce whether or not this was written by genuine inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
10. **Speaking with tongues.** It is difficult to be sure exactly what the gift was. It may have been actual superhuman speaking of foreign languages; or perhaps a form of enthusiastic utterance in no known language; or even an inspired repetition of prayers and psalms in ancient Hebrew. The subject really requires a study of its own; but certainly “tongues” was one of the least useful of the gifts.

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- 11. Interpretation of tongues.** This and speaking in a tongue come last in the list. Speaking with tongues not understood would have been no real help at all without translation. So some were given this power. But Paul commanded: If there is no one present with the gift of interpretation, there must be no speaking with tongues. That gift could be, and must be, controlled.

Chapter 4

Holy Spirit Gifts Today?

The question is often asked whether believers may be blessed with these Pentecostal gifts today. Claims to have the gift of healing or of speaking with tongues are often made (though, strangely enough., the other gifts hardly ever seem to be claimed). What is the truth about this?

The Bible is a true guide, and all its evidence points to the same conclusion-that the gifts of the Spirit were intended by the Lord as help for his church in its early years and only then; and having done their work the gifts were taken away.

The Early Church and its problems

Let it not be overlooked that some outstanding divine help for those early preachers of the gospel was absolutely necessary. Think for a moment of the difficulties and hindrances against which they had to struggle.

They no longer had their Lord with them to inspire and direct personally the work he had set them to do. Nor were those preachers men of outstanding influence or reputation, but-with the exception of the apostle Paul-humble folk drawn from obscurity. Nor did they have the inspired wisdom of the New Testament to direct their efforts, for in those early days that part of the Bible was only just being written. There was no big influential body of opinion to support their efforts and bring pressure to bear on people in high places. Instead, at first, only scattered groups of new believers, with- out any set pattern of church affairs to guide their way of life.

But, on the other hand, there was plenty of opposition from suspicious Roman governors, and especially from a strong well- organised body of clever and evil adversaries-the Pharisees and the men of the temple. Swimming against such a tide of opposition and difficulty, how could those early disciples hope to make headway, unless the Lord equip them with the gifts of his Spirit? Without such help how could they cope with a task that was otherwise too much for them? As mentioned earlier (page 3), the circumstances were very special and called for special men specially equipped for a great work. But once the Christian gospel was well launched on its course and making good progress, the need for the gifts was no longer there.

As will be seen in the next few pages, all the available Bible evidence supports this approach to the problem of Holy Spirit gifts.

Given through the Apostles only

The account in Acts of how the Holy Spirit came to the believers in Samaria is very helpful on this question.

Philip, one of the early evangelists (but not the Philip who was an apostle of the Lord) had a highly successful preaching mission to the Samaritans. Hearing about this, the apostles in Jerusalem promptly sent Peter and John to confirm the good work and also to impart gifts of the Holy Spirit by laying hands (*see last page) on the new converts.

It is useful to enquire here, why Philip did not do this himself? He certainly had the Holy Spirit. Why didn't **he** impart the gifts to the believers? Why was it needful for the Spirit to be given through Peter and John? The only explanation that makes sense is that **the Lord had left authority for passing on the Spirit in the hands of His apostles only, and with no one else.**

Special to the Apostles

This conclusion is confirmed by the story of Simon who saw big opportunities of money-making and influence here. He came to the apostles offering to pay them well if only they would give him the same power and authority:

“Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me also this power, that any one on whom I lay my hands may received the Holy Spirit.’” (Acts 8: 18, 19).

It was not the Holy Spirit which Simon was trying to buy, but the power to pass on the Spirit's wonderful gifts to others. Clearly, he saw this as a good business investment. But he had already seen miraculous signs done by Philip (Acts 8: 6, 7). Then why hadn't he come to Philip with his commercial proposition? The only reasonable answer is this: he recognized that only the twelve apostles, and later, Paul, had been given power and authority to impart the Spirit to others.

Two Generations Only

It follows from this, that when the Twelve passed off the scene, there would be no one left to give the marvellous powers of the Spirit to others. The generation after the apostles would be the last to know the presence of such gifts in the church. They were bound to die out.

