



### 1 Cor. 12:28-31

### *God Has Gifted Us Differently*

28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?

30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

As we have seen throughout this Chapter, that following the ascension of Jesus Christ God has given his church gifts and offices for the purpose of fulfilling specific tasks and ministries. Some of those gifts and offices were what we would call non-miraculous and continuing, because the need for those ministries continues, while others were miraculous and have ceased, because the primary purpose for those gifts was foundational, and often related to the giving of God's inspired revelation that would make up the New Testament canon.

So we shouldn't be surprised that following the time of the Apostles, in church history we see what can be called a *cessation* of these miraculous gifts that were present within the church during the Apostolic age.

Following the death of John around 90 AD, there were no more men legitimately claiming to be Apostles within the Christian church. Part of the reason for that of course is that one of the qualifications listed for an Apostle was that He be an eyewitness of Jesus and that he was chosen directly by the Lord and appointed to that office. Paul, who had encountered the risen Lord on the Damascus was the last man to whom those qualifications applied. And that is as it should be, the Apostles exercised a foundational ministry, and as we have discussed, once the foundation is laid one does not go back and lay it again.

Additionally, once the last book of the canon, the Revelation of John was written on Patmos, there was no further reason for gifts like prophecy or the miracles that had attended and authenticated the prophets and apostles of the church. With the completion of the canon of scripture, the church at that point had a perfect and complete revelation from God, one that was according to 2 Timothy 3:16 "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." Nothing more was needed and nothing more could be added. In fact to add to that revelation would be to add the imperfect to the perfect, and as Paul puts it in Chapter 13 of this letter: "***when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.***" The NIV is even clearer – "***when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.***" When you have the Bible that God had intended to create, you have His perfect witness, and it only makes sense that the imperfect gifts that established and authenticated it would disappear from the church.

After you've finished building a building you don't keep the scaffolding, and temporary housing, and equipment that enabled the workers to build it in place, you clear them away. This is also vital in that those passing by seeing that equipment in place would assume that the work of building is ongoing. I look at a building surrounded by scaffolding and workers and equipment and I think – *not finished, still more work to be done, imperfect*. God clearly didn't want to convey that impression about His Bible and so it makes sense that when it was complete, He cleared away the materials used in its construction, but kept and indeed multiplied the materials used in its *proclamation and application*.

That is why, for instance, while prophets have ceased, ministers haven't, and why while healings have ceased, deacons haven't.

We see for instance that even though Paul dealt with churches, such as Corinth where the gifts were still present, because this letter was written in the Apostolic age in that foundational and never to be repeated time, and thus addressed the gifts, he lets us know in the next chapter that those gifts will naturally cease, and when he addresses his disciples in the Pastoral epistles given near the end of his ministry about what the structure of the church that would continue beyond the age of the Apostles would look like, we see no mention of the miraculous gifts or a continuation of the miraculous offices. The letters themselves are only concerned with the ordinary, normative, and ongoing functions of the church.

Now, just because those miraculous gifts and ministries have ceased, it doesn't mean that God doesn't still intervene in His creation. As Elder Ivory reminded us this morning in Sunday School, the universe is not a closed box that God cannot work in, he still intervenes in His creation, both mediately, that is through secondary causes, and immediately that is miraculously. But not in a sense in which He is still appointing Apostles or giving the Gift of Prophecy, but in the sense that He still heals, He still changes circumstances, He still hears and answers prayer, and of course He is still about the miraculous works of bringing men to new spiritual life, and sanctifying them, and granting them grace.

Unfortunately, there have been at scattered times in church history, individuals who have claimed to be new Apostles, and to have the miraculous gifts, such as the Montanists of the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century or the men the Reformers called "enthusiasts" at the time of the Reformation. But inevitably, as with the Montanist prophetess Maximilla, their prophecies did not come to pass and those who followed them more often than not, fared disastrously.

We are currently in the midst of an age when there are wide-spread claims to having the miraculous gifts, and it seems that every third storefront church is being run by the Apostle and Prophet so and so. This current age really started in around 1900, with the birth of Pentecostalism. Some people point to the Azusa street revival of 1906 others to the ministry of Charles Fox Parham, and say the movement began when Agnes Ozman spoke in tongues during a prayer meeting at Charles Fox Parham's Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas in 1901.

Parham, a minister of Methodist background, propagated a fundamental doctrine of the Pentecostal movement and denominations, namely that tongues was the "Bible evidence" of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and that every true Spirit filled believer should have them.

That of course runs counter to the thrust of this chapter, which states that the gift of *interpreted tongues*, was something given to only some and in the list of rhetorical questions that Paul asks in verses 29-30 the answer to all which is obviously no, Paul asks if everyone in the church speaks in

tongues. Surely if tongues was supposed to be a normative evidence of the blessing of the Holy Spirit that every Christian should have the answer would be YES!

God appointed some, but not all, to have these miraculous gifts and that for a time. He distributed them variously and not all had them or should have expected to have them. Not all were eyes, not all were ears. We do however see third abiding principles, *first* that while all gifts are important some are of greater importance. Obviously the gift of Apostles, was a far more important gift than that of tongues which was ranked dead last, after even the continuing gifts of helps and administrations.

Oh how I wish we had a movement suddenly rise up in Christianity that was crazy about helps and administrations, but apparently they don't have the appeal of tongues and prophecy, so very few seem to want them.

And *second* that God gifts some men to fulfill his purposes. There was no such thing as an Apostle not granted miracle working gifts in the apostolic age, and in the same way, there should be no such thing as a Minister not granted the gift of teaching and preaching in our own. And if you don't have those gifts, then that is not your calling. Part of the whole training and internship process should be to make that evident.

*Third* We should still *desire the best gifts, that we might be mightily used in the church*, not miraculous gifts but men should desire to be officers, you should want gifts of helps. You shouldn't *find* them if they aren't there, one of the worst things that can happen is if a man is called to an office he isn't equipped for. But if you are, you should desire to exercise that gift. I believe it was Spurgeon who said, *if God calls you to the Ministry, do not stoop to pick up the crown of a King.*

Remember finally that the gifts that are given to Christians are *never designed primarily for our own amusement*. You remember that scene in the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe where Father Christmas finally appears and gives each of the children special gifts? He says there:

***"These are your presents and they are tools not toys. The time to use them is perhaps near at hand. Bear them well."***

Well brothers and sisters, these gifts were not given to puff us up we will be judged in the by God how we used the talents he gave us. If we bury them, we will be in trouble. But you can also exercise them wrongly, in a way that seeks to draw the attention and adulation to you, and not Jesus, and that is sinful. Remember the continuing gifts are given for the *proclamation and the application of the Gospel message*. They are given to equip the workers for the harvest, and make them fruitful. Therefore for instance, if we have the gift of teaching, let us teach with the end of teaching Christ and drawing men to Him. If we have the gift of preaching, let us not preach ourselves or movement or politics, but Christ Crucified, and in all of works let our declaration be that of John the Baptist:

***"He must increase, but I must decrease."***