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Section: Doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology)

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**HANDOUT NOTES**

**Q113. What is a spiritual gift?**

A spiritual gift is a God-given capacity through which the Holy Spirit supernaturally ministers for the good of the Church unto God’s glory.

**Q114. Are all the biblical spiritual gifts given still?**

No. God used certain gifts for a particular purpose and time in human history. God still does miracles, but the gifts that have ceased to be given by God to individuals are the miraculous and revelatory gifts: Apostle of Christ, prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, and miracle worker.

* **Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics: how one reads and interprets Scripture

Having proper hermeneutics is something learned. Each of us must be taught, trained in, and use biblical, faithful hermeneutics.

The historic confessions of faith give some important foundations for hermeneutics. For example, they say truths in Scripture are “either explicitly stated in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture” or “by necessary inference contained in the Holy Scriptures.”

**Q113. What is a spiritual gift?**

A spiritual gift is a God-given capacity through which the Holy Spirit supernaturally ministers for the good of the Church unto God’s glory.

**1 Corinthians 12:1** Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.

* **A *spiritual* gift**

**James 1:17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights …

In this study, we are not focused on all the good gifts He gives, rather the ones often classified as “spiritual” gifts.

* **A spiritual gift is a *God-given* capacity through which the *Holy Spirit***
* Spiritual gifts are from God, *and* Scripture particularly highlights the Holy Spirit’s role in this gift giving and gift using.

**1 Corinthians 12:4-6** Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

The dispensing of spiritual gifts is credited to the work of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the triune God.

* God gives these spiritual gifts on the basis of His sovereign will alone.

**1 Corinthians 12:11** All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

**Romans 12:6** Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them …

**1 Peter 4:10** As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace

God is sovereign, and we are not.

It is good and biblical to desire spiritual gifts for godly purposes, *and*, it **is** very wrong to think that we can earn and/or produce them or that we can draw them out of God.

* **A spiritual gift is a God-given *capacity* through which the Holy Spirit *supernaturally ministers***

Spiritual gifts are the ability to do something.

**Romans 12:6 …** let us use them …

**1 Peter 4:10** As each has received a gift, use it …

We receive spiritual gifts to use them—to serve others with them and to do so in the way God ordained.

* **A spiritual gift is a God-given capacity through which the Holy Spirit supernaturally ministers *for the good of the Church unto God’s glory.***
* **Primarily for the Good of Others**

Spiritual gifts, on the horizontal level, are primarily for the good of the elect. Spiritual gifts are primarily for the good and service of others, not ourselves. Spiritual gifts are primarily for the building up, encouraging, instructing, and correcting of Christ’s body.

If your use of spiritual gifts is primarily about you, then repentance needs to happen.

**1 Peter 4:10** As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace

**1 Corinthians 12:7** To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

* **Spiritual Gifts Are Ultimately for God’s Glory**

God’s name and fame must be our hearts’ motivation in all we do; so it is with spiritual gifts.

**Romans 11:36** For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

* **Spiritual Gifts That Remain in Our Time**

**Administration:** wisdom and prudence, ability to execute the plans of leadership by managing people, resources, and time for ministry.

**Service:** to take the initiative to meet the practical and physical needs of others.

**Teaching:** to understand, clearly explain, and apply the Word of God (Scripture in our time) rightly.

**Exhortation:** to give support, admonishment, and encouragement to those who are struggling, to promote growth in another’s Christian maturity.

**Evangelism:** to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ, especially to unbelievers.

**Faith:** to trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, trust in the goodness and plan of the triune God regardless of circumstances, often done in a way that encourages others.

**Generosity:** to cheerfully and generously contribute time, material resources, and/or money.

**Leadership:** to instill vision, make decisions, motivate, discipline, and direct people to accomplish the work of ministry.

**Acts of Mercy:** to provide compassionate and cheerful support to those who need it, especially those experiencing crisis or pain.

**Existing Revelation Prophecy (Proclaiming *previous* revelation, which is Scripture in our time):** to proclaim and apply God’s truth and expose sin. (In using the word to mean this, this is not claiming to have a personal insight from God, hear from God, or speak for God. Rather, in our time period, it is one who proclaims accurately truths found in Scripture alone.)

All believers have a call to do all these things and have at least some level of ability to do so.

When we speak of someone having a spiritual gift in a particular area, we mean that there is an *advanced ability* that exists in the person.

Sometimes this spiritual gift—this advanced ability—needs to be trained, cultivated, and instructed on how to wield it most effectively.

We encourage you to consider what on that list you have advanced ability in and seek to use your gifts for God’s glory.

**Q114. Are all the biblical spiritual gifts given still?**

No. God used certain gifts for a particular purpose and time in human history. God still does miracles, but the gifts that have ceased to be given by God to individuals are the miraculous and revelatory gifts: Apostle of Christ, prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, and miracle worker.

God no longer gives *individuals* the miraculous and revelatory spiritual gifts that are seen in Scripture and that were present in the first century church or prior.