The witness of writers in the early church confirms this conclusion. In the first two or three generations of believers the memory continued of the remarkable powers which the Spirit imparted, and then no more.

Gifts Passing Away

This is the witness of the apostle Paul also. In 1 Corinthians 13, only a few verses after his long chapter about the Holy Spirit's gifts of healing, knowledge, tongues, and so on, he declared plainly:

“As for prophecy, it will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge it will pass away” (13: 8).

The pronouncement of this inspired apostle is surely decisive. The superhuman gifts of the Spirit were given to the church only for a time, until new believers were firm in the faith and a good sound pattern of Christian belief and living had been established. Today the completed Bible is all that is needed for that purpose. [As already mentioned, in the days of the apostles the New Testament was only gradually coming into existence. When the apostles died, few churches would have copies of a complete New Testament.]

Outpouring of the Spirit

The heading: Given through the Apostles only, was intended to indicate that no other men besides the apostles had this power and authority.

But there was, of course, another way of receiving the Spirit- by direct outpouring from heaven. This was most exceptional. Only four examples are mentioned:

1. Our Lord, at his baptism. (Matthew 3: 16).
2. Pentecost. (Acts 2: 1-4).
3. The assembly of thankful brethren. (Acts 4: 31).
4. The household of Gentile Cornelius. (Acts 10: 44).

It follows that today those who claim to have received the Spirit's gifts should have received them either by direct outpouring from heaven, or by laying on of the apostles' hands.

The first of these was exceptional, even in New Testament times; and the second is no longer possible.

For those who today say they have this power, there is a problem here. How do they claim to have received the Spirit?

Always Temporary

It is worth noting that on all earlier occasions when God poured out his Spirit upon men, it was only for a while, and for a special purpose. Moses had seventy Spirit-blessed elders of Israel to aid his work (Numbers 11: 24-30), but not so Joshua who succeeded him. Saul, anointed by Samuel, prophesied (1 Samuel 10: 9-13), but later that Spirit was replaced by an evil spirit (16:14). During his ministry, the Lord Jesus gave the Spirit's powers to the Twelve when he sent them out preaching (Mark 6: 7, 13), but some time later nine of them were unable to cure a boy who suffered from fits. (Mark 9: 17, 18, 28, 29).

In the Last Days

The claim, sometimes made, that the Bible promises a revival of Holy Spirit powers in the last days, is correct, but the Scripture verses are often wrongly used, and nearly always misapplied.

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.” (Joel 2:28).

The apostle Peter quoted these words at Pentecost (Acts 2:17), and applied them to Jews in Jerusalem in his time. If, as seems likely, there is to be a further fulfilment of these words, it can be expected to begin in Jerusalem as a blessing upon believing Jews, since the Joel passage specially mentions Mount Zion in Jerusalem (v.32); and then spread to believing Gentiles after the pattern of the bestowal of Spirit gifts in the first century. This scripture would therefore throw considerable doubt on the claims of modern charismatic movements whose beginnings are claimed to be everywhere except Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

Chapter 5

Modern Claims

All kinds of questions arise with regard to these modern claims about Holy Spirit gifts. Why is it that one hears plenty of claims to the gift of tongues and to healing by the Holy Spirit, but (in the present writer's experience, at least) no sign of the gift of prophecy or of the discerning or distinguishing of spirits (*There are cases on record where instances of speaking in a "tongue" have produced two or more completely different interpretations. No discerning of spirits to expose the fraud!) (see Para. 9 on page 5).

True, there have been modern "demonstrations" of Holy Spirit immunity from snake-bite or poison, but they have all ended in disaster. What sort of conclusion are we to draw from claims and failures of this sort?

Lack of Clear-cut Proof

Again, why is it that claims for miraculous healing seem always to relate to neurotic or psychosomatic (** Cases where the condition of the mind has a marked influence on the condition of the body) conditions or to internal physical illness which is not clearly understood in the first place? e.g. that mysterious internal pain which vanished with the laying on of hands, or those arthritic fingers which began to move and grip. In instances such as these, how much depends on the sudden exercise of a will to be "healed"? It is noteworthy that when sufferers from arthritis are "healed" there is always a further onset of the disease later. Surely the Holy Spirit could heal completely and for good?

