

# Spiritual Gifts in the Church – Part I

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The topic of spiritual gifts is a very divisive and emotionally charged one. Several Charismatic and Pentecostal groups have a lot invested in the idea that they possess the genuine supernatural gifts of the Spirit recorded in the book of Acts. To challenge their theology is to challenge their experiences and their claim to a special relationship to God's Spirit that the rest of the Christian world does not seem to possess. If it is true that some Christians today possess the same supernatural powers given by the Spirit to the early Church, then it is obvious that the majority of Christians are really missing out on something significant. Conversely, if the claimed manifestations of the Spirit by Charismatic and Pentecostal groups are not the genuine gifts of the Spirit, then it is obvious that a considerable portion of the Church has been hoodwinked with a counterfeit. Either way, the ramifications are very, very serious.

As with any theological question, the answer must be derived from the Scriptures. Prejudices and presuppositions must be put aside. Experience cannot be the standard, since it is subjective. Many of the things passed off as "gifts" are apparently prominent in false religion, such as Mormonism and paganism, and even occultism. Spiritual and emotional experiences are inherently untrustworthy. Only God's Word, interpreted with sound exegetical principles, can resolve this issue objectively.

Methodology is critical to any kind of research. Just as with a criminal investigation, a proposed scenario must be tested against all the relevant evidence. The simplest scenario that best accounts for all of the evidence (without forcing) should be regarded as the true scenario.

Our view is that supernatural spiritual gifts were given by the Spirit exclusively through the agency of the twelve Apostles that Jesus personally commissioned. The purpose of the Apostle's special gift – the ability to impart supernatural gifts through their hands— was meant to be God's testimony to the Apostolic ministry, and verify their eyewitness testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Spiritual gifts were not given apart from the immediate presence of an Apostle of Jesus Christ, usually involving the laying on of the Apostles' hands. However, the particular gifts given to the individuals on whom the Apostles' laid their hands was determined entirely by the Holy Spirit, not by the Apostles. The Apostles acted merely as conduits. The gifts themselves came from God.

### **The Uniqueness of the “Apostles of Jesus Christ”**

Much confusion surrounds the meaning of the term “apostle.” This confusion was created by the early English translations failure to translate the Greek word, “αποστολος.” Rather than translate it into English, they “transliterated” it. That is, they conveyed the phonetic sound of the word in English letters rather than the meaning of the word. Consequently, it has taken on a special religious technical meaning far different than the sense of the term in early Christianity. Essentially, the Greek word was the common term for someone sent on a mission with the authority of the sender, to speak and act on his behalf. The best English equivalent is “emissary.” There is nothing special about the term itself. And used alone, it lack any religious specificity. Its real significance is derived from the context, the sender and the purpose for sending. For example, there is a huge difference between sending someone to the store to pick up a gallon of milk and the President of the United States sending the Secretary of State to negotiate a treaty! While the verb “sent” is the same, and even the equivalent noun meaning “emissary” is the same (both are acting on behalf of another), the relevance and importance comes exclusively from the sender and the mission entrusted to the “emissary.” In Biblical Greek, the word “αποστολος” could be used just as easily of sending someone on an errand to buy milk or a king sending an ambassador to a foreign country.

The Greek word rendered “apostle” (αποστολος) is used in various ways in the New Testament. We have cases where a local church sent someone on a mission (2 Cor. 8:23). Paul and Barnabas were “sent” on their first missionary journey by the Church of Antioch (cf. Acts 13:1-3 & Acts 14:14). In these cases, “apostles” were acting on behalf of a local church, with the authority of that local church. However, the majority of cases in the New Testament use the term “Apostles” with reference to Jesus as the sender, giving them His authority to perform the mission specifically entrusted to them. These are “the Apostles of Jesus Christ.” The prepositional phrase, “of Jesus Christ” identifies the sender and the mission (the Great Commission). Those whom Jesus personally commissioned and sent were the eleven and Paul. And these twelve men are the only ones who had the special gift of distribution of supernatural gifts. Therefore, only twelve men can truly claim to be “the Apostles of Jesus Christ.”

### **The Purpose of the Supernatural Gifts**

According to Mark’s account of the Great Commission, the accompaniment of the Apostolic ministry with gifts of the Spirit had a special purpose – to confirm in an undeniable way the unique testimony of the Apostles to Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection.

