

Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth

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Chapter 5—God the Holy Spirit: Pneumatology—Service

Overview of Gifts

In the Old Testament, only a few select people were empowered by the Holy Spirit for spiritual service. However, in the New Testament, every believer is gifted to serve in the body of Christ, the church.

New Testament spiritual gifts have a Trinitarian involvement. God the Father has planned for and appointed the gifts (1 Cor. 12:18, 28). God the Son has provided these gifts (Eph. 4:7–8, 11). God the Holy Spirit indwells and empowers people with spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:11). All three persons of the Godhead are involved (1 Cor. 12:4–6).

At least seven gift lists can be found in the New Testament. No two lists are identical; thus, they are representative, not exhaustive (see table 5. 10). They are located in 1 Corinthians 12–13 (AD 55), Romans 12 (AD 56), Ephesians 4 (ca. AD 61), and 1 Peter 4 (ca. AD 64).

Table 5.10 Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:8–10	1 Corinthians 12:28–30	1 Corinthians 13:1–3	1 Corinthians 13:8–9	Romans 12:6–8	Ephesians 4:11	1 Peter 4:10–11
<i>Emphasizes Temporary Gifts</i>	<i>Mixture of Temporary & Permanent Gifts</i>	<i>Mixture of Temporary & Permanent Gifts</i>	<i>Emphasizes Temporary Gifts</i>	<i>Emphasizes Permanent Gifts</i>	<i>Mixture of Temporary & Permanent Gifts</i>	<i>Emphasize Permanent Gifts</i>
 Utterance of wisdom	Apostles	Tongues	 Prophecy	 Prophecy	Apostles	Speaking
 Utterance of knowledge	Prophets	 Prophecy	Tongues	Serving	Prophets	Serving
Faith	Teachers	 Knowledge	 Knowledge	Teaching	Evangelists	
Gifts of healing	Miracles	Faith		Exhorting	Shepherds / teachers	
Working of miracles	Gifts of healing	Giving		Giving		
 Prophecy	Helping			Administering/ Leading		
Distinguishing between spirits	Administering/ Leadership			Mercy		
Various kinds of tongues	Various kinds of tongues					
Interpretation of tongues	Interpretation of tongues					

 Gifted Men
  Temporary/Miraculous Gifts
  Permanent Speaking
  Permanent Serving
  2017 re-categorizing

The following observations constitute some of the most important descriptions and conclusions from God's revelation concerning spiritual gifts:

1. Salvation is a *charisma* gift, that is, an undeserved gift by God's grace (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8; Titus 2:11).
2. The Holy Spirit is also a *charisma* gift, that is, an undeserved gift by God's grace (Rom. 5:5; 1 Thess. 4:8; 1 John 3:24; 4:13; also see Acts 2:38; 10:45; Heb. 6:4).
3. Like Spirit baptism, spiritual gifts accompany salvation.
4. God's will, not human will, determines individual giftedness (1 Cor. 12:11, 18, 24; Heb. 2:4).
5. Spiritual gifts are permanent and irrevocable (Rom. 11:29).
6. Spiritual gifts received with salvation should be distinguished from natural talents possessed from physical birth (1 Cor. 12:11). However, the Holy Spirit can certainly use both kinds of giftedness for his own divine purposes.

7. Spiritual giftedness alone does not necessarily make a Christian spiritual, as demonstrated by the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 14:20). Spiritual character is the highest priority (Col. 1:28).
8. All Christians are gifted without exception (1 Cor. 12:7, 11; Eph. 4:7; 1 Pet. 4:10) and can have more than one gift, resulting in a unique gift combination.
9. The Holy Spirit produces a variety of gifts (1 Cor. 12:4), which Christians employ in a variety of ministries (1 Cor. 12:5–6) with a variety of outcomes (1 Cor. 12:6).
10. Individual giftedness enhances the corporate good (1 Cor. 12:7) through Christians serving one another (1 Pet. 4:10).
11. Gifts are to be exercised in love (1 Cor. 13:8, 13), because without love, the practice of giftedness is useless (1 Cor. 13:1–3).
12. Gifts differ according to God's grace given (Rom. 12:6; Eph. 4:7) and are to be ministered by Christians as good stewards of God's grace (1 Pet. 4:10).
13. Scripture commands Christians to exercise their gifts (Rom. 12:6; Eph. 4:11–14) as a human responsibility and obligation.
14. The primary purpose of permanent gifts is for the edification of the church (1 Cor. 14:4–5, 12, 17, 26; see Eph. 4:12–13).
15. The fruitful exercise of one's giftedness brings God glory (1 Pet. 4:11).

