

# SPIRITUAL GIFTS & FRUIT

## PART 3

### THE EARLY CHURCH: THE IDENTITY, PURPOSE, AND DESTINY OF THE GIFTS

“endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”  
Ephesians 4:3 NKJV



#### Review of study 19

Around the time of Pentecost, the disciples sold everything they owned, lived communally, and were prepared to go as God directed. They were excited with the prospect of Christ's soon return, with the thrill of the new gifts they had just received, and the incredible prospect of His Kingdom on earth. As the saints in Jerusalem waited, it soon became obvious something was wrong. The disciples did everything right, they had the spiritual gifts, and they were ready to go to the ends of the earth. However, there was a God-given order to their endeavors, and that order required the unbelievers in Jerusalem to heed the signs presented them, that is, to repent and trust in Jesus Christ. The leaders (primarily the religious leaders) and the majority of the people in Israel had to be converted before the disciples could go, and before Christ would come back. No such conversion occurred, in fact, there was an outright rejection of the entire Godhead. God temporarily gave up on Israel, and that left the saints in a terrible predicament. They began communal life in 33 AD, and by 42 AD relief had to be sent to the saints dwelling in Judea, and many times after that. Pentecost was in the last days of the Law Age, and God interrupted that age to introduce His secret age, the Age of Grace. The idea of going back to Pentecost is totally outside of God's plan for us today. God quickly and totally unexpectedly revealed the Age of Grace when He gave up on the chosen nation. Today we are told to provide for our own, which means having jobs and homes, not living in a commune. We are also to live and believe according to the Word God has given for our age, not what He said for the Pentecostal time period.

### INTRODUCTION

Adult Study 9 presented the prerequisites for this study, that is, the basics of the Age of Grace (AOG). The AOG was an age God kept a secret (not revealed in any way) from the very beginning of the world. In Adult Study 19, two major issues were mentioned which needed more exploration: 1) the purpose of the spiritual gifts in the

early Church, and 2) if the purpose for spiritual gifts were fulfilled, what would become of spiritual gifts?

We have studied Pentecost and the outpouring of the Spirit, with the manifestation of the Spirit in the form of spiritual gifts. The purpose of spiritual gifts for Israel

was to act as signs, and to assist in the ministry. However, the Jewish people would not heed the signs. After God exhausted all efforts to get the Jewish people to accept Him, it was necessary to set Israel aside and

begin the new Age of Grace. Now, we will study the spiritual gifts in the early Church: 1) what gifts were involved, 2) what was their purpose, and 3) what happened to them.

## BIBLE TRUTH

### What Were the Church's Gifts

We will jump into this study very rapidly because there is so much information to cover. The three major passages referring to the various spiritual gifts in the early Church are found in Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Ephesians. There is no reason to think these passages provide lists that are all inclusive (showing every gift that ever existed); the lists show examples of typical gifts. The mere fact the lists refer to the same general time period, yet are largely different, implies they were intended to give us examples of what the gifts were, not to suggest a complete listing of all the gifts. Please study the table below.

### The Early Church's Spiritual Gifts

#### Romans 12:1-12

prophecy  
ministry  
teaching  
exhortation  
giving  
leading  
mercy

#### 1 Corinthians 12:1-12

wisdom  
knowledge  
faith  
healing  
miracles  
prophecy  
discernment  
tongues  
interpretation

#### Ephesians 4:3-14

apostles  
prophets  
evangelists  
pastors  
teachers

#### 1 Corinthians 12:28

apostles  
prophets  
teachers  
miracles  
healings  
helps  
administrations  
tongues

First, notice each list is quite different, with prophecy/prophets being the only gift on all four lists. Second, notice that the Ephesians list is not of gifts, per se, but the individuals so gifted; this is also seen in some of the gifts shown in 1 Corinthians 12:28. Third, notice that 1 Corinthians is divided into two major groups, the first group is shown in three colors, and the second group in black.