And, how is it that there is never an instance of the immediate healing of a broken leg, or of a thalidomide baby suddenly growing its missing limbs, or the cure within a moment of a loathsome case of leprosy? One really proven case of this kind would bull-doze all unbelief right out of the way for ever.

No More Divine Healing?

At this point some reader may perhaps be saying to himself: "Does this mean that there is no possibility of divine healing in these days? Has such a blessing disappeared for all times"?

The simple and reassuring answer to these questions is, that in all ages, God has been willing to listen to the prayer of faith and has often (but not always) responded graciously to a devout cry for help. Men like David, Job, Hezekiah, Epaphroditus were restored from grievous sickness, without any godly man with the Spirit's gift of healing coming to lay hands on them. And the same kind of experience is possible today. The Father in heaven is ever ready to "bow down and hear" the prayer of His children in their distress.

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However, this does not mean that we have a right to expect God to answer all our prayers of this kind just as we ask them. The apostle Paul found his labours in the Lord seriously impeded by some hardship which he called his “thorn in the flesh,” and he prayed three times that it might be taken away (2 Corinthians 12: 7, 8), yet the answer was a firm “No.” God knows best! And in this instance, as the passage goes on to explain, it was better for Paul that way.

Chapter 6

Then and Now

It is important to keep clearly in mind the distinction between a divine healing which comes as a result of prayer to God in heaven, and the exercise of the Spirit's gift, healing through one of the servants of the Lord.

Consider, for example, Peter's healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple (Acts 3: 1-10). In this instance there was none of the uncertainty which besets us today as to whether the Lord would respond with sudden healing power. The power to heal was already there in Peter, his to use or not to use, as he chose. Here, at the gate of the temple, he decided to exercise this power, and in a moment the man was cured, walking and leaping as he had never done in all his life.

Those who today claim to have the Spirit's gift of healing, should be able to demonstrate the same kind of result. But do they?

Always nowadays "Pentecostal" (Spiritual church) healers insist on the need for faith before their powers can be effective. How different this is from Peter's healing of the lame man, or his raising of Dorcas to life (Acts 9: 36-41), or Philip's miracles among the Samaritans (Acts 8: 7), or Paul's cure of the frenzied girl at Philippi (Acts 16: 16-18), or his restoration of Eutychus who fell out of a third floor window (Acts 20: 9-12).

Many Claims

Lastly, on this problem, why is it that every church claiming to have the Holy Spirit puts forward un-Biblical teaching of some kind or another? If the Holy Spirit were truly at work in these churches, would not complete harmony exist between that church's teaching and the Bible? It is difficult to believe that gifts of the Spirit would be given by the Lord to give added power to teaching that is false. Yet, over and over again, Pentecostal churches are found, on investigation, to differ markedly from the basic truth of the Word of God.

The Test

This is the kind of test the apostle John requires us to apply: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God." (1 John 4: 1-3).

Although it gives one no pleasure to write it, the fact has to be faced, that careful investigation of one Pentecostal church after another has revealed the sad fact that their claims of Holy Spirit guidance are made by people whose religious beliefs are very different from the teaching of the Bible.* This, at the very least, should teach us to be cautious.

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[* An up-to-the-minute example of this: Just as this booklet was being revised for publication, a Pentecostal friend declared very emphatically his belief that at death the souls of true believers go to heaven to be with the Lord Jesus there for ever. His instructors in the Pentecostal faith had never taught him a single thing about resurrection and judgement at the Last Day]

Summary

- (a) The evidence for healing, tongues and so on claimed by Pentecostal churches is just not good enough
- (b) There are good Biblical reasons for believing that the gifts of the Holy Spirit died out with the earliest generations of believers.
- (c) Those who claim to use the gifts of the Spirit are found to believe and teach unscriptural doctrines.
- (d) “**The sacred writings** are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (Timothy 3: 15). There is therefore no **need** for a special gift of the Holy Spirit today.