Temporary Gifts (Revelatory/Confirmatory)

The following discussion addresses both **temporary gifts that ceased with the apostolic age** and **permanent gifts that continue to the end of the church age**. The seven gift lists record temporary and permanent gifts in three ways. First, **two lists emphasize temporary gifts** (1 Cor. 12:8–10; 13:8–9). Second, **two lists focus on permanent gifts** (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Pet. 4:10–11). Finally, **three lists recount a mix of temporary and permanent gifts** (1 Cor. 12:28–30; 13:1–3; Eph. 4:11). **The temporary gifts served both revelatory and confirmatory purposes in authenticating God's special messengers and the inauguration of the new covenant era.**

Three New Testament statements speak directly about divinely initiated miracles involving temporary gifts done through people. First, consider Peter's inspired commentary on the purpose of Jesus's miracles in Acts 2:22: *"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know . . ."* Here Peter essentially echoed Christ, who **asserted that his works certified his claims to deity and messiahship**. Jesus's miracles **attested undeniably to the truth of his claim to be the God-man** (John 11:47–48). They distinguished Christ, who had impeccable miraculous credentials, as the true Messiah in contrast to all the false christs throughout history.

Second, Paul made a direct statement about miracles in relationship to the apostles in 2 Corinthians 12:12. He noted emphatically that **the marks (sēmeia) of an apostle were signs, wonders, and miracles**. God used those supernatural phenomena to **authenticate the apostolic messenger and thus validate his message** (Acts 2:43; 5:12; Rom. 15:19; Heb. 2:1–4). Much the same method was used by God to authenticate the Old Testament prophets—God fulfilled the prophets' message and performed miracles through them (see Deut. 13:1–5; 18:21–22). **Miracles distinguished between true and false prophets and apostles.**

Third, the author of Hebrews argued that **God used miracles to authenticate the salvation message**. Hebrews 2:3–4 states that **God bore witness to true salvation through the apostles by miracles**.

These passages from Acts, 2 Corinthians, and Hebrews teach that God's primary purpose for the miracles he worked through men with temporary giftedness was to authenticate his messengers as bearing a true revelation from God. This was true of both temporary revelatory gifts and temporary confirmatory gifts.

The Biblical Pattern of Authenticating Miracles

There are many illustrations of this major kind of purpose in the Old Testament. In Exodus 3 and 4, God finally convinced Moses that he should represent him in Egypt. To every one of Moses's objections God responded with a supernatural sign that would authenticate Moses's commission. In Exodus 4:30–31, the signs were performed, and the Jews believed. After one sign and three plagues, the magicians of Pharaoh believed (Ex. 8:18–19). After ten plagues and the Red Sea incident, it can be assumed that Pharaoh believed (Ex. 14:26–30), and the Jews' faith was rekindled (Ex. 14:31).

After feeding Elijah with her last morsels, the widow of Zarephath saw her food replenished supernaturally (1 Kings 17:8–16). At the death of her son, she doubted (1 Kings 17:17–18), but when her son was brought back to life supernaturally, she believed (1 Kings 17:24). Elijah had been attested as authentic by a miracle from God. This happened again on Mount Carmel when, at the command of Elijah, fire came from heaven and made believers of the people in the midst of rampant unbelief and gross idolatry (1 Kings 18:30–40). Naaman was convinced of Elisha's credibility after being healed of leprosy (2 Kings 5:14–15). Nebuchadnezzar knew Daniel's reliability after he correctly reviewed and interpreted the king's dream (Dan. 2:46–47).

Clearly, God used miracles through men to authenticate his messengers. The miracles were never used merely for display, for frivolity, or to exalt the messenger.

A review of biblical history reveals three major periods during which God performed miracles through men. Such miracles through human agents did occur in other eras but only rarely by comparison. These three major periods include the following:

1. The ministries of Moses and Joshua, ca. 1450–1390 BC
2. The ministries of Elijah and Elisha, ca. 860–800 BC
3. The ministries of Christ and his apostles, ca. AD 30–60

Still, even in those periods, miracles were not the norm for all of God's servants. Speaking of John the Baptist, the Lord said, "I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Luke 7:28). Yet John the apostle writes of the Baptizer, "John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true" (John 10:41). Later John's message was vindicated by Christ's miracles. So the stature of a man of God was primarily evidenced not by sign miracles but by the truthfulness of the message.

Caution from Extrabiblical History

Reports of miracles are not limited to biblical history or even Christianity. In fact, if the mere number of alleged miracles were used to measure the authenticity of a religion, true Christianity would be eclipsed by false religion. The fact that alleged miracles happen outside the Christian faith should cause Christians to be wary of those who claim to do the miraculous.