The three colors for the first group of 1 Corinthians 12, are based upon three distinct *kinds* of gifts. The three *kinds* of gifts are noted in the Greek text, which, in essence, says some people received the *same kind* of gift, either wisdom or knowledge (red). Then, other people received a *different kind* of gift, either: faith, healing, miracles, prophecy or discernment (blue). Finally, other people received a *different kind* of gift, either tongues or the interpretation of tongues (green). This threefold division by *kinds* will be seen to be important later. As for the three kinds of gifts, you can see how wisdom and knowledge are closely related (a kind); and that those two gifts are complementary, working together to deal with supernatural wisdom and understanding. Equally easy to grasp are tongues and the interpretation of tongues, obviously related gifts of a kind, both working together as a team. The middle *kind* is not as easy to identify as being of one kind; but, we can be sure God had a reason for grouping them as He did.

**Your Thoughts:** Who knew the various gifts were divided into three different kinds? Please take note of the kinds, for we will see Paul refers to them again.

### The Purpose of the Gifts

All these gifts were needed to help get the new Age of Grace started, sort of a jump-start for the early Church by providing an initial boost. There is no reason to think the giving of gifts by God was any different in the early Church than at Pentecost, that is, each person got his or her gift instantaneously, as God willed, complete all at once, and ready for use. As a reminder of the rapidity and completeness of gifts, recall that gifts were immediately useable:

- tongues in Acts 2:4,
- healing in Acts 3:6, 5:15,
- knowledge in Acts 5:1-10 (Peter supernaturally knew Ananias and Sapphira were lying),
- signs and wonders in Acts 5:12,
- discerning of spirits in Acts 5:16,
- wisdom in Acts 6:10, and

- Paul was made an apostle without study or preparation, he immediately went to do God's work (Gal. 1:16) and immediately began preaching about Christ (Acts 9:20).

If a person received the gift of tongues, that person did not then go to a language school to learn how to speak that language better, the person knew perfectly well. The person did not take some sort of survey or test to determine what gift he or she had, the person knew. Although not always mentioned, a gift was ready to use at that time it was given. Thus, if someone got the gift of teaching, the person did not go to the equivalent of a teaching college to learn how to teach, the person instantly knew. A person with the gift of being a pastor did not spend years in a seminary or Bible college (the equivalent at the time), the person was ready to go immediately and was perfectly equipped to do the job.

The person with the gift of teaching may have known how to teach, and no doubt very well, but that does not mean he or she knew exactly what to teach. The content of what was needed to be taught would have to come from another gifted person, say an apostle or prophet. The gifts all worked together, each providing a part, to equip the saints. Each gift provided its essential part to the ministry, and each gift had to be present at the correct time so that it was in operation when needed. Thus, we see an *order* to the giving of gifts by God. This is spelled out, "**And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues**" (1 Cor. 12:28). Notice, some new gifts are shown (miracles, healings, helps, administrations, and tongues) which were not mentioned earlier in the chapter 12.

The Greek word *first* in the verse above, means *first in time*, not first in importance. God set (placed or put) into the Church gifted people to get the whole process underway (1 Cor. 12:18). The first need was for apostles, who got the Word or direction directly from God; Paul was the first apostle for the new Age of Grace. The second need was for prophets to tell others in a clear

manner (exhortation) what the apostle(s) had learned from God, or what God told the prophet. Next, teachers were needed to perform their gift, and so on. It is very clear this order was needed for a manageable process and for efficiency in the ministry. We now have an answer to the first question in the Introduction, that is, the purpose for the gifts in the early church was *to help the new, emerging Church get started in a reliable manner.*

### Was the Purpose Fulfilled

Notice how the gifts worked together and the emerging Church began well, which leads to our second question: *if the purpose for spiritual gifts were fulfilled, what would become of spiritual gifts?* Ephesians 4 provides the answer, so we will work through this rather hard to understand chapter. Paul begins by saying, "...bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.**" (Eph. 4: 3b-6).

