

THE CESSATION OF MIRACULOUS GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. There are a number of lists of gifts of the Holy Spirit; Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 27-31, Ephesians 4:7-11. Not all of these are miraculous or supernatural in nature (ministry, teaching, exhorting, giving, ruling, showing mercy, governments, evangelists). In the miraculous gifts, at least one is almost universally recognized as having been limited to the first century, that of Apostle.

2. Christ had promised that signs would accompany those who believed (Mark 16:16-20). A sign is not an end within itself, but rather points to something else. In this context signs pointed to the divine origin of the message being preached (see also Hebrews 2:1-4, 1 Corinthians chapters 12,13,14).

3. A miraculous gift was intended for the "common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7), but the person who had received the gift had control over the use (1 Corinthians 14:32), and could use it in a way not beneficial to the church. This is, of course, that which brought about the writing of 1 Corinthians chapters 12,13,14.

4. Paul says that while the miraculous gifts would one day cease (1 Corinthians 13:8), other qualities that were more basic and substantial would continue on: faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13:13). The miraculous gifts would cease when the "perfect" ("to teleion"), is come. The nature of the "perfect" has long been discussed. Some have said it is Christ. This offers some difficulty, since faith, hope, and love, are to continue after the perfect has come. It is difficult to see the function of at least some aspects of faith (see Hebrews 11:1), and hope (see Romans 8:24-25) after the return of Christ. Faith will be sight, and what is hoped for will have become a reality. Also, scholars suggest there is some difficulty with this interpretation in the Greek construction of the text. Dr. Frank Pack said the word "perfect" in the Greek is a neuter singular adjective used as a noun and accompanied by the Greek neuter article. It is his claim that this is not the usual reference to a person (Tongues and the Holy Spirit, p.117). Others make the case that what here is referred to as the "perfect" is Love. For the following reasons, it is this writers' belief that the "perfect" is the completed, revealed word (see John 16:13, 2Peter1:3, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, James 1:25, Jude 3, Revelation 22:18-19).

5. There are some important parallels in the passage under discussion. Childhood gives way to manhood. A dim or out of focus view or reflection is to give way to a clear reflection (face to face). A partial knowledge is to give way to full knowledge. In each instance, a continuum is suggested showing how a less perfect developmental state or condition gives way to a more perfect state or condition farther along the continuum. The principle may be diagramed as follows:

- a. imperfect is childhood developmental perfect is manhood
- b. imperfect is a cloudy image perfect is a clear image
- c. imperfect is prophecy, knowledge, tongues as means of teaching perfect is the complete written word as a means of teaching.

6. Note that in each instance something less perfect gives way to something more perfect of the same nature or kind. Prophecy, knowledge, and tongues were for instruction or edification (1 Corinthians 14:26-28). That they would give way to a person (Christ), or to a quality (love), seems to be a shift in kind or type (introduces something not on the same continuum), and thus not consistent with the examples given. On the other hand, the idea that prophecy and tongues, divine infusions of knowledge, would give way to a more useable, accessible and complete teaching mode, a written one that could be freely carried around and shared, would be consistent with the parallels given. Even Jesus said there were things he did not tell the Apostles that they needed to know about future things and the Holy Spirit would tell them later (John 16:12-13). John tells us the written word would tell us all the things we need to receive life in Jesus' name (John 20:30-31). Paul tells us not to go beyond what has been written (1 Corinthians 4:6). The miraculous, as a means of instruction and guidance, was not the ultimate in the developmental process, but only a temporary phase intended to give way to something more adequate which would follow, just as childhood is a temporary condition which merges into and gives way to adulthood. It can be readily seen that a few persons with miraculous gifts which they used to teach, confirm, instruct, guide, and edify would fall short in their utility to the Church by comparison with the usefulness of the completed New Testament. What a gift put into our hands containing all of God's divine words for the church which everyone can take home to read and study at will! The short period that one could prophecy and teach as guided by the Holy Spirit could not in such a brief time impart the whole content of God's Will for the church as we have it in written form in the New Testament. Since the Corinthian

letters were among the earliest of the letters contained in the New Testament, it cannot be denied that the New Testament was not complete at that time. Nor can it be denied that the passage in 1 Corinthians 13:8 does point to a time when the miraculous gifts in question would be done away! That it most easily refers to the revealed word is supported by the fact that when the early Christians examined the books we now have in the New Testament, they put aside other books which were claimed to be inspired. Nor have we today added other books following the book of Revelation!