*Mark 16:14-20*

*15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*

*16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*

*17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues;*

*18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."*

*19 So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.*

*20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.*

This was written by Mark, who was Peter's nephew, and accompanied Paul on at least two missionary journeys. Notice that Mark did not use the first person plural in verse 20 (we, us), but the third person plural (they, them), referring to the eleven Apostles. Had others besides the twelve that Jesus personally sent had this power, why would Mark not include himself? He was a part of the ministry team prior to writing His Gospel. We find the same limitation given in Hebrews.

*Heb 2:2-4*

*3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord [Jesus], and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him [the eleven Apostles],*

*4 **God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?***

The manifestation of supernatural gifts are linked exclusively to the eyewitnesses of Jesus – His eleven Apostles. Hebrews was written about thirty years after Jesus' ascension. There were many tens of thousands of Christians, many of whom were evangelists. Yet, the testimony of the Spirit, through distribution of supernatural signs, is never attributed to anyone except the original eleven Apostles and Paul, the only twelve men whom Jesus personally commissioned.

Granted, there is nothing stated in Scriptures that explicitly limits the transmission of the gifts through the twelve Apostles. However, the only clear statements on the subject only pertain to the Apostles of Christ. Nor is there any case where someone received supernatural gifts apart from the direct personal witness of the Apostles. And there is plenty of circumstantial evidence that supernatural spiritual gifts were always lacking amongst churches where the Apostles had not gone.

## Documented Cases

There are several passages in Acts which provide us with examples of believers receiving spiritual gifts. All of them contain important information, and all conform to the scenario we have outlined. But, none of them come close to giving us the volume of information contained in Acts 8. I have included a rather extensive quote below. I have highlighted several points which will be discussed as we progress.

*Acts 8:5-19*

*5 Then **Philip** went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.  
6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, **hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.***

*7 For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.*

*8 And there was great joy in that city.*

*9 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great,*

*10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God."*

*11 And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.*

*12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.*

*13 Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.*

*14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,*

*15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.*

*16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

*17 Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

*18 And when Simon **saw** that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit **was given**, he offered them money,*

*19 saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."*

*20 But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because **you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!***

If the purpose of distributing miraculous gifts to converts was to confirm the Apostles' own ministry and authority as Christ's emissaries, we would expect that reception of the gifts by believers would take place only when Apostles were present, as they

testified to the Gospel of Christ and His resurrection. If the distribution of gifts by the Holy Spirit was intended to operate independent of the Apostles (without their personal touch or presence), we would expect to see the gifts being bestowed at any place or at any time the Gospel was preached in truth. But that is not the case either in Scripture or early Church history.

Our text above provides us with three critical kinds of information (three witnesses) establishing the mode of transmission of spiritual gifts. They are as follows:

### **I. Explicit Statement of Apostolic Distribution from Acts 8**

Simon's observation in verse 18 provides a direct statement regarding the mode of distribution. The Greek literally reads, "*When Simon **observed** that through (the agency of) laying on (of) the Apostles' hands **the Spirit IS BEING GIVEN...***" The verb translated "saw" (observed or perceived) is in the **aorist tense**. The aorist tense indicates the totality of a "happening" or occurrence of something without regard for continuation. It describes the whole event, usually something that is quickly over. It is properly rendered in the past tense in English. Simon SAW or OBSERVED something — a single happening. "*When Simon saw...*" Simon's observation was quickly over. Simon made an observation and drew a conclusion from it. But, the verb translated "*was given*" in the NKJV is misleading in English. In the Greek text it is in the **present tense** and **indicative mood**. The present indicative refers to something CURRENTLY happening CONTINUOUSLY. In this case, "*the Spirit IS BEING GIVEN*" through the Apostles' hands. Remember, Luke was writing a narrative, recounting for his readers what had happened in the past. His use of verb tenses is consistent with his telling the story of what occurred. Luke's language indicates that it was the norm for the Spirit's power to be given in this manner. It does not merely indicate that Simon observed a single occurrence of the Spirit's manifestations being given in this manner. There is a very significant shift from the aorist indicative to the present indicative. (Simon) SAW (aorist - meaning something that occurred - an event quickly over) that by the laying on of the Apostles' hands the Spirit **IS BEING GIVEN** (present indicative). The **continuous present action** of the present indicative Greek verb leaves no doubt that Luke meant the distribution of the gifts through the Apostles' hands was a continuous action when he was writing Acts after the fact! If Luke meant Simon **SAW** that through the Apostles' hands the Holy Spirit **WAS** (or had been) given in that particular instance (both verbs referring to a single event that Simon had just observed) he would have used the aorist indicative again (was given) rather than switching to the present indicative. Luke's use of the present indicative in his narration indicates the Spirit's manifestations were continuously being given through the Apostles' hands. That is the only reasonable explanation for Luke's shift from the aorist indicative to the present indicative in his statement. The switch from the aorist tense (Simon **SAW**) to the present indicative (**is**

