

CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE POSTAL COURSE

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LESSON 17 • Holy Spirit GiftsWEEKLY READINGS
READING FOR STUDY PAPERExodus 7-14, Malachi 1-2
Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 14

Jesus promised His disciples that they would be given the Holy Spirit. He said to them, "These signs shall follow them that believe; in My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; "They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark, chapter 16, verse 17-18).

Why were these promises made to the disciples?

They proved that the message of the disciples was from God

Jesus had been crucified; God had raised Him from the dead. He had gone into heaven, leaving His little band of disciples to "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark, chapter 16, verse 15).

It was a big task. Would people listen to them? Surely they would not believe the story of a man brought back to life after being dead for three days?

So the disciples were given the power to work miracles, as a sign that their message was from God. We read how, on the day of Pentecost (which we now call Whitsun), they preached to the Jews in languages that they had never learnt, and could not have spoken but for the power of God. This was called, "Speaking in tongues".

No wonder the people were amazed; and no wonder they listened.

The Spirit gifts helped to guide the Church

As a result of the preaching on the day of Pentecost, 3,000 men and women joined the disciples, and became Christians (Acts, chapter 2, verse 41). And so the Christian Church had made a good start.

But imagine the difficulties there would be. Such a big family of Christians would need some to guide and teach them, and to give them advice about the arrangements they would have to make. They could not learn from the New Testament, because it was not yet written.

So the gifts of the Spirit were sent, not only to convince outsiders of the truth of the apostles' message, but also to help and teach the early Christians, and to set the first churches in order.

What were these gifts?

In I Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 22 - the apostle Paul shows how different members of the Church possess different gifts, and how each member was to work for the good of the others. Then in verses 28-29, he gives a list of the gifts, "And God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."

The first three gifts - the most important - were for teaching the early Christians.

The end of the gifts

We have already seen that in the days of the first Christians, there was no New Testament - it had not then been written; and we have suggested that that is one reason why these gifts were so necessary. We can read about the life of the Lord Jesus, and we can read the letters of the apostles. But they had no written record; so that apostles, prophets and teachers, with their Spirit gifts, were a very necessary help to the first churches.

When the writing of the New Testament was finished, there was no longer any need for this special help from God. All that Christians need to know is written down for them in the Bible. So the Spirit gifts were taken away.

The apostle Paul said this would happen. In I Corinthians, chapter 13, verse 8, we read, "Charity (love) never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail (or be done away); whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away."

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It would seem that the gifts were not suddenly taken away, at the exact time that the New Testament was finished: but that as time went on, those who possessed these gifts died, and they were not passed on to the Christians who followed them.

Does anyone possess these gifts today?

Some people do claim to have the gifts of the Spirit; especially they claim to be able to speak in tongues, and to heal the sick. How can we test those that claim to work miracles by the Spirit of God?

Firstly we remind ourselves that the apostle Paul said in I Corinthians, chapter 13, that a time would come when the "gifts" would cease. If this period did not begin when the New Testament was completed, then when does it begin? Certainly not in the coming Kingdom, because there will be more gifts than ever then. (The Holy Spirit gifts are, in fact, called "powers of the world to come", and the early disciples had the "firstfruits" of these gifts.)

Secondly, we note that Holy Spirit gifts were given to help the true Church. The true Church believes and preaches the Word of God. Most of those who claim to have these powers today - if not all - preach things not taught in the Word of God. We must, therefore, reject these claims.

Thirdly, we have to confess that we are not impressed by many of the so-called miracles. Many of the cures are soon seen to be no cures at all; and others of them can be explained scientifically. Hypnotists can often get the same results.

Those who believe all that is written in the Bible will not claim to have Spirit gifts, for they know that these gifts were to vanish away when the writings of the New Testament were complete.

Finally, yet another reminder that when we read the Bible we are, in a very real sense, receiving the Spirit of God. If we want to be saved, let us show that we appreciate this wonderful gift of God to us, by reading it as much as we can.

Summary

1. Holy Spirit gifts were given to the early Christians.
2. They were for two purposes:
 - (a) To be a sign to unbelievers,
 - (b) To help to build up the early Church.
3. They were only begin until the New Testament writings were finished: after this they were to "vanish away".
4. No one since has been able to work miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit.
5. Those men who claim to work miracles today may possess some strange power, just as hypnotists do. But it is not the power of the Holy Spirit.