**Discuss:** When do you think the unity of the Spirit was created in the Church? Do we have unity today?

Paul instructs the believers to "endeavor" (to try very hard) *to keep the unity* of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The Spirit had already produced unity in the Church (Ephesians is one of Paul's latter books, 64 AD); we know this because Paul tells them to work hard to *keep it*. The Church began in the mid-40's AD, and a unity already existed by 64 AD. Since they already had unity, they were then instructed to try very hard to keep it. The text clearly says the glue (bond) holding the unity together is peace (between the believers). So, it is easy to see why Satan's target is to destroy unity between believers by creating anything that breaks the peace: factions, selfishness, disharmony, and so on. The basics of the unity He created are seen in the *seven one's (one body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, God and Father)*, which comprise the seven basic truths of the Church. Space does not allow for the examination of

these seven one's; however, if one of them is not understood or taught correctly, there will not be peace, but conflict in the Church. A lack of unity will ensue. Notice that one unity is "one faith;" this will become very important later.

Paul then goes back in time to explain what God did to equip the saints to do His work in a godly manner. **"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.'** (Now this, 'He ascended' – what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? ...) and He Himself gave some *to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ* " (Eph. 4:7-12).

The passage above teaches each believer was given grace (the implication is that grace was involved in the giving of gifts). Grace was given according to the measure of Christ, which presumably means the gifts had limits based upon what Christ measured out to each person. If each gift was measured, then each had a limit and extent as God purposed. Each gift generally worked best in combination with other gifts, which helped the people understand what it means to me a member of the body of Christ. Then, he says that gifts were given to each believer (the word *men*, in this case, refers to male and female) starting at the ascension (when He arose and went to Heaven), in 33 AD (even before Pentecost).<sup>3</sup> The exact, expressed purpose of the gifts was made clear;

<sup>3</sup> Christ descended into Hades, the lower part of the earth. Hades was divided into two parts, according to Luke 16:22-26; one part was a place of blessing for the souls and spirits of the believers. The other part was a place or torment for unbelievers. The side of blessing and comfort was called Abraham's bosom. Christ led the souls and spirits of the believers free, and took them to Heaven (their bodies stayed in the grave). Leading captivity captive is like a double negative, and was used to express a liberating event. When soldiers were captured, they sometimes were led through the streets on their way into captivity (leading captives into captivity). Christ reverse this, He took captivity (which is bad) and made it captive (a liberating event). Thus, He liberated the believers and displayed that to the heavenly hosts and those on the other side of Hades. The believers were led out of Hades in glorious triumph, just the reverse of military captives who were led through the streets in disgrace.

*they were given for equipping the saints for the work of the ministry, and for edifying the body of Christ.* The same purpose would thus apply to all the gifts listed in Paul's Epistles.

**Your Thoughts:** At the ascension, God started giving gifts, more were given at Pentecost, and it seems more were given later for the early Church.

God gave some men (this *men* means only males) to be apostles for our Age. There were several such apostles: Paul, Silvanus, Apollos, Timothy, and Barnabas are mentioned as apostles (1 Thes 1:1, 2:6; 1 Cor. 4:1, 9; 2 Cor. 1:19; Acts 14:14). Other apostles are suggest. It is apparent these men became apostles quickly, because God so gifted them. The original twelve apostles were not called apostles at first, but served with the Lord for a time before gaining that title.

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We have learned the purpose of the spiritual gifts, now we must consider the second question: if the purpose for spiritual gifts were fulfilled, what would become of the spiritual gifts? As we continue in Ephesians, the Apostle for our Age tells us how long gifts would remain with humans, **"till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"** (Eph. 4:13). Gifts were given to the Church for a *specific time period*; they were given "till" (*until*) we all come to the unity of the faith.... Remember above, in verse 3, God already had created the unity of the Spirit, which included "one faith," by 64 AD. Then in verse 13, we learn the gifts began to be given in 33 AD. Thus, the gifts would be needed from 33 AD until there was unity, which occurred in 64 AD. The unity of the faith signaled

the end of the specified time for spiritual gifts, since their purpose was fulfilled. (Note: the reference to a perfect man refers to a *complete* man or woman.)