**being given**) indicates that Simon's OBSERVATION was momentary (aorist), but the giving of the gifts through the laying on of the Apostles' hands was continuously ONGOING, even up until the time that Luke wrote Acts. It was THE MANNER in which the Spirit's power was being distributed at the time. Young's literal translation renders this verse correctly as follows:

*Acts 8:18*

*18 And Simon, **having beheld** that through the laying on of the hands of the apostles **the Holy Spirit is given**, brought before them money,  
(YLT)*

In other words, Simon discovered or observed something that was a continuous (present) reality, not a momentary occurrence.

## **II. Implicit Evidence of Apostolic Distribution from Acts 8**

Notice also that Simon wanted to buy the "power" to do this. "*Give me **this power** also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.*" Peter referred to this ability to impart the Spirit (manifestations) as "the gift of God." "*Your money perish with you, because **you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!***" Note carefully that the **POWER** to impart the gifts to others is what Peter called "the gift of God." These words DO NOT refer to the Holy Spirit Himself, or even to the spiritual gifts given to others. Simon was not asking to receive the Spirit, any of the gifts he had seen Philip exercise, or even the gifts received by the other Samaritans on whom Peter and John laid hands. Simon wanted something more, the unique **POWER** that the Apostles themselves possessed to impart the Spirit's power to others. This unique power, which was held exclusively by the Apostles of Christ, was the "gift of God" that he could not buy from the Apostles.

The **POWER** to impart the Holy Spirit's manifestations on believers was one of the unique gifts only the Apostles themselves possessed. (The other unique gift being the ability to punish people with supernatural power - cf. Acts 5:1-13 & Acts 13:8-12). The unique Apostolic gifts are not included in other lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament. Being **Apostolic gifts**, they were not given to anyone else. That the **power** to impart the Holy Spirit's gifts to other believers was itself called "the gift of God" by Peter implies Apostolic use on a continual basis. If ordinary spiritual "gifts" were meant to be the permanent possession of the recipient, the same would apply to this special Apostolic gift, it being a permanent possession of the Apostles to be exercised continually. A "gift" was meant to be used on an ongoing basis. This also implies that the mode of distribution was through the Apostles' hands.

### **III. Circumstantial Evidence of Apostolic Distribution in Acts 8**

In Acts 8, it was apparently necessary for Apostles of Christ to be present in order for the Samaritan converts to receive the supernatural manifestations of the Spirit. Luke provided a comment in verse 16, explaining why the Jerusalem church sent the Apostles down to Samaria. They thought it necessary because the Samaritan believers had not yet themselves received any personal confirmation by miraculous signs. Philip, who preached the Gospel to them, was not himself one of the Apostles of Christ. It should be noted that Philip himself possessed certain supernatural spiritual gifts. It was through his performing great signs that the Samaritans believed the Gospel. Yet, Philip was apparently unable to transmit spiritual gifts himself to the Samaritans. Otherwise, the Jerusalem church would not have sent Peter and John to Samaria for this purpose. When the Jerusalem church heard what had happened in Samaria, they sent Peter and John who imparted the power and manifestations of the Spirit to these believers, just as Jesus had said in Mark 16 — *“these signs shall follow them that believe”* the testimony of **the Apostles**.

#### **Other Examples of Apostolic Distribution**

**1. The Ephesians:** When Paul first arrived at Ephesus, he found Jewish followers of John the Baptist. Having explained the Gospel of Christ and baptized them, Paul laid his hands on them to impart spiritual gifts.

