

SPIRITUAL GIFTS & FRUIT

PART 4

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS, WHY, & WHEN

“For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.”
1 Cor. 13:9-10 NKJV



Review of Study 20

Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4 provide lists of spiritual gifts given to the early Church. The lists are not meant to show all possible gifts, but to give examples. First Corinthians 12 teaches there are three distinct kinds of gifts. Some people received one *kind*, and other people received a *different kind*. All the different kinds of gifts were given to ensure the new Age of Grace started well, to give it an initial boost. Each gift was given as God willed, completed all at once, and ready for use. If a person received the gift of tongues, that person did not then go to a language school to learn how to speak that language better: the person knew perfectly well. Nor did the person take a survey to discover what gift he or she had; the person knew. Bestowing of the gifts began in 33 AD, but they were given for a *specific time period*, that is, "till" (*until*) we all come to the unity of the faith. Paul makes it clear that God had created that unity by 64 AD. After the unity of faith came, the gifts were said in First Corinthians to *fail, cease, and vanish away*. It is important to recognize the early Church had the spiritual gifts; however, according to Paul, something better (more excellent) was needed because gifts gave only a partial understanding. The day was coming when "that which is perfect has come" and the matter of knowing and prophesying in part would be over, and the gifts would vanish. Based upon the Greek language, "that which" (of that which is perfect) is in the neuter gender and cannot refer to Christ. The phrase, *that which is perfect*, has to be something neuter. That which is perfect provides the more excellent way, and this will be discussed in the next study.

INTRODUCTION

The last Study ended with this verse, "**For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away**" (1 Cor. 13:9-10). Paul has just said that the gifts would fail, cease, and vanish away (1 Cor. 13:8); then he immediately states when that would occur. The verses above explain when they would pass away, when the mysterious "that which is perfect" comes. The phrase "that

which is perfect" is not a reference to Jesus Christ's coming (Rapture or Second Coming); the Greek language and the context of what Paul is saying do not allow for that interpretation. The question is: to what does "that which is perfect" refer? It has to refer to something neuter. The words "that which" can also mean "the" in English, so the Bible is saying when "the perfect" has come, then the spiritual gifts would fade away.

BIBLE TRUTH

That Which Is Perfect

God gave Paul the job of fulfilling (completing) the Word of God. His job was to put into Scripture the truth of the mystery (secret Age of Grace): **"of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints"** (Col. 1:25-26). The word *fulfill* means to fill, complete, or *make perfect*. God needed a faithful steward to write about the mystery because it was a truth hidden from all previous ages and generations; once it had been revealed, the complete truth of this mystery had to be well documented for the early Church and future generations (Eph. 3:2-7).

When Paul says "when that which is perfect has come," he is referring to the completion of the Word of God (the Scripture for the Age of Grace). The word *perfect* (1 Cor. 13:10) is "...referring to the complete revelation of God's will and ways, whether in the completed Scriptures or in the hereafter."¹ Paul used the word *perfect* in reference to the completed truth for our Age, which are his epistles. Recall, *that which* is neuter in Greek, and could not refer to Christ; but *that which* can refer to the Bible. Since Paul specifically was commissioned **"to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations..."**, it is quite obvious the phrase, *that which is perfect has come*, is a reference to fulfilling the written Word. Fulfilling the Word means to completely document the mystery in written form (which is the message specifically for the Age of Grace). The completed Word is the *perfect Word of God*, better and more desired than spiritual gifts.

Other books of the Bible (for example, Revelation) may have been written at a later date than Paul's Epistles; however, those books do not discuss the mystery. In fact,

the books located in the Bible after Paul's Epistles (Hebrews through Revelation), regardless of when they were written, contain information of special significance for the saints of the future. Those saints will be back under the Jewish Law, as the Jewish program again comes into prominence. Thus, after the Rapture, as God again turns to Israel, those same books will be of prime value and phased back into His primary plan. At that time, the Tribulation and those books—Hebrews through Revelation—will cause the Israeli people to believe.

