

Chain Reference: Spiritual Gifts

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Introduction.

- A. One of the most vexing things in the entire world is when we're talking to somebody about the Bible, need to make some point from the Bible to them, but can't remember where in the Bible that point is found. We know it's in there somewhere, we remember the preacher preaching about it just last month, but we can't for the life of us remember where it is. All of us have been in that position, and it's a frustrating place to be.
- B. This can happen during our discussion of any spiritual topic, but one of the places it most often happens is in our conversations with those who believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit and miraculous spiritual gifts still continue today. People who hold this belief tend to be very vocal about their faith, so it's not uncommon for us to be drawn into an exploration of our different beliefs. Naturally, when we're dealing with someone who is sincerely convinced that he's speaking in tongues, "I know it's in there somewhere," isn't going to cut it.
- C. To help us in moments like these, we're going to set up what's called a chain reference study on spiritual gifts. If you've heard of chain-reference Bibles, this is like those, except we're going to write it in ourselves. Here's how it works. Open your Bibles, go to one of the blank pages in the back, and write at the top of the page: Spiritual Gifts: Acts 2:1-4. That's going to be the first Scripture in our study. Then, once we go to Acts 2:1-4, write down the point of that passage in the margin. Once we're done with Acts 2:1-4, write down next to it the next passage in the study, which is going to be Acts 10:44-45. Keep on doing this throughout the study, and you'll have an eight-verse study on spiritual gifts that you don't have to remember anything about except that it starts in the back of your Bible. Let's begin, then, this chain reference for spiritual gifts.

I. The Origin of Spiritual Gifts.

- A. As I said earlier, our first passage is going to be **Acts 2:1-4**. This needs to be written next to "Spiritual Gifts" on that blank page in the back of your Bible. This passage is important because it describes the first pouring forth of the Holy Spirit. First, let's note just who received the Holy Spirit and the attendant spiritual gifts here. In context, the "they" of Acts 2:1 refers back to the twelve apostles mentioned in the last verse of Acts 1. This tells us that the entire group of 120 believers at that time were not baptized with the Holy Spirit. Instead, just the apostles were—that group to whom Jesus promised that they would receive power from on high.
- B. Second, this passage is significant because it is the only time in Scripture when we ever see Jews receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit at all. This is half of the promise that God made in Joel 2, when He said He would pour forth of His Spirit on all mankind. On Pentecost, the Jewish half of mankind got it.
- C. We see the other half of mankind get it in **Acts 10:44-47**. Now, before you turn there, be sure to write this Scripture reference in the margin of your Bibles next to Acts 2:1-4. This occurs, in the household of Cornelius, as Peter is preaching the gospel to the Gentiles for the first time. Just as on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given as a sign that the Jews might be saved, here it's given as a sign that the Gentiles might be saved. That's exactly why Peter calls for the household of Cornelius to be baptized as soon as he sees what's going on. This is the only time in Scripture where we see the pouring out of the Holy Spirit impart spiritual gifts to Gentiles.
- D. In fact, when we put this one together with the day of Pentecost, they are the only two times in Scripture when the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs. It's critically important that we recognize this. There are some religious groups out there who basically expect to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit every time they get together, and they think that they come by their "spiritual gifts" just like the Jews on the day of Pentecost did. Folks, that just can't be. The pouring out of the Spirit occurred as a sign that salvation was possible, first to the Jews and second to the Gentiles. Every man who has ever lived is part of one of those two groups. That means that the possibility of our salvation was proved 2000 years ago, and God isn't going to prove it again.
- E. Every other time in Scripture when we see a person receive spiritual gifts, it happens through the laying on of the apostles' hands. That means that in the margin of your Bibles next to Acts 10:44-47, you need to write **Acts 8:14-17**, then turn there. This text is important because it shows that only the apostles could transmit spiritual gifts in this way. Philip, after all, had been preaching in Samaria for a while now. He clearly had the power from God to work signs and wonders, but he didn't have the power to pass that power on. Only when Peter and John came did the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit—because the apostles laid hands on them.
- F. Here's why this is important. We've already seen from Scripture that the first way people received spiritual gifts—the direct outpouring of the Holy Spirit—isn't something that's going to happen anymore. Likewise, the only other way people received spiritual gifts—the laying on of the apostles' hands—isn't going to happen anymore either. There are no more true apostles. The Scripture tells us in Acts 1 that in order to be qualified to serve as an apostle, a man had to have been with Jesus from the time when He was baptized until the time when He was taken up into heaven. No one alive can meet that qualification, so there are no more apostles, so there is no one who can still impart the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. That time is ended.

