



Are all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the N.T. still around today?

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THIS IS NOT THAT!

A Look at Spiritual Gifts in Today's Church

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Introduction

Not everyone seems to care about patents. Though the big corporations might not agree, some of the ways their brands have been imitated are hilarious. Take, for example, 'Michaelsoft's Binbows' in Japan (now closed), or these shoe labels from China: 'Nkie' (with the Nike trademark), 'abidas,' 'cnoverse,' and 'iPhone shoes' with the apple trademark! Apparently, you'll also find 'Sunbucks Coffee,' 'Pizza Huh,' and 'KFG,' all with graphics approximating their western counterpart.

Now, a consumer would be none-the-wiser if they were unaware of the originals upon which these imitations were based. They would gladly grab a pair of adibas shoes, blissfully unaware of the difference in quality with their Adidas models. They would devour some KFG and not even care how it compared to the real thing.

Something similar has happened in the evangelical church over the last 60 years. It has to do with claims about spiritual gifts, particularly the 'razzle dazzle' ones.

This paper seeks to show that the spiritual gifts people claim to be exercising today don't match those in the first-century church. Hence the title, – 'This is Not That'. A spiritual gift, by the way, refers to a Holy Spirit-given, supernatural ability to serve God.

Before going any further, let's clarify what this paper is not saying. Nobody's salvation, sincerity, or service is being questioned. Indeed, many intelligent and well-meaning people believe they have supernatural spiritual gifts and try

to live accordingly. These believers are often very passionate about God and the Gospel and seek to serve him faithfully and generously. The issue, however, is one of truth. Does their view regarding spiritual gifts reflect reality and therefore bring the freedom that Jesus promised truth would bring (John 8:31-32)?

This issue also impacts how the Bible should be interpreted, how church services should operate, how believers should serve in the church, and what expectations believers should have in their walk of faith. So, as you can see, this is an important topic.

Taking each 'controversial' spiritual gift in turn, let's compare what is claimed today with what we see in the N.T.

Apostleship

In the N.T., Apostleship seems to be regarded as a spiritual gift in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11. If Apostleship is not to be considered a gift, but a functional role within the church, then the same should be said of prophecy, which is listed next to apostleship in both those passages.

The word 'apostle' means 'sent one.' It is therefore used for people who served as envoys or messengers (e.g. Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25). However, it is more commonly used for those appointed and gifted by Christ to help lead and grow the church in those perilous first decades (Matthew 19:28, Acts 1:21).

Apostles had to have witnessed the resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:21-22) and were validated by the sign gifts they

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exhibited (2 Corinthians 12:12). No such gifted and qualified people have ever existed in the church since. No one, therefore, with any credibility, can claim to be an Apostle of Christ today.

Some Pentecostals and Charismatics agree with this and concede that at least one of the supernatural spiritual gifts has ceased. This is important because if one supernatural gift can cease, it's at least possible the others can cease too. And note, nowhere does Scripture say that the gift of Apostleship will cease; it's an obvious deduction from Scripture, history, and reality.

Others reject the idea that Apostleship was a gift, so get creative with 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11 to explain how one item on the list isn't a gift, but the very next item on the list is!

Still, others want to argue that the gift of apostleship refers to the 'gift' of church planting or the 'gift' of 'visionary leadership.' However, nowhere does the Scripture define apostleship in this way.

The 'gift' of apostleship that some claim today is not the gift seen in the N.T. – 'this is not that!'

Miracles and Healing

Advertising is the art of exaggerated persuasion. Persuasion, of course, because they're trying to sell you something. Exaggerated in that they imply outrageously positive outcomes for their product. Their product will bring you happiness, be it a taste sensation, driving excellence, relief from pain, or

whatever. Nobody really believes the products will deliver the kind of well-being they promise, yet that does not seem to deter advertisers or consumers.

The same seems true regarding the spiritual gifts of miracles and healings that many allege to possess today. The claims are pretty astonishing. Some believe they can raise the dead; others that they can heal all manner of illnesses. Still, others pray for miracles and think their prayers are answered. Yet when anyone looks closely at the evidence, the reality doesn't match the hype.

In the N.T., the gift of miracles was the Spirit-given ability to do miraculous works. Jesus walked on water, fed the five thousand and so on. At the same time, the apostles did "signs, wonders and miracles" (2 Corinthians 12:12). The gift of healing was the ability to heal anyone of any illness, again as demonstrated by Jesus (Matthew 4:23-24; Matthew 8-9) and the Apostles (Acts 3:6-9, 6:15-16).

These miracles and healings were:

- Always successful
- Immediate
- Normally for unbelievers
- Normally performed in public
- Robust (no record of any relapses soon afterwards)

These gifts were given to glorify God (John 2:11), validate the messenger and his message (Hebrews 2:3-4), and authenticate the offer of the Davidic Kingdom to Israel (Acts 2:22; 3:12-21) and edify the church (1 Corinthians 12:7).