Discuss: The fulfilled Word of God is perfect and complete; gifts were *in part* (not complete or perfect).

In 1 Corinthians 13:10, *that which is perfect* refers, in general, to the Scripture Paul wrote. You can see how the Bible would be neuter, meeting the Greek language requirements. In addition, the fact the Bible is what Paul had in mind, is verified in Col. 1:25-26 (above). We now know the spiritual gifts came to an end in the general time period when Paul finished writing. Paul wrote all of his epistles in the time span from 54 AD to 66 AD. Paul also said that the gifts would be active "till" we all come into the unity of the faith, and we know that unity already existed in 64 AD (Eph. 4:13). Thus, we have two independent scriptural texts stating the gifts would begin passing away in the general period of 64-66 AD. The *till* we come into the unity of the faith, and the phrase *that which is perfect*, join together making a compelling case for when the gifts would come to an end, that is, in the mid-first century.

Ephesians 4:12 states the purpose of spiritual gifts in the early church was **"for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."** When the Word of God was completed, that is, the perfect had come, the gifts were predetermined to pass away. When the gifts did pass away, the saints were not left without the proper resource to carry on the ministry. The resource for equipping the saints, changed

¹ Vine, W. E.; *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*; Fleming H. Revell Company; Old Tappan, NJ; 17th impression; 1966.

from being based upon spiritual gifts, to being based upon the Word of God. **"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is 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"** (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Notice, from the mid-first century to today, believers are *thoroughly equipped for every good work* by the inspired, completed Word of God. The gifts were *in part*; now we have something that is thorough (complete) in its ability to equip the saints, the Scripture.

The Gifts Pass Away

In our last Study, we were in 1 Corinthians 13 and had gotten to verse 11, where we will now continue. **"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love"** (1 Cor. 13:11-13). These verses provide the absolute proof anyone needs concerning gifts. Paul employs a simple metaphor about being a child. When he was a child he *spoke, understood,* and *thought* as a child; but, when he became a man, he put away his childish things. Notice that he mentions *spoke, understood, and thought*; these three items are a direct reference to the three gifts he had just mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:8 which would fail, cease, and vanish away. In his metaphor, *spoke* corresponds with tongues, *thought* with knowledge, and *understood* with prophecies. When he became a man, he put away childish things; this was equivalent to saying tongues, knowledge and prophecy were childish.

Childhood is required for development and maturation, and is entirely according to God's plan. The spiritual gifts were childish, and in part (not complete); but they were as essential as milk in childhood. However, God does not intend for anyone to stay in childhood; His design is for a person to put away childhood things and become a mature adult. The same thing is true in the Church—gifts were needed for the early (childhood) stage; but God

always intended for that childhood to pass and for the Church to mature. God did not want the early Church to remain in its infancy for long; growth and maturity depended upon the completed Word of God. When completed, or nearly so, the gifts would pass away. Although the gifts would pass away, Paul wanted to make sure the believers knew three important realities would remain in our age: faith, hope, and love. These three realities are not gifts, but they are very important for all ages.

Your Thoughts: When we become adults, we do not continue to think and understand as a child. Paul compared spiritual gifts to childhood, so what does that say about spiritual gifts for today?

In the passage above, Paul continues with yet another metaphor, **"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."** In 59 AD, when he was writing, mirrors were polished metal, not the clear-image mirrors we have. Thus, their mirrors gave a dim, blurred image, not the perfect image we get today. Similarly, the early Church saints did not have a good understanding of what God was doing; what they got, when spiritual gifts were in place, was a dim and unclear image of His plan for the Age of Grace. However, when the perfect came (the completed Word), it would be like looking at someone face to face—no distortion or dim image. Looking at someone face to face has to do with the clarity of the image; it is not a reference to seeing Christ. When the perfect came and childhood passed, the believer would see clearly what God was doing. Paul is saying the Christians at that time knew in part, but the day was coming soon when they would know and understand fully and clearly. When the Word was completed, then the saints would know the fullness of God's mystery.

