

1 CORINTHIANS: MOVING FROM THE CARNAL TO THE SPIRITUAL STATE

Part XXXIII: Understanding The Purpose Of The Sign Gifts

(1 Corinthians 14:20-25)

I. Introduction

- A. Many evangelicals believe God's spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, healing, working miracles and prophecy that He gave in the Early Church He is also giving to believers today.
- B. However, no use of those gifts as described in New Testament passages about them exists today, and we view 1 Corinthians 14:20-25 to understand God's purpose giving in such gifts, and why He does not give them now:

II. Understanding The Purpose Of The Sign Gifts, 1 Corinthians 14:20-25.

- A. The spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, healing, working miracles and prophecy as described in the New Testament record of the Early Church do **not truly** exist today (as follows):
 - 1. As we have learned in this series, speaking in tongues and interpreting them involved supernatural abilities respectively to speak or to interpret a Gentile language, Acts 2:1-11. These gifts do not exist today.
 - 2. The gifts of healing and doing miracles in the Early Church involved instantly, permanently healing and raising the dead, Acts 3:1-110; 4:16 and 20:7-12 NIV. No such gifts exist today.
 - 3. The gift of prophecy was the supernatural ability perfectly to predict future events (Deuteronomy 18:21-22), with its content being in perfect alignment with the body of truth already revealed, Romans 12:6 (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Romans 12:6). This gift does not exist today.
- B. God's purpose in giving these temporary gifts was to signal to Israel her need to believe in Christ (as follows):
 - 1. The gift of tongues was given to clarify to Israel her need to repent and believe in Christ, 1 Cor. 14:20-25:
 - a. To explain God's purpose in giving the gift of tongues, Paul referred his readers to Isaiah 28:11-12 where Isaiah predicted God would speak to Israel using Gentile languages, 1 Corinthians 14:20-21.
 - b. In the context of that Isaiah passage, God was asserting that due to the criticism of Judah's people over Isaiah's lecturing them as if they were children (Isaiah 28:9-10), God would in discipline speak to Israel with the unintelligible Aramaic language of their Assyrian conquerors, Isa. 28:11; Ibid., ftn. to Isa. 28:11.
 - c. Thus, God's speaking to Israel in a foreign Gentile language was a sign of rebuke, indicating Israel's need to repent, an idea also present in God's warning in Deuteronomy 28:49 to send a Gentile nation against Israel whose language the Hebrews did not understand because Israel had sinned against the Lord!
 - d. Tongues then served as a warning sign to the nation Israel to repent (1 Corinthians 14:22a,b), what explains the motivation of the Jews listening to Peter's sermon to repent in Acts 2:14-15, 37-38.
 - e. Thus, Paul taught that tongues be interpreted in the Church so visitors uninformed of these Bible truths might not think the Corinthian believers to be insane, but would heed their message, 1 Cor. 14:23-25.
 - 2. The gifts of interpreting tongues, healing, working miracles and prophecy were also sign gifts for Israel:
 - a. In Numbers 11:25 NIV, ESV, when God put the Holy Spirit upon Israel's elders to equip them to help Moses administrate the nation, they prophesied, but they ceased doing so as it was a sign gift to Israel. Also, once the canon of Scripture was complete, there was no more need for prophecy, 2 Timothy 3:15-17.
 - b. The gifts of performing miracles and healing in the Early Church were used to testify to Israel the credibility of Jesus as the Messiah to Israel, Acts 4:8-12, 16, and Jesus certified His messianic credentials by performing such miracles in His earthly ministry to fulfill Isaiah 35:4-6 and 61:1, cf. Matthew 11:2-6.
 - c. However, at the A. D. 70 fall of Jerusalem, there was no more need of such gifts as Israel's opportunity to repent regarding Christ was past and would not come again until the Great Tribulation, Rom. 11:25-27.
 - d. In support of this claim, we note how Church father "Chrysostom, a fourth-century theologian, testified that" tongues "had ceased so long before his time that no one was certain of their characteristics." (Thomas R. Edgar, "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts," Bibliotheca Sacra, Oct.-Dec. 1988, p. 373 in citing Chrysostom, Homilies in First Corinthians, Homily XXIX, in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 12:168)

Lesson: *God gave the gifts of speaking in and interpreting tongues, healing, working miracles and prophecy to the Early Church to clarify to Israel in light of her Scriptures her need to trust in Christ. When Israel's opportunity to repent as a nation was past and the canon of Scripture was complete, there was no more need for such gifts, so God stopped giving them. Thus, even in the Early Church, God gave these sign gifts solely to clarify His truth.*

Application: *May we realize that God's purpose in giving the Early Church the sign gifts was to clarify His truth about Christ to Israel, so may we use the gifts God still gives us today to continue to clarify His truth to others.*