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The nature of the alleged gifts of miracles and healings is very different today. The miracles and healings depend on the faith of those involved and the sovereignty of God. Ordinarily, such works are done behind closed doors and for 'church' people. The illnesses from which people are healed appear to be less severe than those in the N.T., often having less ability to be verified.

Yet many healings in the NT were not dependent on the recipient's faith. Nor is there any record of healings being unsuccessfully attempted by believers. What is being described by advocates as the gift of healing and the gift of miracles are not spiritual gifts at all since the person does not have control of the gift. Instead, they seem to describe random acts of God's providence. Simply put, the 'gifts' of miracles and healings some claim today are not the gifts of miracles and healings in the N.T. – 'this is not that!'

Prophecy

What would happen if you ate a takeaway meal that contained the most delicious elements imaginable but also had a sprinkling of disgusting, putrefying ingredients?

One mouthful would be enough, right! Not only would you spit the food out and throw the meal away, but you'd also probably never trust that takeaway joint again.

Welcome to the modern charismatic world of prophecy! Except in this world, not only is the patchy food taken

seriously and eaten, but the restaurant is also lauded with a five-star rating.

Pentecostals and charismatics believe in what they term the spiritual gift of 'fallible' prophecy. It refers to the Spirit-given ability to receive a message from God. The gift, however, does not seem to include the ability to report this message 100% accurately. Thus, those with the gift of prophecy relay messages from God that possibly contain truth and error. Therefore, the argument goes, the church is told to weigh carefully what the prophets say (1 Corinthians 14:29) and hold to the good while rejecting the false (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). Apparently, this form of prophecy was modelled by the prophet Agabus in the book of Acts when he prophesied truth mixed with error (Acts 21:10-14).

Very conveniently, in these circles, this allows anyone to have a go at prophecy without consequences for getting it wrong. More alarming, leaders encourage their people to engage in and receive such prophesy in all seriousness as if 'from the Lord'. The door to false teaching, emotional and spiritual manipulation, pride, and a whole host of other evils has well and truly swung open.

So, what is the deal with this 'infallible prophecy'? In a nutshell, it's a bogus, non-biblical concept. Here's why:

1. All agree no such infallible prophetic gift existed in the O.T. You either had true prophets or false prophets. False prophets were considered false if they were not 100% accurate (Deuteronomy 18:21-22). So-called fallible prophets are what

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- the Bible defines as false prophets. Now, do we really think that the Spirit of God would give the church an inferior gift of prophecy to that which existed in the O.T.?!
2. Nowhere in the N.T. is the definition of prophecy changed. Throughout the book of Acts, O.T. prophets and prophecy are mentioned alongside N.T. prophets and prophecy, with not one hint there is any difference between the gifts. How is the reader meant to pick up on this (backward) 'shift' in the nature of prophecy between the Old and New Testaments?
 3. N.T. Prophets are placed on the same level as the Apostles regarding their significance to the founding of the church (Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; 4:11). If these prophets were, or might have been, fallible, the church's foundation was compromised.
 4. 1 Corinthians 14:29 is easily understood as an exhortation to weigh prophecies carefully to determine if they are true or false. In the same way, Thessalonians 5:19-21 is a call to discern the true from the false. That's why the call is to 'test everything' (v.20) and avoid every kind of evil' (v.22). This passage has the same verb which is used in 1 John 4:1, where again, the call is to 'test' the spirits because many false prophets are about the place.
 5. Agabus did not prophesy error. He uttered his prophecy with the introductory formulae 'This is what the Holy Spirit says,' a phrase that elsewhere always introduces divine and infallible revelation (see Acts 8:29, 13:2; Hebrews 3:7; Revelation 2:7 etc.). In addition, Paul's testimony of what happened to him confirmed the details of Agabus' prophecy (Acts 28:7). The charismatics argue Agabus got the big picture right but the details wrong. However, they can only argue from silence, as the narrative doesn't give all the details. In fact, the context implies the details Agabus gave must have happened. Finally, no one in the history of the church believed Agabus was a fallible prophet until the rise of the charismatic movement in the last 60 years. Coincidence? Probably not.

The 'gift' of fallible prophecy that some claim today is not the gift of prophecy seen in the N.T. – 'this is not that!'

Tongues

Did you ever get into trouble with your parents or teachers for mumbling? Mumbling refers to speech that is quiet and indistinct. When you mumble, others can't make out what you're saying. This immediately evokes suspicion because whatever is being said can't be validated, contested or corrected.

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Unfortunately, such is not the case with the modern gift of 'tongues'. Even though those who think they're speaking in Spirit-given tongues make less sense than one who mumbles, no one seems to mind. The utterance makes no sense whatsoever, yet the phenomenon is thought to be of God. The same God who never mumbles but in the Bible is seen to always communicate clearly.