Paul ended the previous chapter, 1 Corinthians 12:31, by saying, **"But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way."** The believers were told to earnestly desire the best gifts, while the gifts were still active. However, there was a better way coming. In

Paul's day, they knew in part, that is, they did not get a complete, perfect understanding because the gifts had limitations (most likely due to human involvement, versus the Word, which is completely of God). We see how God made it clear that the Word is far superior to anything spiritual gifts could offer. God's plan was for believers to realize the gifts were limited and in part, and that there was the more excellent way.

When Paul says, "then I shall know" (1Cor. 13:12), he is using a special word for *know* that is not shown in English translations. It is a word that means a *more perfect knowledge*; literally *an upon knowledge* (knowledge upon knowledge); we would call it a super knowledge. No, those people were not smarter than anyone else, but they would get a complete knowledge that no one previously had. We, too, can have that knowledge through a careful and wise study of the Word. That is what the complete revelation of the mystery provided: a superior knowledge that had not been known before, and certainly was not provided by the gifts. Providing the completed Word (and one other thing, discussed in our next study) is the more excellent way.

Proof the Gifts Passed Away

Early in his ministry, Paul healed the sick and exorcised demons **"so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them"** (Acts 19:12). He did not have to be there personally to perform the miracle, just an article of clothing from him was enough to take to the sick and possessed, so they could be healed and exorcised. However, we can see a huge change later in his ministry, when the Word of God (that which is perfect) was completed. The Bible says the spiritual gifts would pass and gave the general timeframe, around 64-66 AD. If we are interpreting the Scripture correctly, there should be some evidence of the cessation of the gifts in the Bible itself. Well, there is clear verification the gifts did pass, and in the approximate time period we have mentioned. Here are just a few evidences of the passing of gifts.

1. Chronologically, the last recorded miracle in the Bible is found in Acts 28:8-9 (62-63 AD).
2. In the time period of 33-42 AD, prison doors miraculously flew open (Acts 5:19, 12:7); but by 64 AD, Paul was imprisoned with no deliverance (Philemon 9-13).
3. The twelve Apostles and Paul performed many miracles and raised the dead (Acts 5:12, 20:10) around 33-59 AD; but later, some of the apostles, if not the majority, were unable to perform miracles, resulting in them sealing their testimony for Christ with their own blood.
4. In Paul's mid-career (56 AD), he healed the sick (Acts 19:12); but by 66 AD Paul had to leave Trophimus behind because he was sick (2 Tim. 4:20).
5. Again, Paul healed the sick in his mid-career (Acts 19:12); but by 65 AD he did not heal Timothy; instead, he told him to use a little wine for his frequent infirmities (1 Tim. 5:23).

Your Thoughts: Spiritual gifts had a purpose; when the purpose was completed, they vanished. Discuss the proofs of their passing away.

Do not be fooled by those who claim to have spiritual gifts today. Being able to perform wondrous acts or miracles is not evidence such ability is from the Lord. Even unbelievers in the Bible had the ability to perform limited miracles and wonders, and that is still true. Unbelievers in the Bible:

- worked magic arts, Acts 19:19
- told the truth, even though demon possessed and a fortune teller, Acts 16:17
- performed exorcisms, Acts 19;13
- will work great signs and wonders (speaking of the future), Rev. 13:13-14

Great problems have been created by those who believe that miracles must occur to show they are Christians, that God is real, or that their religious beliefs are correct. These people claim all sorts of healings, miracles, or wondrous events as a result of those with spiritual gifts. The sad truth is the vast majority of the reported miracles

turn out to be false, when correctly analyzed and reported. However, to these people, even if miracle after miracle is shown to be false, that is no problem, as long as just one may not be a fake. Just one supposed miracle, and they are ecstatic. A common ploy is to claim some missionary or believer in some remote area of the world has seen miracles happen; it is assumed the miracle is true since no one can prove it false. However, remember in the Old Testament, a prophet had to have all of his prophecies come true, not most, not 99.9%, but every single one. If every single one did not come true, then the person was a false prophet (again, proof that false prophets can sometimes get it right and deceive us). This Scriptural test should be used today for those claiming to have such a gift. The quest to *prove* God exists by the occurrence of miracles/healings is a walk by sight, not faith. God does not need us to prove His existence or actions in the world today, based upon our concepts.