You may wonder if the words of Ephesians 4:13, "till we all come to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God....," really refer to "the unity of the Spirit," noted in Ephesians 4:3. This question arises because there is a minor difference in wording, that is, the first verse refers to *unity of the faith*, the last verse to *unity of the Spirit*. The mere fact "one faith," is part of the unity of the Spirit in Ephesians 4:5, is very strong evidence the unity of the faith and the unity of Spirit *with it's one faith* are the exact same thing.<sup>4</sup> The unity of the Spirit was created in the early days of the Church. There is no indication more unity will be achieved near the end of our Age, as some proclaim. Clearly, unity of the faith has diminished since Paul wrote, with all our present denominations, different church beliefs, and so forth. Paul makes it clear that disunity will grow as our Age continues, **"...in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons"** (see 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-7). No one can argue that the unity of the faith can occur while some are departing from the faith. It is very clear the gifts would last until there was unity in the early church, and that occurred around 64 AD.

We now know when the spiritual gifts were given, what their purpose was, and how long they would be in effect, that is, "till" the unity of the Spirit was achieved. The giving and purpose if the gifts is summarized below. As you look at the bullet points below, it is helpful to know the end of the Law and the start of the Age of Grace

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<sup>4</sup> The "till" of Ephesians 4:13 includes three items: 1) the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, 2) a perfect man, and 3) the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. All three items are clear references to the truth of the mystery, or, if you prefer, our Age. The remaining verses of Ephesians 4, indicate "the unity of the Spirit" and "the unity of the faith and knowledge of the son of God" refer to the same thing. Remember in the sequence of time, verse 3 comes after verse 13. In Ephesians 4:13, the reference to a perfect man (complete), and the fullness of Christ, are clear indications that verse 13 does refer to the unity of verse 3. After all, the perfect (complete) man is a major teaching for our Age, indeed, a hallmark of our Age is the fact the believer is complete in Christ (Col. 2:10). Referring to Christ, Colossians 1:19 says, "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell." Ephesians 3:19, "...that *you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*" Clearly all three items are "truths" for our Age, and they became established in the Church in the mid-first century.

overlapped, that is, as the Law was phasing out the Age of Grace was phasing in. This overlapping of two programs of God creates some confusion on different matters, as Law and Grace were both in action. For example, the early Church saints had some gifts which were typical of the Spirit being on the outside of the person. We may conclude this about spiritual gifts:

- they began to be given at the ascension (33 AD),
- they were given in a big way a little later at Pentecost,
- the gifts had specific purposes for the end of the Law Age (as signs to unbelievers for the need to repent, and to help prepare the believers),
- the gifts had a specific purpose for the start of the Age of Grace (to help the emerging Church by equipping the saints), and
- the purpose of the gifts ended when the Age of Grace was firmly established (around 64 AD)

**Discuss:** The Jews required a sign, completely consistent with living under a legal religious system (the Law). We live under Grace; God asks us to walk by faith (not to expect signs and experiential events).

### Did the Spiritual Gifts Come to an End

Since the purpose for spiritual gifts was fulfilled by 64 AD, we can only wonder what then happened to the gifts themselves. We will use the Scripture to provide the evidence as to what happened to the spiritual gifts, and when. The key passage telling us precisely what would happen, will be studied first. Second, we will see the Bible tells us in clear terms when that would happen. Finally, we will look in the Book to see if there is evidence showing whether the gifts continued or ceased.

