

Spiritual Gifts – Biblical Framework

Suggested Resources

- Strange Fire-John Mearther
- Christianity in Crises –Hank Hanwrgraaff
- The Holy Spirit – Jack Cottrell

Just because I use these resources does not mean I agree with all they say on the subject—the historical research is important.

Remember that my view of interpretation is to read the scriptures in light of what the first church understood it to mean. The historical approach rather than a progressive approach to understanding scripture is essential if we are to maintain the historic faith.

1. The Purpose of Supernatural Gifts: Confirming God’s Word

From the beginning, miraculous gifts were given to **confirm that the message was truly from God.**

- Hebrews 2:3–4 (NIV)

“This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. **God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.**”

- Mark 16:20 (NIV)

“Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, **and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.**”

Summary:

Miracles were not the message—they **validated the message.**

2. Scripture as the Final Standard

Once the message was delivered, it was preserved so that future generations could **test all teaching and experiences.**

- Jude 3 (NIV)

“...I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for **the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people.**”

- 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (NIV)

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

- 1 John 4:1 (NIV)

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits** to see whether they are from God...”

Summary:

The church is anchored not in ongoing revelation, but in the **completed, delivered Word of God.**

3. The New Testament Era: A Time of Confirmation

The apostolic era was unique—it was when the message of Christ was being **revealed and confirmed.**

- Ephesians 2:19–20 (NIV)

“...members of his household, **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,** with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”

Summary:

The apostles were laying a **foundation**, not continuing an endless process to allow for further new revelation.

4. Gifts Fueling the Launch of the Church (Acts 2)

In the early church, supernatural gifts helped establish both **the message and the movement.**

- Acts 2:4–6 (NIV)

“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to **speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them...** each one heard their own language being spoken.”

- Acts 2:22 (NIV)

“Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by **miracles, wonders and signs**, which God did among you through him...”

- Acts 2:42–43 (NIV)

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching... **Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.**”

Summary:

The “beachhead” was established—the gospel went forward with **power and confirmation**.

5. Clarifications Even When Gifts Were normatively Active

Even in their most active period, Scripture gives important guardrails:

A. Miracles Were True Miracles

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They were not emotional experiences—they were **clear acts of God overriding natural law**.

- Acts 3:6–8 (NIV)

“In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk... and immediately his feet and ankles became strong.”

B. The Focus Was Always God, Not the Individual

- Acts 3:12 (NIV)

“Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?”

C. There Were Clear Rules for Their Use

1. God is a God of Order

- 1 Corinthians 14:33 (NIV)

“For God is not a God of disorder but of peace...”

2. Tongues Were Real Languages (Acts 2)

Charles Parham (1903) actually introduced

- Taught that **speaking in tongues is the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit**
- Initially believed tongues were **real foreign languages** (xenolalia) for missionary work
- Sent people out expecting them to preach without learning languages

When that failed, the understanding shifted toward:

- Tongues as a **“prayer language”** rather than known human languages

Glossolalia found in other religions

Examples often cited:

- Ancient Greek religious practices (ecstatic speech in oracles)
- Certain tribal or animistic religions
- Some forms of spirit possession rituals
- Modern charismatic-type experiences in non-Christian groups

So **the phenomenon itself (ecstatic, non-cognitive speech)** is not unique to Christianity.

3. Interpretation of biblical speaking in tongues was Required so all could understand the message in a language they could understand

- 1 Corinthians 14:27–28 (NIV)

“If anyone speaks in a tongue... someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church...”

4. Limited Participation in a gathering of the church

- Same passage:

“Two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time...”

5. Not Pagan Babbling

- Matthew 6:7 (NIV)

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans...”

6. The Spirit Works Through, Not Instead Of, the Person

- 1 Corinthians 14:32–33 (NIV)

“The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace...”

Meaning:

Even prophetic speech was **under the control of the speaker**.

God's work is not chaotic or overpowering in a way that removes responsibility.

7. Prophecy Must Be Tested by other knowledgeable leaders

- 1 Corinthians 14:29 (NIV)

“Two or three prophets should speak, and **the others should weigh carefully what is said.**”

8. False Prophets Were to Be Rejected

- Deuteronomy 18:22 (NIV)

“If what a prophet proclaims... does not take place... that is a message the Lord has not spoken.”

9. Even Apostles Could Not Heal at Will

- 2 Corinthians 12:7–9 (NIV)

“I was given a thorn in my flesh... I pleaded with the Lord to take it away... But he said, ‘My grace is sufficient for you...’”

- 2 Timothy 4:20 (NIV)

“I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.”

10. Not Everyone Had the Same Gifts

- 1 Corinthians 12:29–30 (NIV)

“Are all apostles?... **Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?**”

11. The Body Needs Every Member

- 1 Corinthians 12:12 (NIV)

“Just as a body... has many parts... so it is with Christ.”

6. Gift Lists Are Illustrative, Not Exhaustive

The different lists show **variety**, not a fixed system.

- Romans 12:6–8

- 1 Corinthians 12
- Ephesians 4:11

These lists differ, pointing to a bigger truth:

Every Believer Has Gifts to Serve

- 1 Peter 4:10–11 (NIV)

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms... so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.”

Miracles still happen

- **Salvation is the greatest miracle**
- **God answers prayer (James 4:15-16)**
- **There may be a time and place where God moves in a miraculous way but there will be a purpose for it – and it will always point to the message already given**

Conclusion

- Miraculous gifts were **given to confirm the message.**
- The message was **delivered once for all and preserved in Scripture.**
- The early church experienced gifts **normatively during the foundation period.**
- Even then, gifts were **regulated, purposeful, and not universal.**
- Today, every believer still has a role: **to use their gifts to build up the body and glorify God.**
- **Be careful when people claim biblical gifts but reject the rules for their use**


Clarification

- Most define Cessationism as the idea that all miraculous activity by God is finished – this is not the view of our doctrine here at RLM
- Most Continuationists believe God works the same today normatively (as a normal course of every Christians life and church experience) We do not agree with this view either
- God can and does work at times in different ways that are consistent with how scripture defines the work – when He has a special purpose He can and does work

At Real Life it is okay to believe differently on this issue, but we will act in this way.

- Because this is a non-salvation area of contention between believers we will not have a place in our church where the gift of tongues is encouraged.

- We will not allow the discussion of a non-salvation issue to destroy the Lord's work.
- We do believe God does miracles and answers our prayer, and through the work of the Holy Spirit, empowers us to serve Him and do good works.

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