The history of alleged miracles within the sphere of Christianity since AD 100 is abundant in the area of healing. Noted theologian Benjamin Warfield observed,

There is little or no evidence at all for miracle-working during the first fifty years of the postapostolic church; it is slight and unimportant for the next fifty years; it grows more abundant during the next century (the third); and it becomes abundant and precise only in the fourth century, to increase still further in the fifth and beyond. Thus, if the evidence is worth anything at all, instead of a regularly progressing decrease, there was a steadily growing increase of miracle-working from the beginning on.

However, do the character and quality of reported postapostolic miracles match those recorded in Scripture? The eminent church historian Philip Schaff offers these weighty considerations against those miracles:

1. They are of "a much lower moral tone" and "far exceed" biblical miracles "in outward pomp."
2. They do not serve "to confirm the Christian faith in general."
3. "The further they are removed from the apostolic age, the more numerous they are."
4. The church fathers did not truthfully report all there was to know about the alleged miracles.
5. The church fathers admitted that there were "extensive frauds."
6. "The Nicene miracles met with doubt and contradiction even among contemporaries."
7. The church fathers contradicted themselves by teaching that miracles no longer took place and then reporting the occurrence of actual miracles.

Christians need to heed history's warnings regardless of their own position on miracles done through human agents. Satan will do all that he can to mislead and deceive Christians along the dead-end path of alleged miracles (2 Cor. 11:13–15). Those on the path will one day approach Jesus with claims of having done miracles in his name, but to them he will respond, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23).

The Cessation of Revelatory and Confirmatory Gifts

Have miracles and temporary gifts through men really continued beyond the apostolic age? Scripture teaches that miracles served to authenticate the messenger of God and ultimately God's message. However, when the book of Revelation was recorded by John, the canon of the New Testament and the total revelation of Scripture from God was completed. After AD 95, God had no reason to perform miracles through men because he was no longer revealing truth that needed to be authenticated; the canon closed with the completion of Revelation. Therefore, God's work of miracles and temporary gifts through men ceased.

There is no single, explicitly clear biblical statement that specifies whether miracles through men and temporary gifts ceased with the apostles or continued, but if one consults the whole counsel of God, one will find the answer. Here are some New Testament indicators that the age of miracles through men and temporary gifts indeed ceased with the apostolic age.

Acts 2:22; Romans 15:18–19; 2 Corinthians 12:12; and Hebrews 2:4 indicate that God gave sign miracles in order to authenticate the messenger of God. With the completion of the canon, those signs no longer served their God-intended purpose.

Following the historical progress of the apostles who wrote about miraculous gifts, miracles diminished in scope as time moved onward. In Acts 19:11–12 (AD 52); 1 Corinthians (AD 55); and Romans (AD 56), the writers report extraordinary miracles that were taking place. Later epistles indicate that those phenomena were waning. Paul did not heal Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:27, AD 60). Paul prescribed wine for Timothy's stomach ailment (1 Tim. 5:23, AD 62–64) instead of recommending that Timothy submit himself to someone who could heal. Trophimus was left sick by Paul at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20, AD 66–67).

James, writing around AD 45–49, exhorted believers who were seriously ill to call for the elders to anoint them and pray over them rather than to call for someone who had the ability to heal. In the seven letters to the seven churches (Revelation 2–3, AD 95), no mention is made of miraculous sign gifts. These epistles were Christ's last and final scriptural words to his church.

The Scriptures teach that miracles through human agents served a very specific purpose. That purpose focused on authenticating the prophets and apostles of God as certified messengers with a sure word from heaven (Acts 2:22; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:1–4). When the canon of Scripture closed with John's Revelation, there no longer existed a divine reason for performing miracles through men. Therefore, such miracles ceased along with temporary gifts.

The following **nine Temporary, Miraculous Gifts/Offices** served revelatory or confirmatory purposes and ceased at the completion of the apostolic era because their purposes had been accomplished:

1. **Apostles** (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11): Men directly commissioned by the risen Christ and sent out to found and establish the church
2.  **Distinguishing between Spirits** (1 Cor. 12:10): The divine enablement to discern true from false statements made by people who deceptively claimed that their words were prophetic revelations from God
3. **Healing** (1 Cor. 12:9, 28, 30): The divine enablement to restore the sick to immediate health without a necessary faith response by the one(s) being healed
4. **Miracles** (1 Cor. 12:28): The divine enablement to perform works of power that contravene or exacerbate the normal processes of nature
5. **Prophets** (1 Cor. 12:10; Eph. 4:11): The divine enablement of receiving and communicating direct verbal revelation from God to man
6. **Tongues** (1 Cor. 12:10, 28; 13:1): The divine enablement to speak in a real, human language that had not been previously learned
7. **Interpretation of Tongues** (1 Cor. 12:10, 30; see 14:26–28): The divine enablement to interpret the words of one speaking in tongues