Modern tongue speakers believe they have the God-given ability to speak a 'mystery' language, an angelic language or an ecstatic utterance. Whatever they call it, the actual speech is the same – incoherent sounds that linguists have revealed share none of the hallmarks of any known form of language. These tongues are often uninterpreted because they are supposedly a form of private prayer and praise. This is by far the most common 'spiritual gift' claimed by charismatics today. Alas, both their definition and practice of tongues are unbiblical.

In the N.T., the biblical gift of tongues was the Spirit-given ability to speak in a known human language one had never learnt before – truly a miracle (Acts 2:4-6; Acts 10:46 and Acts 19:6). There is no evidence that the gift of tongues was ever anything else. Here's the evidence:

1. The passages in Acts clearly refer to tongues as known human languages (Acts 2:4-6).
2. The word used for tongues in the Bible is glossa. The word always and only referred to the physical tongue or a known human language. Charismatics argue the word has an entirely new meaning in 1 Corinthians, namely 'ecstatic utterance'. However, a word's meaning is determined in context by looking at the history of its usage. Since glossa had never previously been used to describe ecstatic utterances, why would it carry that meaning in 1 Corinthians? Where did Paul redefine the term? Sound interpretive practice is to take the meaning of the word from a clear passage (Acts 2) and use that in other passages that are less clear; unless there is very good reason to do otherwise. More than this, using the ordinary meaning for glossa in 1 Corinthians makes better sense of the passage than the invented meaning.
3. In 1 Corinthians 14:20-22 Paul likens the gift of tongues to a known human language via the link with Isaiah 28:11-12.
4. Paul said tongues were a sign for unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:22 cf. Acts 2). How would ecstatic utterances be a sign to unbelievers?
5. Ecstatic utterances are neither a Christian nor supernatural phenomena. Many religious groups are known to practice this kind of speech.
6. The speaker did not understand what was said with the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 14:2); the person's mind was 'unfruitful' (1 Corinthians 14:14). Therefore,

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tongues were only to be used with an interpreter (1 Corinthians 14:28). If they were used for personal edification, how did such edification take place? The answer can only be through some mystical, emotional experience. Yet the Bible does not encourage mindless emotionalism (Romans 12:1-2). How can the believer take every thought captive for Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5) if they have an experience in which their mind is unfruitful?

7. The reference to angelic tongues in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 is very probably hyperbole. Regardless, angels are only ever recorded speaking human languages in the Bible.
8. Tongues were not evidence of the Spirit's baptism. The Spirit baptises every believer (1 Corinthians 12:13). However, not every believer has every spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:29-30).
9. Spiritual gifts were given to edify others, not self (1 Corinthians 12:7). To suggest tongues are a gift for private use is to misunderstand the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts.
10. The first Pentecostals who spoke in tongues believed they spoke in known human languages. It was on this basis that some of them went to the mission field expecting to be able to use their newly acquired

gift for evangelism. They soon discovered they didn't have the Acts 2 gift of tongues. Alas, rather than admitting error, they changed the definition of tongues from known languages to ecstatic utterances.

The 'gift' of tongues as ecstatic utterances that some claim today is not the gift of tongues seen in the N.T. – 'This is not that!'

Putting It All Together

If 'this is not that' and what people claim to be spiritual gifts today do not match what is seen in the N.T., what has happened to these gifts? Both sides in this debate need to answer this question. No one believes N.T. Apostles are around today; people heal and perform miracles as they did in the first century; give infallible prophecy; or speak in human languages they did not know. So, what happened to these gifts?

The charismatics believe that their 'average' gifts were around in the first century, together with the more exceptional gifts of Jesus and the Apostles. Yet the evidence doesn't bear this out. There were no 'average' gifts in the N.T. Regardless, why did the more exceptional gifts cease? It seems both sides believe gifts have ceased in this age.

Here are a few reasons why the spiritual gifts might have ceased:

1. The ministry of Jesus and the early church leaders in laying the church's foundation was unique

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(Ephesians 2:20). The sign gifts authenticated the message and the messengers (Hebrews 2:3-4). With the passing of the apostolic age, the foundation having been laid, the sign gifts were no longer necessary.

2. When the N.T. Scriptures were complete there was no longer any need for direct divine revelation (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Revelatory gifts like prophecy were no longer needed.
3. A significant and unique purpose for tongues was as a sign of judgment on unbelieving Israel (1 Corinthians 14:20-22 with Isaiah 28:11) and a sign of blessing on the Gentile nations. By A.D. 70, Israel had been judged for their rejection of the Messiah, and the Gospel had spread 'to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). The purpose of tongues had been fulfilled.

One last thought. Have you noticed that one side of this issue argues for a high-quality form of spiritual gift commensurate with the Giver? In contrast, the other side argues for a more average form of gift commensurate with the receiver.

The Charismatic movement is vast. It has dramatically shaped and influenced the entire evangelical world. Yet size and influence don't validate a movement. The most important question will always be, is it biblical?

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.'" (Matthew 7:21-23 NIV)

NB: This paper is a summary of a larger position paper. If you'd like more details (including validation for the statements made), the church will be happy to forward you the full-length document.