The Truth about Holy Spirit Gifts

Ruth Moore
CBM

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A few points about this leaflet:

1. The following letters are used for different Bible versions: R.S.V. means Revised Standard Version N.I.V. means New International Version.

   Most of the quotations are taken from the New King James Version.

2. Many Bible passages are given. It is worth looking them up for yourself.

3. Some more complicated ideas are put as notes at the end.

Members of some churches claim that they have the power of the Holy Spirit and are able to heal and speak in tongues. Is their claim true? In searching for the answer, beware! Do not accept the ideas of men. A Christian can only accept God’s Word, the Bible.

Bible teaching

1. Some members of the early Christian church were given the power of the Holy Spirit

   - to help them to establish the new church,
   - to remember the teaching of Jesus so that they could instruct others,
   - to heal sick people and
   - to complete the writing of the Bible.

2. These very special powers were only for the early days of the church. They could only be passed on to others by a few people, mainly the apostles. As these people died so gradually the powers died out.

3. However wonderful a person might be today, claiming to heal and speak in tongues, he cannot have the very special power of the Holy Spirit.

Occasions when people were given the power of the Holy Spirit

The power of the Holy Spirit was given by God on certain occasions to men and women to do special work in God’s service. Here are some examples:

1. Builders in Israel were given the Spirit of God to help them make the tabernacle. (See Exodus 31:3-5).

2. The Spirit of the Lord came upon men and women to be judges in the nation of Israel. (See Judges 3:10).
3. Men of God knew what to write in the Bible because the Holy Spirit acted on their minds. This is known as “inspiration”. (See 2 Peter 1:21).

4. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary, so that she was able to conceive and then later to give birth to Jesus (Luke 1:35).

5. At the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus like a dove. (Matthew 3:16).

6. The apostles of Jesus were given the Holy Spirit and were sent out in twos by Jesus to preach about the kingdom of God (Matthew 10:1-8). Also the 70 helpers who went out preaching had this special power (Luke 10:9). On all these occasions, it was obvious that God’s power was working.

7. Before his crucifixion, Jesus promised his disciples that they would be helped by the Comforter or the Holy Spirit, to remember the teaching of Jesus (John 14:26). On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles in a very dramatic way (Acts 2:2-3) and the apostles could then speak with tongues as well as perform miracles (Acts 2 verses 4 & 43).

(For more on speaking in tongues see note 7 at the end).

**Different kinds of gifts**

1 Corinthians 12 lists the gifts given by the Spirit. They were:

- wisdom, knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, speaking with tongues, interpretation of tongues.

(For a more detailed explanation of these different gifts of the Spirit see note 2 at the end.)

**How did people in New Testament times receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit?**

1. Some received it directly from heaven.

   This happened only a few times. The pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost is an example (Acts 2). The answer to the prayer of the apostles in Acts 4:31 is another example. Both of these were very dramatic events.

   Cornelius received the Holy Spirit directly from God. He is the only example of someone who received the Holy Spirit before baptism and the reason is quite obvious if you read Acts chapter 10. He was the first Gentile to become a Christian. It needed a dramatic dream (Acts 10:9-16) to one of the most important of the apostles, Peter, to show the early church that Gentiles could also be Christians. Immediately after Cornelius received the gift of the Holy Spirit and spoke with tongues, Peter knew that Cornelius should be baptised with water and be treated like Jewish believers, so he said:
“Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptised who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”

God deliberately chose this amazing way of showing that Cornelius could be a Christian because He knew that Jewish Christians would find it difficult to accept Gentile believers as Acts chapter 11 shows us (read verses 1-18).

The Holy Spirit given directly from heaven was very unusual. The Lord Jesus himself received the Holy Spirit in this way at his baptism.

See note 3 at the end for information on water baptism and baptism of the Holy Spirit.

2. Most Christians who received the gift of the Holy Spirit were given it by the laying on of hands. Ananias passed on the Holy Spirit to Saul (later called the Apostle Paul), see Acts 9:17. Otherwise only the apostles could pass on the gift of the Holy Spirit by laying their hands on people. Acts 8:4-25 tells us about Philip, the preacher who visited Samaria. He baptised Simon with water but could not give him the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The apostles, John and Peter, came from Jerusalem and laid their hands on the newly baptised believers. Verses 18 & 19 say: “Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit’.”

