

The Holy Spirit 9

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit (continued)

Healing. In the context of our present series on the Holy Spirit and in particular on the gifts of the Spirit, let me remind you of the fact that Jesus said:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. (John 14:12)

Jesus healed and so his promise that those who believe in him will do what he did means that we are to heal today. The reason that will happen is that Jesus went to the Father and asked him to send the Holy Spirit:-

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. (John 16:7)

"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever-- (John 14:16)

Remember also that Jesus did not heal everyone. At the Pool of Bethesda there were many sick there but Jesus healed just one. It seems that he sought his Father's will before he healed, to discern what his Father wanted at every moment. So we need to be careful before we offer to bring healing to anyone. We need discernment to know the Father's heart.

On the other hand, we have no record in scripture that Jesus ever refused to heal anyone who came to him asking for healing. So I suggest that if people ask for healing we ought not to refuse to minister to them. We need very great care here. We need on the one hand to build up the person's faith, yet on the other not to

tell them that they will certainly be healed. Some years ago a well-known preacher with a recognised healing ministry was the speaker in one of a series of Lent Talks on a local radio station. Whether or not he intended to do so, he certainly gave the impression that if a person was not healed following ministry for that purpose it was because he or she did not have sufficient faith. The talk was heard by many terminally ill people in the local Hospice. They were left not only with their disease but with an added guilt complex that it was their own fault that they were not healed. It caused intense distress which had to be handled by the local clergy when the speaker had departed to his home in a different part of the country.

We must face facts, we know that not everyone to whom we minister healing is healed. There may be many reasons for this, some of which we may understand and others which we will only discover in eternity. All I would say here is that Christ is more concerned at making a person whole than simply their physical healing. A person with bitterness of heart and nursing unforgiveness will be compounding their illness and cannot logically expect God to heal them.

Notice I talk about ministering healing not praying for healing. The reference in the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 is to healing not praying for healing. I learned much from a Roman Catholic priest about this. He explained that so much of our praying for people's healing is triangular where we stand at one corner of the triangle and direct our prayer to God at the apex, asking him to send his healing upon the patient at the third corner. That is not how Jesus ministered:

Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me... Now when He had said

these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"
(John 11:41-43)

His reference to his Father having heard him clearly implies that Jesus had prayed beforehand and received his Father's authority to restore the life of Lazarus. When he came to minister at the tomb he simply commanded with authority.

The disciples ministered in the same way:

Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.
(Acts 3:6-7)

I am not saying there is no place for praying for the sick, James instructs that we should do so, and Elders of the Church have a particular role in this respect, they are to do this by reason of their office and not because they necessarily have a gift of healing. It seems that they represent the Church as the Body of Christ and, as his body on earth today, the Church has authority to heal. However, in addition, there are some individuals who do have gifts of healing (note the plural).

to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, (1 Corinthians 12:9)

It seems that there are different gifts of healing. Some say some people are good at backs, another at breathing problems etc. but here it seems that scripture is talking about one person having a variety of gifts of healing. Does it mean that he or she is good at counselling; helping people get rid of the jealousy, bitterness, unforgiveness, hurts, inferiority complexes and so on which may be the root cause of their disease - their dis-ease? I'm not sure. I just draw your attention to it..

There is one more spiritual gift to which I will refer in detail and that is the **Gift of Tongues**, because there is so much misunderstanding about this. First what it is. It is the ability to speak in a language which we have not learned. It may be another human language or an angelic, heavenly language.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels... (1 Corinthians 13:1)

It is often thought that this somehow comes upon a believer who cannot stop himself speaking in this way if the Spirit drives him. This is quite untrue. We are no more compelled to speak in a spiritual tongue than in our mother tongue. It is the *language* that is given, not the *voice*. We may choose when we start and when we stop. It is because this is not understood that many find it difficult to begin to speak in tongues. We have to make a noise; that is, offer our voice. We may say 'aah', as for a doctor. In the English language there are far more consonants than vowels so it may be helpful to make a noise of 'ba-ba-ba' or 'do-do-do,' as we learn. It is often helpful to begin by *singing* with the spirit rather than speaking - try it in the bath!

Because we have not learned this language we do not understand what we are saying unless there is an interpretation. There is a view in some circles that a tongue plus interpretation is equal to prophecy. I believe that is to ignore the teaching of scripture. I am convinced that the intention of speaking in tongues is that it is always to be from man to God and never from God to man. We have enough difficulty in tuning in to what God is saying to us when the Holy Spirit is revealing it in our mother tongue. Why should God make it even more complicated by speaking in an unknown language which then has to be interpreted? However, on our part, we soon exhaust our words of praise when we seek to extol God. "Hallelujah, praise you Lord, bless your holy Name," is just about the limit of our vocabulary. There is a tremendous

release in not having to concentrate on finding words, but to allow our spirit to soar in praise and thanksgiving, knowing that we are uttering sounds which delight God, even though we do not understand exactly what they mean. To do this is, as Paul says, edifying to ourselves even though it will not edify anyone else (1 Cor. 14:4)

Let me quote the evidence for my statement that the intention is that speaking in tongues is always to be from man to God; whereas it is prophecy when God speaks to man.

For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. (1 Corinthians 14:2-3)

The opening of that quotation seems abundantly clear. Paul goes on...

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. (1 Corinthians 14:14-17).

In that passage Paul refers to speaking in tongues as praying, blessing (other translations say praising) and giving thanks. There is no suggestion at all that to speak in tongues is to give a message from God. The confusion that tongues plus interpretation is the same as prophecy arises from one verse:-

I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification. (1 Corinthians 14:5)

But Paul is not equating the two. He is speaking about edifying or building up the Church. If a person is speaking in a tongue to God, no one else can join in and say 'Amen', unless he understands what is being said, and for that there needs to be an interpretation. So it is far better to hear in our mother tongue what God has to say to us in prophecy. That edifies everyone without any problems of not understanding what is said.

In spite of this, in many fellowships where there is public speaking in tongues, the interpretation is in the form of a message from God to the people. My own belief is that this is normally a fresh prophecy and the tongue remains uninterpreted. However, the Holy Spirit is so gracious that perhaps it may be that he is willing to speak in a tongue with a message from God and then give the interpretation if that is how we want it to be, however perverse we are, although I am by no means convinced of that. For myself, I believe that the elders in each church should teach their people what scripture actually says and encourage them to expect the interpretation of tongues always to be prayer, praise or thanksgiving from man to God.

There does seem to be one exception to this. It is when the person speaking in tongues in public does so in a language which, although unknown to them, is that of someone else who hears them (as happened with the disciples on the day of Pentecost). Then it may very well be it is a word from God to men. However, it must be recognised that *in that circumstance no interpretation is needed*; it is a direct and understandable word to the hearer. This occurrence is obviously rare and is distinct from the normal use of tongues in worship, whether public or private.

One final thing: there are some Christians who hold that the proof that someone has been filled with or baptised in the Holy Spirit is that they speak in tongues. There is no scriptural ground for this teaching and I know many who have been filled with the Spirit and exercise other gifts without being able to speak in tongues. Personally, I believe that scripture points to the fact that all believers may speak in tongues in their private devotions if they wish to have this gift, but if they do not do so that certainly does not mean that they cannot have been filled with the Spirit. However, if, as I believe, it is available why decline a gift which God offers us?