7. There are other passages which indicate it was not the Lord's intention to continue indefinitely giving humans the power to work miracles. The truth is that once miracles were written down as testimony to the truth of Christ and His message, these proofs were adequate and do not have to be repeated for every age (see John 20:30-31, Romans 10:6-8). While on the one hand, signs are not encouraged in the Scriptures (Matthew 16:4, John 4:48); on the other hand it is clearly stated that all that is needed is contained in Scripture (1 Corinthians 4:6, 2 Timothy 3:16-17). This seems sustained by the fact that as the New Testament comes nearer completion, fewer miracles are mentioned and most all are done by Apostles. "The last recorded miracle(s) in the New Testament occurred around A.D. 58 with the healing of Publius' father (and others CM), (Acts 28:7-10). From A.D. 58 to 96 when John finished the book of Revelation, no miracle is recorded. Miracle gifts like tongues and healing are mentioned only in the earliest epistles such as 1 Corinthians. When you get into Ephesians and Romans, both of which discuss gifts of the Spirit at length, no mention is made of miracle gifts. By that time the commonness of miracles was already looked on as something in the past because God's word and revelation are already substantially confirmed and established. It is reasonable to assume that by the end of the first century the church was committed to the Word, and tongues along with other sign gifts had ceased to serve any purpose. The death of the Apostles would also end their use since they were specifically tied to them" (2 Corinthians 12:12, Hebrews 2:34), (The Charismatics, J.F. MacArthur, Jr., Zondervon 1978, p. 66)

8. The New Testament challenges believers to not accept everything they are told in religion, but to test credentials of those who claim to speak for God (1 John 4:1, Revelation 2:2). Warning is very frequently given against those who use signs and wonders to deceive (Matthew 7:21-23, 24:24, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, Revelation 13:14, 16:14, 19:20). The idea of trying to use the power of the Holy Spirit for monetary gain was known in the Apostles' time! (Acts 8:18-23).

9. Those who quote John 14:12-14 where Jesus says those who believe in Him will do greater works than He, are hereby challenged to prove the works that Jesus meant were signs and miracles! If that is what He meant, when has that ever taken place? If all the deeds of Jesus on the earth were all written down and made into books there would be too many for the world to hold (John 21:25). In the same mode Jesus said the least humans in the Kingdom were greater than John the Baptist even though there was no physical person as great as John the Baptist. John died before Jesus died on the cross ((Matthew 14:6-12). John never had the privilege in his life of being clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:28), or knowing in his life that his sins were put upon Jesus on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). This could not happen until Jesus died (Hebrews 9:11-17).