Please understand, the topic under consideration concerns God's working of miracles through human intermediaries. At *Grace 4 You*, we believe God can and does, independent of human mediators, perform miracles today. He, no doubt, performs countless miracles each day for each of us. However, spiritual gifts of the early Church were far different because God was working through the human mediators.

Did All Gifts Pass Away, or Just Some

The heading of this section is the million dollar question. Some people believe none of the gifts have passed away, but they will pass away in the future. A few people believe all the gifts, on the lists we have discussed, have passed away. Some people believe only certain gifts passed away—generally the sign gifts (miracles, healing, raising the dead...), but the ministerial gifts for helping the early Church remained (administration, giving, hospitality...). Regarding the latter, people often do a most curious thing: they take the gifts of Ephesians 4 (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers), all of which are ministerial gifts, and claim the gifts of apostles and prophets have passed away while evangelists, pastors, and teachers remained. This latter

teaching employs a pick-and-choose-the-gift-you-like theology, but in a way it does point out something interesting.

In Ephesians 4, all the gifts are ministerial (prophecy can be both ministerial and a sign gift). The weight of biblical evidence does not allow us to believe some gifts passed while others remained. From Scriptural analysis, it is clear all the gifts (or gifted people) passed away. Thus, we have a dilemma; the Bible indicates all the gifts passed away, yet we see the need for evangelists, pastors, and teachers today. However, if we were to believe the ministerial gifts remained, we would have to admit there were people gifted to be apostles and prophets today. The dilemma is resolved by recognizing *how* the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers got into their office/position, and also recognizing if there is, or is not, a *continuing need* for that office today.

First we will consider *how* people got into their office/position. At Pentecost and the early Church, the recipients of the gifts were placed (set) into their office very rapidly and without study. Today, a person gets into such an office by hard study and preparation. Thus, if the need for an office/position exists today, then those who fill the office must study and prepare to fill it—they will not be gifted into the position. Second, we will consider the continuing need for certain offices. There is no need for apostles and prophets today, since their function has been replaced by the completed Word of God. There is no reason to go back to that which is "in part." However, the need for pastors, teachers, and evangelists to teach the Word of God still exists today. Those latter offices exist, but a person will not be gifted and put into that office, as in the first century.

The clear exposition of Scripture provides the evidence to say *all the spiritual gift under discussion have passed away*. The term passing away implies a slower process than the instantaneous giving of the gifts. However—and this is an important and overlooked issue—the passing away of gifts does not mean people are without natural skills, talents, and abilities today, similar to the biblical

gifts. There is a difference between a gift and natural talents; for example, to become a speaker of an unknown tongue today requires considerable study and generally advanced education. Similarly, while the gift of evangelist, pastor, and teacher does not exist, that does not mean the office or need for those types of people has passed away. It seems the office or position of evangelists, pastors, and teachers still exists, but those who fill the office need to study, prepare, and work hard to be able to fill the roll. The mere existence of Bible schools, seminaries, language schools, and so on, is evidence people are not receiving "the gift" from God.