II. The Nature of Spiritual Gifts.

- A. Now that we know where spiritual gifts came from, let's look at what they are. That means that in the margin of your Bibles next to Acts 8:14-17, you need to write **Acts 2:6-11**, because that's our next stop. This is the passage that tells us what speaking in tongues is, in a Biblical sense. There are many people today who claim to speak in tongues, but for all of them, what they speak sounds like gibberish. They claim variously that it's a prayer language, or maybe the language that angels speak, but friends, real speaking in tongues wasn't about either one of those things. As we see in Acts 2, real speaking in tongues was going up to a foreigner whose language you had never studied in your life, and being able to talk fluently with him in that foreign language. If I, for instance, had the genuine gift of tongues today, I would be able to talk in perfect Chinese to somebody who'd just gotten off the boat from China, even though I don't know a single word of Chinese that isn't on a takeout menu. Friends, there is no one alive today who can demonstrate that he possesses this genuine spiritual gift. There are many people who are deluded, but no one who really has the gift of tongues.
- B. Now that we've got this down, in the margin next to Acts 2:6-11, write **Acts 3:4-10**, because that's where we're going to find out about the gift of healing. Today, there's a whole lot of murkiness about those who claim to be faith healers. Either they perform a "healing" with effects that are invisible, or they heal someone whom nobody knows was sick in the first place. Folks, that's exactly what we don't see in Acts 3. The lame man whom Peter healed wasn't some kind of fake whom Peter had brought in to pretend to be healed and impress the gullible. Everybody in Jerusalem knew this man couldn't walk. He'd been begging at the temple gates for years. Furthermore, because it was the hour of prayer, there was a whole crowd around who saw him suddenly begin to leap and bound around. This was a man who wasn't even expecting to be healed, who suddenly was healed in an unmistakable and miraculous way. That's the way the gift of healing worked.
- C. Nobody today can do that. Nobody today can do anything that even comes close to that, and if somebody claimed to me that he could, here's what I'd say to him. I'd say, "Friend, let's take a drive down to St. Jude's. Let's go into the children's cancer ward there. Then, I want to see you use your God-given gift of healing to heal just one child dying of cancer. Just one sick child, instantly healthy and happy, is all it'll take for me. Then I will believe." And I would. Of course, nobody will ever put their supposed "gift" on the line like that. They won't ever do anything for which there isn't another explanation. We shouldn't believe until they do.
- D. From there, the Scripture you need to write in your Bibles next to Acts 3:4-10 is **Acts 21:10-11**, because that passage gives us an example of the real use of the gift of prophecy. There are many so-called prophets today, and they come from many different religious groups, but they all have one thing in common: all of them have made prophecies that didn't turn out to be true. Not so with the genuine first-century prophets. Like Agabus, they made specific, disprovable predictions that were accurate every time. Let me give you an example of what it would be like. Next month, I have a gospel meeting in Aurora. A genuine prophet could say to me, "Matt, if you go to Aurora, you'll get in a car wreck," and it would happen. So-called prophets today don't do that. Either they try to predict the future without any more success than you or I would have, or they predict it in such vague terms that they can't be proven wrong. Folks, that's not the true gift of prophecy.

III. The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts.

- A. Now that we know where the spiritual gifts came from and what they did, we need to learn what they're for. To that end, in your Bibles next to Acts 21:10-11, write **Mark 16:20**, which first describes the purpose of those miraculous spiritual gifts. Typically, people who claim to have these gifts today are vague on why they have them. Most sincere faith healers believe that they have their gift to heal sick people. Logically, that doesn't make sense. After all, if God's goal were really to heal sick people, He could heal everyone in the world right now and keep them healed forever. Instead, the true purpose of gifts was to save, not heal.
- B. Commonly in Scripture, the miracles that were worked were called "signs," and that gives us a wonderful insight into their purpose. When we're driving down the highway, we don't see blank highway signs a lot, do we? Of course not! Signs are put there to tell us something. That's just the way the spiritual gifts were: they were given to tell people something, that the man who had them was from God. They confirmed his word.
- C. This tells us something else, too. After all, if God gave man spiritual gifts for this specific purpose of confirming the word, it's just common sense that those gifts would cease to be once the word had been confirmed. The job they were supposed to do was done, so there wasn't any reason for them any longer.
- D. We see a passage that tells us that exactly this happened in **1 Corinthians 13:8-10**. That means that in your Bibles next to Mark 16:20, you need to write 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, and then turn to the passage with me. Remember, folks: in Scripture, the word perfect often means "complete," and that's what it means here. Paul is comparing their current partial state of knowledge imparted through spiritual gifts to the complete state of knowledge that we have today through the written word. Sometimes, we get envious of those folks in the first century who could prophesy and work miracles, but as this passage makes clear, what we have is actually better. Even Paul didn't know everything, but we can hold in our hands every single thing that God wants us to know. Next to what we have in the word, why would we possibly need spiritual gifts anymore?

Conclusion. Are you living in obedience to that word? If not, start now.