10. Since tongues (languages) are given such prominence today, a word is in order. In Acts 2, 10, and 19 the tongues were clearly contemporary languages. It is also this writer's opinion that 1 Corinthians 12-14 is speaking also of contemporary speech. The word "unknown" is not in the Greek, only the usual word for tongue or language. "Foreign language" makes sense if inserted throughout the passages, ecstatic speech does not. The tongues spoken here could be translated. The Greek word "heremeneuein" in its common use in the New Testament and the Septuagint (LXX), means 'to translate.'" J.G. Davies says, "The word used by St. Paul for translating glossolalia carries with it the strong suggestion of translating a foreign language" (Jr. of Theological Studies, April 1952, p. 230). Ecstatic speech was well known in the world of the first century and was widely associated with pagan religious forms (as at Delfi). It exists today among various pagan groups such as Spiritists in Brazil, and in some forms of schizophrenia. Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:11 in 1 Corinthians 14:1, where Isaiah referred to the Assyrian tongue. Paul says In 1 Corinthians 14:22, "So then tongues are a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers, but prophecy is for a sign, not for unbelievers, but to those who believe." Tongues could be a sign for unbeliever only if they knew the language and also knew the speaker did not know the language. That was what got the attention of people who came from 15 different countries and were amazed that the Apostles, although uneducated, spoke to them in their native languages Acts 2:1-12. It should further be stated that tongues were not really central to the New Testament narrative. Quoting again from MacArthur, "1 Corinthians is the only epistle where tongues are even mentioned. Paul wrote at least twelve epistles and never mentioned tongues again. Peter never mentioned tongues; James never mentioned tongues. Neither did Jude. Tongues appeared briefly in the early days of the church as the new word of God was being spread and the church was being established. But once this occurred, tongues were gone, they stopped" (Ibid, p. 169). MacArthur quotes a scholar-missionary, Cleon Rogers, who wrote, "It is

significant that the gift of tongues is nowhere alluded to, hinted at or even found in any writings of the Post Apostolic Fathers (ibid). MacArthur further states, "During the first four or five hundred years of the church, the only people reported to have spoken in 'tongues' were followers of Montanus who was branded a heretic as was his disciple Tertullian' (ibid.). Criswell states, "At the most, it (the gift of tongues), was a rare phenomenon found only in a few places, and, as far as we know, in only one church (Corinth), and that was not a spiritual church but a carnal one filled with every problem and disorder" (The Holy Spirit in Today's World, W.A. Criswell, Zondervan, 1966, p. 211).

11. An interesting addendum to the above is found in the report of a study of modern day "speaking in tongues" commissioned by the American Lutheran Church involving Paul A. Qualben, M.D., psychiatrist; Lowell J. Satre, Ph.D., professor of New Testament, and Dr. John Kildahl, A clinical psychologist who wrote the 10 year report entitled "The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues", Harper & Row, New York, 1972. Dr. Kildahl gave his following impressions, "Tongue speaking does not look very uniquely spiritual to me after many experiences of watching people teach other people how to speak in tongues. I have observed the same routine everywhere I have been. (1), a meeting devoted to intense concentration on tongue-speaking followed by, (2), an atmosphere of heightened suggestibility to the words of the tongue-speaking leader after which, (3), the initiate is able to make the sounds he is instructed to make. It is the same procedure that an accomplished hypnotist employs. Like the hypnotist, the tongue-speaker leader succeeds with some subjects and with others does not. I have reached the conclusion, that tongue-speaking is a learned phenomenon" (p. 74). One very interesting thing they did in their survey was to tape someone who was speaking in a tongue. Then they found a number of people who claimed to have the gift of interpreting and individually and separately each was given the same tape to interpret. "In no instance was there any similarity in the several interpretations. The following typifies our results; one interpreter said the tongue speaker was praying for the health of his children; another that same tongue-speech was an expression of gratitude to God for a recent successful church fund-raising effort. When confronted with the disparity, between the interpretations, the interpreters offered the explanation that God gave to one person one interpretation of the speech and another person another interpretation," (Ibid, p.63). "Glossolalia in current usage is not of the type described in Acts. In the past the ability has been claimed for some early Christian missionaries but today there are no verified instances of a tongue speaker having a foreign language at his command which he has not learned by the usual means." (ibid, 13).