Note:

(i) the Holy Spirit gifts did not come to these believers when they were baptised with water.

(ii) Acts 8:18 shows us that the believers received the gift of the Holy Spirit when the APOSTLES laid their hands on them.

(iii) Philip did not lay hands on them to give them the Spirit gifts because he was not the apostle Philip. (We are told in Acts 8:1 that the apostles stayed in Jerusalem and since the Philip in Acts 8 was not in Jerusalem we conclude he was not an apostle. See also Acts 6:5).

(iv) Simon knew that even though he had received this power, he could not pass it on to others. He offered to pay money to the apostles so that he could pass on the Spirit gifts to people.

After the apostles died, there would be no-one to pass on the gifts, so the gifts would have to die out.

Why were the Holy Spirit gifts needed?

After the Lord Jesus was taken into heaven, the apostles had the difficult task of setting up the early church. They had to do this without the New Testament because it had not yet been written. So the gifts of the Holy Spirit were needed to finish writing the rest of the Scriptures, as well as to preach to people who spoke foreign languages.
The gift of wisdom would help when there were difficult decisions to make, and the gifts of teaching and miracles would help the preaching work. The first century Christians had lots of enemies; the Jews and the Romans disliked and persecuted them. The gifts of the Holy Spirit helped them through this difficult time.

When the New Testament had been completed and the church set up, the gifts would no longer be needed.

The Apostle Paul wrote about the time when the gifts would finish. In 1 Corinthians 13:8 he says, “As for prophecy, it will pass away; as for tongues they will cease; as for knowledge it will pass away”.

The Holy Spirit gifts do not exist today because they are not needed. We have the whole of the Bible to guide and teach us.

Other occasions when powers were given and did not last.

The Lord Jesus gave “power” to the twelve disciples when he sent them out to preach to the people (Mark 6:7-13) but it did not last for very long because nine of them were unable to heal the boy who was ill (Mark 9:17-29). The Spirit was poured out on them at Pentecost (Acts 2).

In 1 Samuel 10: 9-13 we read that Saul was able to prophesy (because God had given him His Spirit) but it did not last and later on he was given an evil spirit (1 Samuel 16:14).

What about people who claim to heal in our time?

Some people have health problems because they are suffering from anxiety, and so telling the sick person that he will get better can help him to recover. Doctors know that most illnesses including major ones can be overcome naturally by the body. People who call themselves “divine healers” know that if they encourage the sick it often helps them to get better. These people never raise the dead or cure a paralysed arm or leg, which shows their powers are limited.

A friend from Africa told me the story of the person who went to the doctor asking for an injection to cure him. The doctor said there was no injection that could help. The man insisted he needed something so the doctor injected him. The next day the man felt much better. The doctor had not told him the injection was only salt water! It was easy to “heal” this person!

Mark 16:15-18 says that those who possess the power provided by the Holy Spirit can take poison and not be harmed by it. The next time you talk to someone who claims to have power from God, ask him if he or others from his church will take poison to prove they have this power! Or perhaps they could hold a poisonous snake as the apostle Paul did, and not be harmed.

Jesus and the apostles who had the Holy Spirit were always able to heal completely, even raising people from the dead. Jesus also fed thousands of people. If the gift of miracles is still around today, then those who possess it should be able to feed many
people as Jesus did. If they could, they might be able to reduce the famine in some countries.

A wrong idea

“Healers” often say that the patient needs faith before the Holy Spirit can work, and that if they cannot cure a person it is because the person does not have faith. Jesus and the apostles raised people from the dead; dead people cannot show faith! Jesus restored the ear of one of those who came to arrest him (Luke 22:50-51). This person clearly was not showing faith. Readers of the New Testament will be able to think of other examples, particularly those who were mentally ill, who showed no faith and yet were healed.