It is **not** God’s will to distribute miraculous spiritual gifts to Christians and churches today as He did in the times of the Apostles. Those gifts ceased with the Apostles.

While God himself *can and still does* perform miracles today, the Holy Spirit no longer gifts individuals to perform miraculous signs and gifts.

* **Spiritual Gifts That Do Not Remain in Our Time**

**New Revelation Prophecy (hearing *new, special* revelation from God and/or proclaiming *new or personal* revelation from God):** This gift enabled those with it to have personal insight from God, hear directly from God, and/or speak for God, all with 100% accuracy.

**Performing Miracles:** The definitive ability to cause something supernatural (something beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature) to happen.

**Healing:** The definitive ability to heal any kind of sickness/illness/disability in a complete, immediate, permanent, and undeniable success.

(List continued on the next page…)

**Speaking Tongues:** The definitive ability to speak in a real human language that was foreign/unknown to the speaker apart from the spiritual gift.

**Interpreting Tongues:** The definitive ability to interpret a real human language that was foreign/unknown to the hearer apart from the spiritual gift.

**Discernment of Spirits:** The definitive ability to discern the hearts of men, their thoughts, purposes, and designs to find out falsehood and hypocrisy.

**Apostleship:** A spiritual gift *role* of a person who was a witness of the resurrected Christ, was personally appointed to Apostleship by Christ, and was able to work miracles and other now-ceased spiritual gifts such as new prophecy of special revelation.

* **Six Biblical Reasons for the Historic Christian Understanding of Cessationism**
* **The Unique Role of Miracles**

The primary purpose of miracles has always been to confirm the credentials of a divinely appointed messenger (to establish the credibility of one who speaks for God); not one who teaches or explains the Word of God as I’m doing this evening, but one in whose mouth God has put His very words.

**John 5:36** “But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.”

**John 6:14** When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”

**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"

**Acts 14:3** So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

**Hebrews 2:3-4** ... It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, 4 while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

* **The End of the Gift of Apostleship**

In the New Testament, Paul refers to the Apostles as one of the gifts that Christ gave His Church. **Ephesians 4:11** says, “[God] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.” These are roles—gifted roles—God gave the Church.

But the Apostles were a temporary gift. These are capital “A” Apostles; those in a unique role. There are no more Apostles like the twelve or like Paul. How do we know that? Because an Apostle, to be a true Apostle, you had to meet three qualifications:

First, you had to be a witness of the resurrected Christ. (Acts 1:22; Acts 10:39–41; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:7–8; 1 Cor. 15:8–9)

Secondly, to be an Apostle, you had to be personally appointed by the sovereign Christ. (Acts 1:2; Acts 9:15; Acts 10:39–41; 1 Cor. 15:7–8)

Thirdly, to be an Apostle, you had to be able to work miracles. (Matthew 10:1–2; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Acts 2:43; Acts 4:33; Acts 5:12)

The Lord is no longer giving the gift of Apostleship.

This is a significant difference in the work of the Spirit between the time of the Apostles and today—one of the most miraculous displays of the Spirit, the gift of Apostleship, ended with the Apostolic age.

It’s also significant that the gift of Apostleship ceased without a crystal-clear New Testament statement that it would.

* **The Foundational Nature of the New Testament Apostles and Prophets**

**Ephesians 2:19-20** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

The New Testament Church has been established—the work of the Apostles and prophets is complete.

We should not expect any more Apostles. We should not expect any more prophets. The foundation was laid in the first century. We should not expect any more new revelation.

* **The Nature of the New Testament Miraculous Gifts Compared to the Charismatic Gifts Claimed Today**

If the Spirit were still gifting believers today with the miraculous gifts, they would meet the standards and examples that we find in the New Testament; *however*, the gifts claimed today bear almost no resemblance to what’s seen in the New Testament.

Consider, for example, **the gift of tongues.** According to Luke in Acts 2, the New Testament gift was the capacity to speak in a real human language. **Acts 2:7-8**: “they were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?’” Each of them heard in their own native language. These were actual languages, known languages. That is very different than most of those who claim tongues today. The common practice today is to speak in odd sounds, gibberish, or other forms of non-language. The modern thing called “tongues” doesn’t match the real New Testament gift of tongues.

Also consider the nature of **the gift** **of new revelation prophecy**. This too is different; the New Testament gift and today’s manifestation are two different things. Contrary to modern practice, nowhere does the Scripture allow for prophecy to be anything but 100% correct—no exceptions. For those claiming to hear from God or speak prophecy, their words were to be evaluated against previous revelation, but once it was approved, their prophecies were added to the teaching of the Apostles to form the foundation of the Church.

New revelation prophecy is direct, infallible revelation. That is not what is called prophecy in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Some wrongly teaching that new revelation prophecy still exists suggest that prophecies today should begin with, quote: “*I think* this is what the Spirit might be saying.” That is not the New Testament gift of new revelation prophecy. In the Bible, it was, “Thus says the Lord,” and it was ALWAYS correct.