*Acts 19:6*

*6 And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.*

Notice the language. The Spirit “came upon them” and they exercised these gifts. In Acts 8, Luke said that the Spirit had not “fallen upon” the Samaritans after being baptized by Philip. In both cases, the activity described is not the normal indwelling of the Spirit that is promised to all *“whom the Lord our God shall call”* (Acts 2:38-39), but to outward supernatural manifestations related to the supernatural gifts of the Spirit.

**2. The Romans:** Paul wrote to the Romans that he desired to travel all the way to Rome to impart spiritual gifts to them (Rom. 1:11). This is similar to the case in Acts 8, where Apostolic travel to distant locations for the purpose of imparting spiritual gifts was required. The Church in Rome was not started by an Apostle, but by someone acquainted with the Apostles, probably an Evangelist like Philip. Paul had not yet been to Rome when he wrote his Roman Epistle. Yet, it is clear from his words that travel was necessary in order for them to receive supernatural gifts. If such gifts were given through any preaching of the Gospel, or by the Holy Spirit without any human agents, why travel all the way to Rome for this purpose?

Rom 1:9-13

9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,

10 making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.

11 For I long to see you, **that I may impart to you some spiritual gift**, so that you may be established —

12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

13 Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.

The Evangelist who began the Roman church almost certainly possessed some spiritual gifts himself, just like Philip's ministry to the Samaritans, but was not able to impart them to new baptized believers. It is very significant that in this very epistle Paul discussed specific "gifts" that the Romans already possessed (Rom. 12). But, when we compare them to the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, (the Corinthian church having been started by Paul an Apostle of Christ), the list of current gifts is completely different.

<b>The Corinthian Church</b> (1 Cor. 12:4-13) "Now there are <b>diversities of gifts</b> , but the same Spirit. ... For as the <b>body is one</b> , and hath <b>many members</b> , and all the members of that <b>one body</b> , being many, are <b>one body</b> : so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into <b>one body</b> ,..."	<b>The Roman Church</b> (Rom. 12:4-8) "For as we have <b>many members</b> in <b>one body</b> , and all <b>members</b> have not the same office: So we, being <b>many</b> , are <b>one body</b> in Christ, and every one <b>members</b> one of another. Having then <b>gifts differing</b> according to the grace that is given us ..."
1. Word of <b>wisdom</b>	1. Gift of <b>prophecy</b>
2. Word of <b>knowledge</b>	2. Gift of <b>ministry</b>
3. Gift of <b>faith</b>	3. Gift of <b>teaching</b>
4. Gift of <b>healing</b>	4. Gift of <b>exhortation</b>
5. Working of <b>miracles</b>	5. Gift of <b>giving</b>
6. Gift of <b>prophecy</b>	6. Gift of <b>ruling</b>
7. <b>Discerning</b> of spirits	7. Gift of <b>mercy</b>
8. Gift of various <b>languages</b>	
9. Gift of <b>interpretation of languages</b>	

It is striking that in both Epistles, Paul's instructions regarding "gifts" are very similar. That is, the point he was making — unity — is precisely the same. Both churches were to use their various gifts in love, working together as a body, each part playing the role dictated by his gift, operating as a unified whole. He used the human body, with its various parts working in unison, as his metaphor. Yet, the gifts being exercised by the Corinthians (a church the Apostle Paul himself founded) were vastly different from the gifts being exercised by the Romans (a church founded by an Evangelist)! The only gift mentioned in the Roman list, that would be considered one of the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, is "prophecy." (And this could be easily explained if Paul knew that the Evangelist, who established the Roman congregation, exercised the prophetic gift just as Philip himself exercised supernatural gifts in Acts 8). All the rest are what we might call natural gifts or talents, similar to what we see today. Why are the lists so different? If Paul expected that the Spirit distributed supernatural gifts apart from direct Apostolic involvement, would he not indicate that the Romans possessed all the same gifts as the Corinthians, and list the supernatural gifts? Of course he would. The disparity between the Corinthian and the Roman gifts can only be explained if the Romans did not have the supernatural gifts the Corinthians had. This explains why Paul would be so anxious to travel all the way to Rome just to impart spiritual gifts, the kind of gifts they lacked, but for which Corinth was well known (Rom. 1:10-12).