Scripture proves *all the spiritual gifts under discussion have passed away.*

Surveys for Spiritual Gifts

Today, people can take numerous surveys, questionnaires, and tests to discover their supposed spiritual gifts. These simple surveys, often with a series of questions to compare one gift against another, are taken in order to determine which gift a person supposedly has. An example would be: "Would you rather host a dinner, or teach a class?" The survey may ask the question this way: "Do you like to entertain people in your home?" If you answered that you preferred to host a dinner or like to entertain people (and there would be several other questions along this line), then you supposedly have the gift of hospitality. No one in the Bible ever had to do this; a person knew immediately and so did others, as exemplified at Pentecost. The mere fact a person has to take a survey to find "his or her gift" is evidence the person does not have a gift; if the person did have a gift, the person and everyone around would know it immediately.

We are not saying there is no value in taking part in these surveys, but be aware these surveys are *not identifying spiritual gifts in the biblical sense*. Spiritual gifts were given only to believers. A non-believer can also take today's surveys and discover something. What is

discovered is not a spiritual gift, but talents, skills, and abilities that all people have. These talents and skills are part of God's general provisions to all humans; these are God-given endowments (discussed in the next study), not spiritual gifts. A believer or non-believer taking these surveys is discovering the same thing, natural endowments.

Discuss: There are similarities and differences between talents/abilities and spiritual gifts; discuss.

We believe the Bible clearly teaches the spiritual gifts of Pentecost and the early Church passed away. Unfortunately, the gifts surveys do not recognize that the gifts have passed away, or that the lists of gifts given in the Bible (see Adult Study 20) were just representative samples. Not only do the gifts surveys try to discover gifts that do not exist today, but they also restrict themselves to a small sample of all possible gifts. Even if the gifts did exist, a survey based upon just a sample of all possible gifts is performing an "in part" ministry.

People take a spiritual gifts survey, believing the survey will identify God-given gifts. The surveys do not question whether gifts still exist or not; it is assumed that since the gifts are in the Bible they must exist today. However, the surveys merely identify some of the many God-given endowments a person may have (even the unsaved). Because of the confusion between gifts and natural endowments, the list of endowments is very limited. There are hundreds of endowments (talents, skill, and abilities) in existence, but the surveys are restricted in scope to around 20 (based upon the gifts listed in the Bible). Thus, the surveys do not create a true understanding of natural endowments possessed by all humans. By restricting a person's understanding, the surveys pigeonhole a person, that is, they force the person into a classification with a small number of categories, none of which may actually fit that person. People take a survey, thinking it will identify their gifts, when in reality it will only identify a few talents and abilities that are similar to gifts. Since the great array of actual, existing endowments are not on the survey,

people are forced to adopt something from the survey that often does not really describe them. Forcing a person to adopt something that really does not fit leads to disillusionment, as a result of a person's actual talents and abilities not being on the survey.

Another problem with today's spiritual gifts surveys is the very design of the surveys, which force some supposed gifts to come to the top of each person's list. Unfortunately, a person can be led to believe those top items are actual gifts. In reality, the top items may be a personal preference over other possible choices in the survey. A preference among choices is hardly a way to describe a true gift from God. In many respects, the surveys are part of the religious games Christians play, with an honest intent, but with a superficial understanding of the Word. If the survey identifies an endowment that actually fits the person, then that is good. Unfortunately, many times the person is led to believe they have a God-given gift, that they do not have.

In no other venue in life would we accept such shoddy intellect and understanding, as we accept in surveys to

discover our spiritual gifts. If you went to a psychiatrist, and he or she suggested your whole life could be understood by the few items mentioned in the surveys, you would be outraged; but somehow in Christian circles, we accept this. If a bridge engineer were gifted by God to design bridges, that would be great, but do you want to take the chance the bridge designer was gifted? If the bridge designer were a believer using natural endowments, would you like that person to restrict the design to twenty, out of hundreds, of known safety rules? If you went to a medical doctor and he or she employed the level of knowledge similar to that used in the surveys, the only prescription the doctor could offer would be wine, a fig poultice, or balm of Gilead. Of course, this is speaking in hyperbole in order to make a point, and to help the reader understand the inadequacy of what is so often presented as biblical guidance. The surveys are inadequate because they force upon us what the Bible calls "in part, imperfect, and childish." We need grown-up information on what God is giving us today. Perhaps we need to think of this as putting on our "big boy or big girl pants" and acting as mature Christians.