**2 Peter 1:21** For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Consider another example: **the gift of healing**. In the New Testament when someone with the New Testament gift of healing used his gifts, the results were complete, immediate, permanent, and undeniable for every kind of illness or disability. We can see that clearly in the Gospels and Acts for example. The claimed healings of today’s “faith healers” are the antithesis of those biblical miracles. What modern day “faith healers” do is incomplete. They do not have the spiritual gift of healing.

* **The New Testament Rules Laid Down for the Miraculous Gifts**

Whenever the gifts of tongues was to be practiced, there were specific rules to be followed:

**1 Corinthians 14:27-28** **27**If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. **28**But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.

Rule #1 God limited how many could speak in **tongues** in a given service.

Rule #2 They were to speak one at a time.

Rule #3 There had to be someone to interpret.

Rule #4 Women were not allowed to speak in tongues in the corporate worship gathering.

**1 Corinthians 14:34** the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says.

1 Corinthians 14:34 speaks to the authority that comes with proclaiming God’s truth to a mixed group of men and women. God has declared that such roles in that setting are only for men. That’s God’s will. (See also 1 Timothy 2:12.)

Therefore, that certainly applies to the revelatory, proclaiming gifts like tongues and prophecy.

Those four directives are how the New Testament gifts of tongues and interpretation were to be exercised. Based on the Bible, not opinion or preference or experience.

For the gifts of prophecy, there are specific rules to be followed:

**1 Corinthians 14:29-34** **29**Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. **30**If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. **31**For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, **32**and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. **33**For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, **34**the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says.

Rule #1 Two or, at the most, three were to prophesy at a church service.

Rule #2 Other prophets and the congregation were to evaluate those prophecies against previous revelation.

Rule #3 They were to speak one at a time.

Rule #4 Women not allowed to prophesy in the corporate worship.

* **The Orthodox Belief of Church History**

The New Testament flow: the gifts were not a key part of the instruction as time went on and especially as the Apostolic period was coming to an end.

When we leave the time-period of the writing of the New Testament, we discover that the testimony of the orthodox Christian church after the New Testament era was that the miraculous gifts ceased previously with the Apostles.

**Augustine**, writing in the late 300’s and early 400’s, said, “In the earliest times, the Holy Spirit fell upon them that believed and they spoke with tongues which they had not learned as the Spirit gave them utterance. That thing was done for a sign and it passed away.”

See of the Reformation, when **Martin Luther** writes, “This visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit was necessary to the establishment of the early church as were also the miracles that accompanied the gift of the Holy Ghost. Once the church had been established and properly advertised by these miracles, the visible appearance of the Holy Ghost ceased.”

**Jonathan Edwards** writes, “Of the extraordinary gifts, they were given in order to the founding and establishing of the church in the world, but since the canon of the Scriptures has been completed, and the Christian church fully founded and established, these extraordinary gifts have ceased.”

The great Baptist preacher, **Charles Haden Spurgeon,** says, “Those earlier miraculous gifts have departed from us.”

And note that the best **confessions in the historic Church** affirm this; such as the Baptist Confession of 1689, which says, the “former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.”

* **The Sufficiency of Scripture**.

This is so critical. The canon of Scripture closed with the writings of the Apostles and their authorized companions. The result of God’s completed revelation is an all-sufficient Scripture.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

There’s nothing left that’s needed for us to be complete, equipped for every good work. The man of God needs no additional revelation from God; he has all God has given for the post-Apostolic period in the Bible. The Spirit speaks only in and through the inspired Word—the words found in Scripture.

God gave us a book; it’s not subjective. It’s outside of us, it’s in words and sentences that we can read, analyze, study. It is external to us.

We must interpret our feelings and experiences BY Scripture.

God has not told us that He will give us customized additional revelation, private or not. Rather, He has told us that *in Scripture* are the words of life—He has told us that *Scripture* is complete and sufficient for us. You are not a prophet—He has not given any more prophets after the Apostles and it’s His good will that we are satisfied with His Bible.

As the historic confession says, “The Holy Scriptures are the only sufficient, certain, and infallible standard of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience." *In Scripture* is "everything essential for his own glory and man’s salvation, faith, and life." Martin Luther also wrote, “Let the man who would hear God speak, read holy Scripture.”

The Spirit of God certainly reminds us of, presses upon us, Scripture, no doubt. But God is not speaking unique things personally to us in our heads or audibly to our ears.

* **Some Application**

Be discerning in the resources you are reading and listening to.

Use discernment when reading even some of our favorites to be sure that what is being taught is truly biblical and in line with the orthodox historical theology that has stood the test of time, so to not get caught up in more modern, unbiblical ideas.

Vet all resources we are interested in against Scripture. Test everything against the standard of Scripture.

Teaching sound doctrine and refuting those who are teaching what is contrary to Scripture is one of the primary roles of your pastors and teachers.

**Romans 15:4** For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

**More resources**: www.discipleschurch.com/MiraculousGifts