**3. Timothy's Gift:** Paul reminded Timothy to exercise the spiritual gift given him through the laying on of Paul's own hands. Paul mentioned this occasion twice, once in each of his Epistles to Timothy.

*2 Tim 1:6*

*6 Therefore I remind you to stir up **the gift** of God which is in you **through** [Gr. διὰ] **the laying on of my hands.***

*1 Tim 4:14*

*14 Do not neglect **the gift** that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy **with** [Gr. μετὰ] **the laying on of the hands of the eldership.***

Some might conclude from the second verse that spiritual gifts were not given exclusively by the agency of the Apostles, but also by the elders of the churches. But, the Greek text does not support that conclusion. Notice in both cases "gift" is singular. Both verses are speaking of the same spiritual gift that Timothy possessed. Paul was referring to the same event, when Timothy received his "gift." That the agency of distribution was exclusively Paul's hands, and not the elders, is clear from the very distinct and specific meanings of the prepositions Paul used. The preposition, "διὰ"

means “the channel of an act.” That is, Paul’s hands were the “channel” through which Timothy received this gift. But the preposition, “μετα” means “accompaniment.” Timothy received His gift through Paul’s hands with the accompanying hands of the elders. When we put these two statements together, both dealing with the same event, it is obvious what occurred. Paul encouraged the elders of this church to join him in laying hands on Timothy as an act of solidarity and approval of the young man. But, the gift was bestowed exclusively THROUGH (by agency of) Paul's own hands. The language does not permit the elders being the agents through which Timothy received his gift from the Holy Spirit. It was transferred to Timothy by Paul's hands amid the elders also laying hands on Timothy.

**4. The Corinthians:** In the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul acknowledged the many gifts the Corinthians had received, and the mighty demonstrations of power, when Paul was in their midst, founding this church.

*1 Cor 1:4-7*

*4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,*

*5 that **you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,***

*6 even as the testimony of Christ **was confirmed** in you,*

*7 so that you come short in no **gift**, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

*1 Cor 2:4*

*4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but **in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,***

*1 Cor 9:1-2*

*1 Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?*

*2 If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For **you are the seal of my apostleship** in the Lord.*

*2 Cor 12:12*

*12 Truly **the signs of an apostle** were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.*

Paul seems to have been recalling his founding of this church, which is actually recorded in Acts 18. Paul continued with this new group of converts, instructing them

for eighteen months. In the above verses, Paul recalled his work among them, teaching and preaching with supernatural demonstrations of the Spirit's power. That Paul rejoiced with them regarding the gifts they received, and in the same context spoke of the Spirit's power manifested through him in their presence, almost certainly indicates he was referring to his imparting the gifts to them in the same manner we find elsewhere. The last verse identifies his demonstrations as "*the signs of an Apostle.*" That Paul meant something more than just miracles in general is apparent, because he identified one of the common gifts distributed to their members as "working of miracles." If the gift of "miracles" and other "mighty deeds" mentioned in the list of gifts given to the members of the church of Corinth is merely what Paul himself possessed, how then could these be "the signs of an Apostle?" Would that not make all of them "apostles" who also possessed these gifts? In order to be "the signs of an Apostle," Paul's gifts must have been UNIQUE to only the Apostles of Jesus Christ. "*The signs of an Apostle*" had to be something more. Otherwise, anyone who received the gifts of miracles or other supernatural gifts would be considered "Apostles" because they possessed "*the signs of an Apostle.*" The only satisfactory explanation for the above passages is that Paul's referring to his own "*demonstration of the Spirit and of power,*" and his mention of "*the signs of an Apostle*" both refer to something other than the common gifts received by his readers. Paul's demonstration of the power proved that He was an Apostle of Jesus Christ, setting him apart from the rest of the people who also exercised their spiritual gifts. This unique "power" and "sign" was Paul's own hands acting as the conduit for the distribution of the gifts to the Corinthians.