Healing today

Today, God does not work through people by giving them His special power but He still uses His power to answer the prayers of true believers. He can heal the sick if it is His will to do so. He can also help in other ways; His power is not limited, but He has not chosen to let men possess His power at the present time. Remember that in Old Testament times only a few people could use God’s power and great men of God like David and Abraham could not speak with tongues, raise the dead, or heal the sick, nor do any miracles.

A useful test

God does not cause confusion. If He had given His Spirit to people then those people would speak His truth. To find out if a person who claims to have the Spirit really does possess it we have to see whether what he believes is correct, by testing it with the Bible.

Here are some of the things people who claim to have the Holy Spirit teach.

(i) They say that part of them goes on living when they die.

The Bible tells us that the dead cannot do anything. They cannot even think.

(ii) They say that they will go to heaven when they die.

The Bible teaches that everyone goes to the grave and no one goes to heaven. (See lesson 22 of the 40 lesson Christadelphian Bible Mission postal course).

(iii) They say that God’s kingdom is in heaven.

The Bible says that the Lord Jesus will set up God’s kingdom on earth when he returns. (See lesson 9 of the 40 lesson Christadelphian Bible Mission postal course).

Since these people are not preaching the true gospel they do not possess God’s very special power, the Holy Spirit.
Matthew 24:24 warns us that there will be false prophets before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven.

**God’s Word - the Bible**

When a person reads the Bible, he has all that he needs to know about God’s wonderful purpose with this earth. This is why the Bible is so important and why we should read it each day.

The apostle Paul wrote this to Timothy, showing how important the Scriptures are:

“And that from childhood you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:15)

**Summary**

1. The gifts of the Holy Spirit died out as the apostles died.
2. People who claim to do miracles and speak in tongues believe and teach ideas which are not found in the Bible.
3. The gifts of the Spirit are not needed today. The Scriptures are able to guide and instruct us.

**Questions**

1. Why were the Holy Spirit gifts given just after Jesus ascended to heaven?
2. Can people today speak with tongues?
3. God can heal people today. Does He do this by giving men a miraculous power?
4. Write out a verse which shows that the gifts of the Holy Spirit would stop being used.
5. David could not perform miracles but the Holy Spirit of God helped him to do something very important. What was it?
6. Why was Cornelius given the Holy Spirit before he was baptised with water?
7. Do we need to be baptised with the Spirit in order to be saved? (see note 3).
Note 1:

What is “speaking in tongues”?

Some people today think that speaking in tongues is quite different from speaking in another language. They think that excited people who make strange sounds at religious meetings are speaking in tongues.

They believe that 1 Corinthians 14:2 teaches this when it refers to speaking “in an unknown tongue”:

“For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.” (Authorised Version)

The New King James Version says:

“For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God...”

It leaves out the word “unknown”. The N.I.V. and the R.S.V. also leave out the word “unknown”. The reason they leave it out is because it is not in the original text which was written in Greek. The Greek word which has been translated “tongue” is also used in Scripture for language. For example in Revelation 7:9-10

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

This passage gives a wonderful picture of righteous people worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ when he returns. People from all nations and speaking different languages will be present.

(Other passages which use this word “tongues” are: Revelation 5:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, 1 7:15. They clearly refer to different languages. The same word is also used in Romans 14:11, Philippians 2:11 and 1 John 3:18).

On the day of Pentecost the apostles were able to speak in tongues so that Jews from many different countries could hear the Gospel being preached in their own language (read Acts 2:5-11).
Note 2:

Gifts of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 12: 7-11 gives us a list of the gifts of the Spirit. Here are some notes about the passage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verses</th>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>For to one is given the word of WISDOM by the Spirit, to another the word of KNOWLEDGE</td>
<td>The early church could be guided by those who had the gift of WISDOM. After the completion of the Scriptures, this gift would no longer be needed as the Word of God guides us. This was not knowledge of facts about science or mathematics but knowledge of the things of God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>to another FAITH by the same Spirit, to another gifts of HEALINGS by the same Spirit</td>
<td>This would help believers to do what would seem to be impossible, like travel long distances to preach even though the Jews were trying to attack and persecute them. Some could heal the sick.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>to another the working of MIRACLES to another PROPHECY, to another DISCERNING OF SPIRITS, to another different kinds of TONGUES,</td>
<td>Some could do miracles other than healing miracles. Some people could tell what would happen in the future and were good at speaking and explaining what the Word of God said. Others could tell whether someone who claimed to have the Spirit was telling the truth or not. They would know if a letter sent to a church was written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit or not. This was the ability to speak in a foreign language so the gospel could be spread further.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>but one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as he wills.</td>
<td>All these gifts came from the same Spirit, but one would not possess all the gifts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Verse 28 shows us which gifts were important.

(a) First, and most important were the Spirit guided apostles.

(b) Second in importance were those with the gift of prophecy.

(c) Third were those who could teach and help to prepare people for baptism.

(d) Then those who could perform miracles

- those who could heal
- those who could help
- those who could administer (serve)

(e) ... and at the end those who could speak with tongues. This was the least important of all the gifts.
Note 3:

Water baptism and baptism by the Holy Spirit

People sometimes try to tell us that believers should be baptised by the Holy Spirit. They think this is far more important than water baptism. This is not true. The following chart shows the difference between water baptism and baptism by the Holy Spirit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Water baptism</th>
<th>Holy Spirit baptism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How did each type of baptism happen?</td>
<td>People were baptised in water by putting them completely under the water (see Acts 8: 38-39)</td>
<td>The Spirit was poured out on the believers. It “filled all the house” so that the apostles would have been completely surrounded by the Spirit (see Acts 2:2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why was the baptism needed?</td>
<td>Water baptism was so that sins could be washed away (forgiven) (Acts 22:16). This was the start of a new life in Christ</td>
<td>To give the apostles power to help preach the gospel to all nations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does each type of baptism represent?</td>
<td>Being put under the water is like dying with Christ and then being raised to a new life (see Romans ch. 6)</td>
<td>The Holy Spirit gifts were a little taste of what the kingdom of God will be like because the gifts will be poured out on believers then. (Hebrews 6:4-5),.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When does each type of baptism happen?</td>
<td>Water baptism is needed when a person wants to change his way of life and follow Jesus. It is still important today.</td>
<td>Baptism of the Holy Spirit was only given on a few occasions. It does not happen today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who can be baptised in those ways?</td>
<td>All believers should be baptised with water to follow the example of Christ (Matthew 3:14-15).</td>
<td>Only a few people in Bible times were chosen by God to receive the Holy Spirit in this dramatic way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you need it to be saved?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note 4:

Acts-2:39

Acts 2:39 is used by some people to show that the gift of the Holy Spirit would be given to anyone who is baptised with water. As we have already seen, the baptised believers in Acts chapter 8 did not automatically receive the Holy Spirit but the apostles had to give it to them. So what does this passage mean?

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:37-39)
Let us look at verse 39 in detail. “The promise is to you”

Peter was talking to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, so he was telling them that they could have the gift of the Holy Spirit.

“and to your children”

Their children could also have this gift of the Spirit.

“and to all who are afar off”

This does not mean “far off in time”. In Ephesians 2:13 those who were “far off” were the Gentiles. Gentile believers had been a long way from God but through the death of Jesus, they could come to God just as the Jews could. The same phrase is used in Ephesians 2:17 and again refers to the Gentiles. So Peter promised that Gentile believers could also receive Holy Spirit gifts. This is what happened to Cornelius, and then later to many other Gentile Christians when the apostles laid hands on them. (See also Isaiah 57:19).

“as many as the Lord our God will call.”

The promise of the Holy Spirit gifts was only given to those “called” by God. These were people who were baptised with water.

There are only 3 groups mentioned here. They are:

(i) the Christian Jews at the time of the apostle Peter

(ii) the children of these Jews - that is, the next generation of Jewish believers

(iii) the Gentile converts (Gentiles who were baptised into Christ).

The passage does NOT mean that the promise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is to anyone who believes at any time. If it did it would be disagreeing with 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 which shows that the gifts would die out.