To some who read these words it may perhaps seem as though a deliberate attempt is being made to get rid of the Holy Spirit from Christian life and experience. Such a conclusion would be seriously mistaken. Of course today there is such a thing as the activity of the Holy Spirit in God’s world, and especially among His faithful people. Else what did Paul mean when he prayed: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope?” (Romans 15: 13). Here is divine power of a different kind in the life of the believer. Paul made a clear distinction, for only a few verses later he wrote about “the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.--- (v.19) Today the former of these (v.13) may still be our happy experience, but the latter (v.19) not. If you wish to read more about this you are invited to write to the address on the cover for a free booklet: “God at Work;” by the same author.

It is important to recognize that today the clearest and fullest possible guidance and help of the Holy Spirit comes through the Bible. It has been shown in this booklet (see again page 3, para. 3, and page 2) that the Old Testament Scriptures and the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament were all written by men under the direction and control of the Holy Spirit. Here, then, in the Bible-the inspired Word of God-is the best and most dependable help of the Holy Spirit. And because “the sacred writings are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3: 15), it is evident that **when a man has a Bible and the will to read it with diligence and prayer for help in understanding it, he has access to all that is needful for his life in Christ.** Marvellous gifts of the Holy Spirit are not necessary. We have seen also that in these days they are not available. The churches claiming these powers are based on a big mistake.

The fruit of the Spirit-”love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5: 22, 23)- must ever be the aim and desire of all sincere disciples of Christ. The gifts of the Spirit are not needed, and indeed are no longer with us, nor will be until the day of Christ’s return.

A further note on the Biblical test for those claiming Pentecostal gifts.

In the book of Deuteronomy it was laid down what the attitude of the people of Israel should be to those who claimed to speak with the authority of God's Holy Spirit.

First, does the prophet utter prophecies which are proved to be true by their fulfilment? "If the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken, the prophet has spoken it presumptuously;" i.e. without God's authority. (Deuteronomy 18: 22).

But there was always the possibility that the "prophet" might succeed, by means of a bit of clever guess work, in deceiving his hearers. So then a further test:

"If a prophet arises among you . . . and the sign or wonder which he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods' . . . you shall not listen to the words of that prophet." (Deuteronomy 13: 1, 2).

In other words, a prophecy or a sign or a wonder does not guarantee that the Holy Spirit is at work. The final and certain test is whether the teaching is good and true and right.

How do "Pentecostal" claims stand up to these tests? First, do modern claimants to Holy Spirit power make accurate prophecies? There are plenty of claims of healing powers and speaking with tongues. But when did anyone hear of an accurate detailed "Pentecostal" prophecy of an event months or even years ahead, the kind of thing Jeremiah did repeatedly?

But even if there were genuine examples of that sort, the claims of the Pentecostal movement fail to stand up to the test of sound doctrine. As already asserted (and illustrated) on pages 13, 14, those who make claims to Holy Spirit power are invariably astray from Bible Truth on one important matter or another.

Then what conclusions are we to draw?

The laying on of hands

It may be useful to summarise here the various New Testament examples of the laying on of hands.

1. For healing:

(a) The miracles of our Lord: Mark 6: 5; Luke 4: 40.

(b) The restoring of Saul's sight by Ananias: Acts 9: 12. (c) Paul's healing of a sick man: Acts 28: 8.

2. For divine blessing:

Jesus blessing the little children: Matthew 19: 13, 15.

3. For special work in the church:

- (a) The seven deacons: Acts 6: 6.
- (b) The mission of Paul and Bamabas: Acts 13: 3.

4. To impart the Holy Spirit:

- (a) The Samaritan believers: Acts 8: 17-19.
- (b) Timothy: 1 Timothy 4: 14; 2 Timothy 1: 6.

The last paragraph emphasises the point made on page 8 that only the apostles had authority to pass on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. At first sight 1 Timothy 4: 14 may seem to be an exception. But 2 Timothy 1: 6, referring to the same occasion, shows that the apostle Paul took part in that ceremony. Other elders were included then because Timothy was being sent forth on a special mission along with Paul; compare paragraph 3.

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