### **Exceptions to Apostolic Distribution**

Whenever there is a rule or norm, it seems there are seeming exceptions. The above passages indicates the RULE. When there are exceptions, there should be obvious reasons for them if our theory is correct. The exceptions in Scripture, where spiritual gifts were distributed WITHOUT the Apostles' directly laying hands on people, are as follows:

**1. Pentecost - Acts 2:** The reasons why the gifts were distributed to the Apostles themselves without human agency is obvious in this case. The Apostles would not lay hands on themselves. And Jesus promised the coming of the Spirit and ability to perform signs only after He had gone to heaven (John 16:7). Who would lay hands on the Apostles? There is certainly no indication that they knew they would come to possess this power to impart spiritual gifts to others. Jesus had merely told them to wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Spirit before they began to obey the Great Commission. He did not define how this "power" would work through them (Acts 1:8).

**2. Cornelius' Household - Acts 10:** Peter was reluctant to go and preach to Gentiles. In fact, when he finally (reluctantly) went to Cornelius' house, he began his sermon by saying that it was unlawful for a Jew to enter the home of a Gentile. God had to shatter Peter's Jewish segregationist and elitist mentality regarding Jew and Gentile, through a vision, just to get him to go to Cornelius' home. Peter preached the first Gospel sermon to a group of Gentiles who took in and embraced every word of his sermon. Before Peter could finish his sermon, the Holy Spirit produced among these Gentiles a repeat of the Jewish day of Pentecost. In this case, the Spirit's manifestations, confirming Peter's message, also served to confirm to Peter and the other Jewish brethren that *"God is no respecter of persons."* When Peter returned to Jerusalem, he was challenged by the church for his going in and preaching to a Gentile household. Apparently, they thought that Gentile conversion would be like it was in Mosaic Judaism. Gentile proselytes came to the synagogue, and were permitted to sit in an adjoining room to listen but not participate. While the Jewish church certainly knew Jesus' commission to preach to the Gentiles, they expected Peter to maintain the segregationist customs established by the Law of Moses, and expected any converts to remain segregated. Going to a Gentile's home, and holding a preaching service exclusively for Gentiles, was quite beyond the pale. But, Peter's recounting what had happened to the Jerusalem church led him to one inescapable conclusion. *"Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?"* (Acts 11:17). It is obvious then, that the Apostles were actually lagging behind the Holy Spirit, and not keeping up with the program He had in mind. Under such circumstances, we should conclude that Peter probably would not have even attempted to lay hands on these people, given his utter surprise that the gifts were also distributed to Gentiles by the Holy Spirit! It was therefore necessary for the Spirit to prompt Peter by getting slightly ahead of him, and providing these gifts to the new believers even before they were baptized. Peter's reaction was to get them baptized in water on the double!

### **Objections to Apostolic Distribution**

**1. Gifts distributed by the Spirit Himself:** No doubt, some will object on the grounds that the Spirit distributed the gifts "according to His own will." But, this is not in conflict with the idea of Apostolic agency. Paul's point in 1 Cor. 12 was that the specific gift given to any particular individual was entirely up to the Spirit. In other words, the Spirit alone decided what gift each individual would receive (1 Cor. 12:7-12). This could occur as the Apostle laid hands on the individual, in obedience to the Spirit's prompting. The Apostle did not decide the particular gift given through his hands. That was left entirely up to the Spirit. The Apostles' hands were merely the conduit for the distribution, as the Holy Spirit saw fit to give specific gifts to specific individuals.

**2. Christians should seek the “best gifts”:** Twice Paul told the Corinthians to strongly desire (literally – be zealous about) the best gifts (1 Cor. 12:31 & 14:39). However, this does not imply that new gifts would be granted to individual “seekers,” or that gifts were bestowed directly without an Apostle being present. The contexts of both passages indicate Paul meant that **the Church as a whole should zealously seek to have the “best gifts” exercised in their meetings.** In the context, “best” he meant the gifts that edified the whole congregation (as he explained fully in ch. 14), particularly “prophecy.” He was not instructing individual believers to be dissatisfied with their current gift, desiring something greater. That concept is exactly opposite what Paul had just taught in the same chapter, that each member should be satisfied with their particular gift (cf. 12:14-19).