The key passage telling us *what would happen* to spiritual gifts is: "**Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away**" (1 Cor. 13:8). This passage was written in 59 AD, and established the fact that at least some of the gifts would disappear. Just to avoid confusion, *knowledge* is referring to supernatural knowledge (knowing things that would be impossible to

know unless revealed by God), not the everyday knowledge we all have. Paul stated in Ephesians 4:13, that the general timeframe for the cessation of gifts would be around 64 AD. We noted before, lists of items in the Bible are generally given to provide examples, not to suggest the list contains every possible item. Thus, Paul selected one gift from each of the three *kinds* in 1 Corinthians 12 (the three-colored list shown above). Knowledge comes from the *first kind* of gifts, prophecy from the *second kind*, and tongues from the *third kind*. It seems clear that by selecting one gift from each kind he is in reality saying this is true for all the gifts mentioned.<sup>5</sup> The three gifts mentioned, were said to *fail, cease, or vanish away*, and this is most likely intended to represent the entire list of gifts. By writing in this manner, Paul keeps the flow of thought moving; if he were to go through the whole list we would get lost in his excessive words. Thus, it is most likely that he is saying every one of the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:1-12 would pass, or cease in some way. Furthermore, since prophecy is on all the lists, it most likely means all the gifts on the other lists would pass away. Note: the Greek words for what would happen to the gifts (fail, cease, and vanish) imply more of a gradual passing than an instantaneous passing.

The really interesting part is that Paul, in a very pronounced and yet another way, tells us *when* the passing away of the gifts would occur. "**For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away**" (1 Cor. 13:9-10). At the time he wrote (59 AD), the Church saints did not have all the information they needed to fully understand the new Age of Grace. It is important to see this passage teaches that even though they had the spiritual gifts, there was imperfection and a lack of completeness, because the gifts only gave a partial knowledge. Thus, gifts are not the ultimate solution to the lack of knowledge and understanding. The early Church saints knew only partially and

<sup>5</sup> Three gifts were specifically mentioned as passing away, and it seems most probable that those three were meant to represent all the gifts on the lists. Prophecy (and prophets) was the only gift on all four lists, and prophecy is specifically mentioned as passing away (failing). The passages connect with "till" and "that which is perfect," certainly include all the gifts listed. So, it seems clear the intent was to teach all the gifts listed would pass away.

prophesied in part, but they lacked the complete revelation of the mystery. However, the day was coming when "that which is perfect has come" and the matter of knowing and prophesying in part would be done away (gotten rid of).

Even though the Corinthians had the spiritual gifts, there was imperfection and a lack of completeness, because the gifts were in part; they only gave partial knowledge.

There are many churches and people who claim "perfect" (in the phrase, "that which is perfect") refers to Christ. If so, then the gifts would stay active all through our Age, until the Rapture or Second Coming of Christ. A casual reading of the Bible indicates that just is not a reasonable interpretation. If Paul meant the gifts would stay active until the end of the Age, he would have said that. The main reason "perfect" cannot possibly be referring to Christ, is the term "that which" is neuter in the Greek, and Christ is not referred to in the neuter. Thus, *that which is perfect* cannot refer to Christ. That which is perfect has to be something neuter (more on this in the next study).

## SUMMARY

Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4 provide lists of gifts given to the early Church. The lists are not meant to show all possible gifts, but to give examples. First Corinthians 12 teaches there are three distinct *kinds* of gifts. Some people received one *kind*, and other people received a *different kind*. All the different kinds of gifts were given to assure the new Age of Grace started well, to give it an initial boost. Each gift was given as God willed, complete all at once, and ready for use. If a person received the gift of tongues, that person did not then go to a language school to learn how to speak that language better, the person knew perfectly well. Nor did they take a survey to discover what gift they had, they knew. The gifts began to be given in 33 AD; but they were given for a *specific time period*, that is, "till" (*until*) we all come to the unity of the faith. Paul makes it clear that God had created that unity by 64 AD. After the unity

of faith came, the gifts were said in First Corinthians to *fail, cease, and vanish away*. It is important to recognize that even though the early Church had the spiritual gifts, there was a better way, according to Paul. Something better (more excellent) was needed because gifts gave only a partial understanding. The day was coming when "that which is perfect has come" and the matter of knowing and prophesying in part would be over, and the gifts would vanish. Based upon the Greek language, "that which" (of that which is perfect) is in the neuter gender and cannot refer to Christ. The phrase, *that which is perfect*, has to be something neuter. That which is perfect provides the more excellent way, and this will be discussed in the next study.

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