12. By way of affirmation of the above, several years ago this writer attended a symposium in San Jose, Costa Rica on Wycliffe translation activities in Latin America. The speaker was overseer of the Wycliffe programs in Latin America. When he had completed his presentation he asked if anyone had a question. I raised my hand and asked how many persons with the gift of tongues had helped in their translation work. He said he knew of none. Then I asked how many missionaries had he known that had the gift of tongues and could immediately speak a native language without having to study it? He said that he had never encountered any. Given the fact that Bible translation workers entering an area without a written language must spend many years in learning the native language, in putting it into written form, in translating the Bible into the language, and then in teaching a few persons who will then teach others. On the Day of Pentecost God gave the Disciples ability to speak in fifteen languages, none of which they knew (Act 2). It seems to me that if God was giving miraculous gifts of tongues today, he would begin with people like the Wycliffes. CM

13. Jesus saw fit to warn, "Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible even the elect" (Matthew 24:23-24). An interesting book entitled, "A Doctor in search of a Miracle" by Wm. A. Nolen, M.D., Random House. NY, 1974, A Graduate of Holy Cross and Tufts Medical School was a leading surgeon at Hennepin General Hospital a teaching hospital associated with the University of Minnesota, and later at Litchfield Clinic in Litchfield, Minnesota. Doctor Nolen's book was the result of his decision that if there were valid methods of healing beyond what he knew, he wanted to learn that (p. 10). "During the year and a half I spent working on this book...I spent many of my spare hours reading about "miraculous" healers. I looked through hundreds of volumes trying to find adequately documented examples of cures that could not reasonably be explained except in terms of miraculous powers. I couldn't find one such case" (p. 265). "I tracked down twenty-three of the most promising leads. I called or visited the healer and the patients he or she had supposedly cured and talked or visited with both at some length. It was all to no avail. The cases I encountered resembled, except for minor irrelevant details, cases I've already described. There were no miracles to be found" (p. 268). Eventually Dr. Nolen became a volunteer guiding in wheel chairs persons seeking healing by Kathryn Kuhlman, the most famous miraculous healer in the United States in the 1960s (p. 42). "Kathryn Kuhlman often said, 'I don't heal, the Holy Spirit heals through me.' "I suspect there are two reasons why Miss Kuhlman continually repeats this statement; first, if the patient doesn't improve, the Holy Spirit not Kathryn Kuhlman gets the blame; second is she hasn't the foggiest notion of what healing is all about, and once

she puts the responsibility on the shoulders on the Holy Spirit she can answer if questioned about her healing powers, 'I don't know, The Holy Spirit does it all' "(269-270).

14. "The patient who suddenly discovers, at a Kuhlman service, that he can now move an arm or a leg that was previously paralyzed had that paralysis as a result of an emotional. not a physical disturbance. Neurotics and hysterics will frequently be relieved of their symptoms by the suggestions and ministrations of charismatic healers. It is treating patients of this sort that healers claim their most dramatic triumphs" (p. 287). The more I learned of the results of Kathryn Kuhlman's miracle service, the more doubtful I became that any good she was doing could possibly outweigh the misery she was causing" {p. 99).

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Jesus, in the "sermon on the mount" warned believers that in judgment there would be persons who would have believed falsely that they had done miracles in Jesus name. "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM Me. You who PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' Matthew 7:22-23.

WHAT ABOUT GOD? DOES HE STILL DO MIRACLES?

Whenever He wants to! From a human perspective we could probably say that all he does is miraculous, See Job 38:1 to Job 42:1-2). The purpose of all the above was to show that miraculous powers given to the Apostles and through them to selected men fulfilled their purposes and ceased. In a sense, everything God does is a miracle! What we do have is the power of prayer. The Apostle Paul was inspired to say, "Pray without ceasing," 1 Thessalonians 5:17. He also wrote to the Colossians, "Devote yourselves to prayer" (4:2). We are told the Holy Spirit helps us pray (Romans 8:26-28). James after encouraging prayer for the sick said, 'The effective prayer of a righteous man (or woman, CM), can accomplish much.' We are encouraged to pray about everything, and to ask everything. However God retains the choice as to whether or not he will do what we ask, "And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that. If we ask anything according to His will, he hears us." (1 John 5:14). As I look back at some of my prayers that got a "no", later I was thankful He said no!

(All Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, 1975, The Lockman Foundation, La Habra, Ca.).

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