All of the Scriptural evidence, direct, indirect, and circumstantial, points to the same conclusion. The specific gifts were chosen by the Spirit, but distributed through the Apostles' hands, or at least in their presence. The purpose of this mode of distribution was to confirm the preaching of the Apostles themselves, as personal eye witnesses to Jesus' teaching and His resurrection. I am aware of no passage that does not conform to this model. The preponderance of evidence leads inescapably to the conclusion that the Bible **specifically endorses** only this mode of distribution of supernatural spiritual gifts. If we assume nothing, and accept only what the Scriptures themselves proclaim both explicitly and implicitly, the implications of this point alone are enough to settle the issue. Since all of the New Testament passages are consistent **ONLY** with this model, unless God began dispensing the gifts in some manner other than the New Testament model after the original Apostles died, we ought to conclude that the “gifts” were no longer distributed after the last Apostle died. To say that they continued is to invent a new way for spiritual gifts to be distributed without any direct biblical support. And if an alleged modern mode of distribution is completely different than what the early Church experienced, and what is recorded in the New Testament, how can we be sure that such “gifts” are genuinely those embraced by the early Church? We will have moved outside of Biblical precedent into the realm of speculation. Since we are dealing with the supernatural and spiritual entities, that is an extremely dangerous excursion without a biblical compass.

### **The Post Apostolic Church**

History bears out our interpretation. While a few of the early Church Fathers mentioned the existence of spiritual gifts in their time, they spoke of them as novelties. For example, Irenaeus, who was a disciple of Polycarp, a disciple of John's, spoke as though he had heard of some who had such gifts, but had not witnessed them himself in his role as bishop of the church in Lyons.<sup>1</sup> There was a brief “charismatic” episode in the second century, the Montanists, who claimed such gifts. Yet, the orthodox church dismissed

them as heretics, and their manifestations as fraudulent.<sup>2</sup> The fact is, the only mention of these things in Christian literature down through the ages after those who knew the Apostles had died, are few and fragmentary, and very suspicious. That is, most such things fit into the category of the strange phenomenon documented by the Catholic Church, such as weeping statues, and apparitions of Mary.

### **Jesus' Warning of False Miracles in the Last Days**

While it is true that only in the last two hundred years have claims been made by specific groups of the restoration of the gifts to the Church, in every case, these groups have introduced heresies along with their "restored gifts." This is true of the Irvingites,<sup>3</sup> the Mormons,<sup>4</sup> and many of the Pentecostals and Charismatics. Denial of the Trinity is common among such groups.<sup>5</sup> The lack of spiritual discernment is rampant among them as well, as is proven by the outrageous disorderly behavior in many of their meetings. Jesus Himself warned of deception by false prophets working counterfeit miracles. And Paul repeated the warning. These false prophets will lead the Church into the final apostasy, and pave the way for the Antichrist.

*Matt 24:24-25*

*24 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.*

*25 See, I have told you beforehand.*

*2 Thess 2:9-10*

*9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,*

*10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*

#### **Notes:**

1. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. V, vi

2. Wikipedia, Montanism, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montanism>

3. Catholic Encyclopedia, Irvingites, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08174a.htm>

4. Cowan, Marvin W., Mormon Scripture, The Articles of Faith Part XIV. "The seventh LDS Article of Faith declares, 'We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, etc.' In explaining this Article, LDS Apostle James Talmage said that men who are commissioned by the authority of heaven 'will not be lacking in proofs of their divine commission.... These [spiritual gifts] are oftentimes exhibited in a manner so different from the usual order of things as to be called miraculous and supernatural.... We may safely regard the existence of these spiritual powers as one of the essential characteristics of the Church; where they are not, the Priesthood of God does not operate' (Articles of Faith, p. 217)."

5. Oneness Pentecostalism, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oneness\\_Pentecostalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oneness_Pentecostalism); Wm. Branham, one of the fathers of modern Pentecostalism, proclaimed in his sermon, "The hour has approached where I can't hold still on these things no more: too close to the coming. See? "Trinitarianism is of the Devil." I say that THUS SAITH THE LORD. Look where it come from. It come from the Nicene Council when the Catholic church become in rulership. The word "trinity" is not even mentioned in the entire Book of the Bible. And as far as three Gods, that's from hell. There's one God. That's exactly right." ('Revelations Chapter 4 Part 3, Mercy Throne', 8 January 1961).