SUMMARY

There are several important items each of us should remember about spiritual gifts.

1. Prior to Pentecost there were: prophets and miracle workers in the Old Testament; New Testament apostles; all sorts of miracles, healings, raising the dead, and casting out of demons (Matt. 10:8). Thus, neither spiritual gifts nor gifted persons were a new "invention" at Pentecost. In pre-Pentecostal times, only a select few believers were empowered by God/Christ to display such gifts or abilities.
2. The spiritual gifts of Pentecost and the early Church Age were granted by God with the involvement of the Holy Spirit; they were freely given *only to believers*, to *all believers*, and *instantaneously* effective.
3. Gifts were given in complete form, meaning the person did not get some of the gift now, more of the same

gift later, then more in the future. The gift was complete all at once, and ready for immediate use. Although complete, each gift was *in part*, that is, it performed only one duty; another gift performed a different duty, and so on.

4. All the gifts worked together, but even when working together they had an *in part* aspect, because they did not provide the completeness afforded by the Word of God (which is the more excellent way).

5. Gifts were given to the early Church *until* there was unity in the Church; the Bible says that unity had developed by 64 AD; after that time, the gifts were to pass away.

6. Gifts were active in the early Church until *that which is perfect* came. That which is perfect is quite conclusively a reference to the completion of the perfect

Word of God for our Age, which occurred around 66 AD. After that, the Bible says the spiritual gifts would pass away. Thus, two independent Scriptures (items 5 and 6) proclaim the gifts would pass, or begin so, in the 64-66 AD time period.

7. The spiritual gifts given at Pentecost and in the early Church Age are referred to later in the Bible in terms such as: *dim*, *in part*, *childish*, and *there is a more excellent way*.

8. Spiritual gifts were not the complete solution to a lack of knowledge and understanding; the ultimate solution was the perfect, completed Word of God for our Age.

9. There is significant biblical evidence that the spiritual gifts did pass, fade, and cease around 64-66 AD. Accordingly, people were no longer healed, the last miracle occurred, and so forth.

10. The Bible:

- **tells us when the gifts began to be given to all believers** (Pentecost and shortly before),
- **lets us know the purpose of the gifts** (a sign for Israel and to help the early Church),
- **explains the gifts had limited ministries** (*in part*),
- **specifies that the gifts had a specific time limitation** (*till* the unity of the faith was reached and when *that which is perfect* came [i.e., the fulfilling of the Word of God for our Age]),
- **explains the fate of the gifts after their time limitation was reached** (fail, cease, vanish),
- **provides proof that the fate of the gifts happened, just as predicted, and**
- **reveals we are now *thoroughly equipped* for the ministry by the perfect Word of God.**

Gospel

If you should wonder, there is a gift that still exists: the gift of Salvation. Like all gifts, it is given in an instant,

and it is complete when given. The gift of Salvation is a unique gift because it is not in part or childish, and it will never pass away. Thus, Salvation is in a class of "gifts" that is different from all other gifts. In addition, Salvation has a very personal aspect, restoring a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. You can have that gift from God today. Each believer will receive God's Salvation upon simple faith in Christ; it is a free gift from God that is guaranteed not to pass away.

Encouragement

The exceeding power of God is something the believer can have with full assurance. Such power "looks different" than that seen at Pentecost and in the early Church. Today, God's power is seen accordingly: "**...the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His might power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places**" (Eph. 1:18-20). Our eyes are opened when we trust in Christ; we begin to see what hope really is, and rejoice in what He is doing for us. All He is doing is very powerful, comparable to the power He demonstrated in raising Christ. As we mature, we realize real God-power is not demonstrated through miracles and moving mountains, but by making changes within a person thought impossible, and making provisions for the future beyond our wildest imagination.

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