✳️ 8. **Utterance of Knowledge** (1 Cor. 12: 8; 13:2, 8): The divine enablement to communicate a direct word of insight from the Lord to guide the local church in understanding a prophecy (deemed a revelatory gift because it is linked with prophecy in 13:8)

✳️ 9. **Utterance of Wisdom** (1 Cor. 12:8): The divine enablement to give a direct word from the Lord to skillfully guide the local church in a specific decision (deemed a revelatory gift because it is connected with the word of knowledge, which is linked to prophecy in 13:8)

Permanent Gifts (Speaking/Serving)

The following eleven **Permanent, Ministering Gifts/ Offices** involve **Speaking** and **Serving** purposes that have continued beyond the apostolic era to this present time:

1. **Evangelists** (Eph. 4:11): The divine enablement to effectively explain, exhort, and apply the gospel to the unsaved
2. **Exhorting** (Rom. 12:8): The divine enablement to effectively incite practical holiness in heart and action through encouragement, comfort, admonishment, and entreaty
3. **Faith** (1 Cor. 12:9; 13:2): The divine enablement to trust God in all details of his work even when the outcome seems uncertain. This gift produces stellar assurance that God will accomplish his purposes.
4. **Giving** (Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 13:3): The divine enablement to generously, joyfully, and sacrificially give earthly possessions to the Lord for the work of the ministry
5. **Helping/Serving** (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28): The divine enablement to sacrificially and submissively help meet the needs of other Christians
6. **Leading/Administrating** (Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28): The divine enablement to zealously govern Christians toward the goal of accomplishing the will of God
7. **Mercy** (Rom. 12:8): The divine enablement to cheerfully detect, empathize with, and assist in meeting the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of other people
8. **Prophecy/Preaching** (Rom. 12:6): The non-revelatory, divine enablement to forthtell, that is, to proclaim the Scriptures
9. **Shepherds/Pastor-Teachers** (Eph. 4:11): The divine enablement to shepherd Christians by leading, providing, feeding, protecting, and otherwise caring for them
10. **Spiritual Discernment** (1 Cor. 12:10): The divine enablement to identify forms of doctrinal error and religious deception. This represents the permanent, ministry aspect of the gift. As “the father of lies” (John 8:44), Satan continually seeks to counterfeit the true work of God by disguising himself as an angel of light (cf. 2 Cor. 11:14), working primarily through false teachers, who dispense the “doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1 NASB). There are those in the church today who have been given a significant ability to identify falsehood by comparing it to biblical truth.
11. **Teaching** (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28): The divine enablement to clearly interpret, explain, and apply the Scriptures to Christians

Important Questions

What follows are five of the most frequently asked questions about spiritual giftedness accompanied by their scripturally based answers.

Question 1. Do Christians receive only one gift?

Answer: Most likely, each Christian has a unique blend of several gifts, not just one exclusive gift.

Question 2: What do Christians need to know about spiritual giftedness?

Answer:

- Salvation is a charisma, that is, a free gift (Rom. 6:23).

- God's Holy Spirit is a gift as a part of salvation (Rom. 5:5; 1 Thess. 4:8; 1 John 3:24; 4:13).
- Every believer has received a spiritual gift—spiritual in source and nature (1 Cor. 1:7; 7:7; 1 Pet. 4:10).
- God's will, not man's, is the basis for who gets what gift (1 Cor. 12:11, 18).
- Spiritual gifts are diverse (1 Cor. 12:12–27), since of the several gift lists in the New Testament, no two are the same (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:8–10, 28–30; 13:1–3, 8; cf. 1 Cor. 7:7).
- In the qualities desired for church leaders and mature believers, spiritual gifts are not emphasized (Gal. 5:22–23; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; cf. 1 Cor. 13:4–7).
- The kind of spiritual gifts people are given do not necessarily indicate their level of spirituality.

Question 3. How can Christians identify spiritual giftedness?

Answer:

- Believing that God uniquely gifts individuals, one should focus more on one multifaceted gift than on multiple gifts (1 Pet. 4:10).
- One clear indicator is that a believer is able to maximize a particular ministry with minimum effort.
- Spiritual gifts will be used most effectively in the context of the local church, where, sooner or later, other Christians will recognize and comment on one's spiritual giftedness.
- Personal inclinations and observations of others will lead one to fruitful ministry.

Question 4. What should Christians do with spiritual giftedness?

Answer: They should use their gifts to build up the church (1 Cor. 14:12) and serve one another (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10).

Question 5. What errors should Christians avoid in exercising spiritual giftedness?

Answer:

- Self-edification rather than the edification of others (1 Pet. 4:10)
- Self-exercise rather than being Spirit exercised (1 Pet. 4:11)
- Self-exaltation rather than using one's gift for God's glory (1 Pet. 4:11)

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