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Our Spiritual Journey: The Gifts of the Spirit...

Making sure we edify others!

I Corinthians 14:1-12

The subject of speaking in tongues and the manifestations of supernatural abilities among Christians has been an issue of debate since the early 1800's (search "Edward Irving"). We will get distracted from our purpose if we pursue all of the movements and happenings that periodically or, in other cases, regularly have appeared in the last two centuries. Let's allow Scripture to emphasize things and to prioritize things for us.

God can do anything supernatural that He wants to do. He can do it anytime He wants with anyone He wants. But please observe that there are few periods of Bible history that are marked by miracles / supernatural events. Usually, special times of miraculous events are given temporarily to confirm a truth or to verify a teacher / leader.

- Moses – Exodus 4:1-9.
- Elijah – I Kings 18:17-40.
- Daniel – Daniel 6:10-28 cp. 3:26-30.
- Jesus Christ – Luke 7:20-23; John 5:36; Acts 2:22; 1:1-3.
- The 12 Apostles & other Apostles (i.e., Paul) – Matthew 10:5-8; Mark 16:17-26; Acts 2:43; 5:12; 19:11-12; 14:3; II Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4.
- The early churches – Mark 16:17-20; Acts 4:29-31; I Corinthians 12:28-31; 13:8; 14:19-25.
- The 2 witnesses – Revelation 11:1-12.

Hopefully, this list can help you understand that the time of Christ, the apostles and the early churches was a time of transition with new teachers / leaders and new truths. Israel had been promised a time when people would speak to them with other tongues / languages (Isaiah 28:11-12 – note it was also predicted that the nation, as a whole, would not hear). Careful observation of the book of Acts will show that whenever tongues occurred, there were Jews present. Paul points out that tongues were a sign to those who do not believe (I Corinthians 14:21-22). Other than Mark 16:17 and the book of Acts, the only teaching that deals with speaking in tongues is I Corinthians. Remember, this is the church that had lots of growing up to do. They were carnal and competitive. Other churches took these special gifts in stride. Therefore, if these special gifts started to fade away, it wasn't going to present a problem. Church history bears witness that the sign gifts did fade out (note: "sign gifts" – II Corinthians 12:12). Preaching and teaching from God's Word became the primary thing (I Corinthians 14:1-4).

Some have asked, “If tongues have ceased, why are there three chapters devoted to the topic?” As we have already stated, the only church to get such instruction was a church that was weak and immature. The prevailing themes of I Corinthians chapters 12-14 are Love and Edification. Paul used the issues of spiritual gifts to deal with the church’s greater problem. Also, the Spirit of God knew that there would be confusion in the future about spiritual gifts. Paul gave clear instructions about how things were to be done decently in order. If churches today do not follow those instructions, then it is not advisable to follow the practices of those churches. Therefore, let’s take a look at the fourteenth chapter of I Corinthians.

I Corinthians 14:1-12 – Speaking in tongues is an inferior means of communication.

I Corinthians 14:13-19 – Speaking in tongues is an inferior means of praise and worship.

I Corinthians 14:20-25 – Speaking in tongues is an inferior means of evangelism.

I Corinthians 14:26-40 – Seek that all things be done decently and in order.

Paul stresses that there should be peace in the ministry of the church, not confusion (I Corinthians 14:33,40). Our focus should be on edifying others with loving intelligent communication from God’s Word (I Corinthians 14:12).

Establishing the work of the gospel in churches was like building a building. At first scaffolding is used (cp. temporary spiritual gifts). When the work of building is completed, the scaffolding is removed. The building can stand on its own. So, the church can stand, in every generation, by gospel teaching which is proclaimed by men and attended by the work of Christ’s Spirit within us (John 6:63; I Corinthians 2:1-5; Romans 1:16; 10:17; 16:25-27). Many spiritual gifts remain today and are very much needed. Let’s discover what God has given us to use for His glory and for the edification of others!

Please review Romans 12:1-21; Ephesians 4:1-16; I Corinthians 12:1 – 13:13.