

# We Believe in the Holy Spirit

LESSON  
THREE

In the Church  
Faculty Forum



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# We Believe in the Holy Spirit

## Lesson Three: In the Church

### Faculty Forum

With

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Dr. J. Scott Horrell  
Dr. Alan Hultberg  
Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

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Dr. Craig S. Keener  
Prof. Mumo Kisau  
Dr. Dan Lacich  
Dr. Steve McKinion  
Rev. Dr. Emad A. Mikhail  
Rev. Mike Osborne

Dr. John Oswalt  
Dr. Greg Perry  
Yohanes Praptowarso, Ph.D.  
Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.  
Dr. Benjamin Quinn  
Rev. Vuyani Sindo  
Dr. Mark L. Strauss

### Question 1:

### Why is it important to consider the church's Old Testament background?

#### Dr. John Oswalt

The Old Testament background of the church is *essential* because the whole concept of God's "called-out people" comes from the Old Testament. It's fascinating that the church fathers never seriously considered the idea that somehow the Christian church is separate from its Old Testament roots. When the "saintly" Marcion proposed that the Old Testament be discarded, it did not take the church very long to declare him a heretic. Fundamentally, I think the point is summed up in Paul's frequent description of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," who is our Savior. He is indeed Yahweh, and of course that gets masked in English when we say, "Jesus is Lord." Well, to the Jew, they understood what that was saying: "Jesus is Yahweh." So, who is this God who comes in the form of a baby? He is, incredibly, the Old Testament Yahweh. He is the one who comes to satisfy in himself his own justice. If we don't know the Old Testament as a church, we are going to miss God's transcendence, we're going to miss his justice, we're going to miss his holiness, and we're going to reduce God to a little useful God who exists for us. So, it's absolutely essential that the New Testament church be founded upon the truths of the Old Testament.

#### Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

If we think about a text such as 1 Peter 2, where Peter applies a whole series of titles that were originally given to Israel in the Old Testament, now to the church — "You are royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" — we see that Peter is teaching a group of churches in a variety of regions, who are predominantly Gentiles, to see themselves as really the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel, and to recognize that that is their identity. That helps us now as we live this side of Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and outpouring of the Holy Spirit, to recognize the significance of the very title "church." The Greek term church is "*ekklesia*," and Jesus

introduces it in Matthew 16 and mentions it again in Matthew 18. Really, it seems kind of out of the blue; it doesn't appear elsewhere in the four Gospels. It appears often, of course, in Paul's writings. But Jesus expected his disciples to know what he meant when he spoke of building his church upon the rock. He expected them to read that and to hear that in the light of the Old Testament usage of that same term, which is basically the Greek equivalent to the term of the "assembly" of the Lord, used in text like the text in the books of Moses that describe God coming down on Mount Sinai and Israel called into assembly of the very presence of God. That helps us to see what the church is about. It's not just a gathering of human beings. It's really the people of God assembled in the presence of God... And of course, Paul emphasizes that there is a unity to this people of God from old to new. There are definitely changes that come as a result of the coming of Christ. But Paul emphasizes in Romans 9–11 that theme of one olive tree into which wild olive branches — Gentiles — are now being grafted by faith in Christ: a single olive tree; a single people of God.

### **Question 2:**

### **Why was God so patient and gracious toward Israel in the Old Testament?**

#### **Rev. Sherif Gendy (translation)**

God was so patient, merciful and gracious towards Israel in the Old Testament because of the covenant God established with his people, whether the Abrahamic covenant or the Mosaic covenant, through which God committed himself to be the Lord for this people and them to be his people. In the context of this covenant, when the people rebelled against God and broke his commands, the Lord was very merciful towards them because of the covenant. He gave them many chances to repent and return to him. There is a significant incident in Exodus 32 when the people made the golden calf and worshiped it. They said:

**These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt! (Exodus 32:4, ESV).**

When the wrath of the Lord burned hot, and he decided to consume them, Moses at that time was with the Lord on the mountain. God wanted to destroy the people, but Moses implored the Lord for his people. Moses said to the Lord:

**Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, "I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever" (Exodus 32:13, ESV).**

Here Moses turned to the covenant, and he reminded the Lord using the covenant he established with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Therefore, the outcome of this prayer is in verse 14:

**The Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people (Exodus 32:14, ESV).**

The Lord decided to neither consume nor destroy the people because of Moses' prayer, because Moses turned to the steadfast love of the Lord, the Lord's glory among the nations, and reminded the Lord of his covenant.

### **Dr. Dan Lacich**

God's patience and his grace with the people of the Old Testament is an amazing comfort to me. I see that even from the very beginning God is demonstrating his character, his longsuffering, his willingness to endure us for as long as it takes, and that, for me in my own life and I think for anyone living even in the era of the new covenant, we see the foreshadowing of that in the old covenant. God is so patient with the people of Israel. He's even more patient, I believe, with us today because of the blessings of the new covenant. It's part of who he is. It's what he does to love us, to give us the time necessary for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, to draw us to him, and to make it clear that he is a gracious and loving God. There is certainly a limit to that patience, but God goes way beyond what I think we would ever be able to reasonably imagine that we deserve. And his patience with the old covenant people is a comfort to me even today.

### **Question 3:**

**Do unsaved people in the church benefit from being in covenant with God?**

#### **Pastor Ornan Cruz (translation)**

Inside our churches, there are people who are included in the covenant, but are not saved. The big question is: how do those people benefit from being in the covenant? ... How does God bless them? How do they receive the Word? How do they enjoy Christian fellowship? How do they enjoy good concepts that can guide them for their lives? Perhaps the best way to understand it is looking at the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7. He is talking about marriage issues related to believers and nonbelievers, and in verse 14 Paul says, "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the woman" or his wife. Here is a good question: does the fact that he is married to his wife make him saved? Paul is not talking about salvation, he is talking about someone who is inside the covenant of the church, but is not saved. And the holiness concept here is saying that he's set apart from the world, even though he's not saved. For a person like that, and many others, they would be inside the covenant of the church, although not within the saved, but they would have many blessings. They would enjoy the special privileges from God of being part of that covenant. So, once

again, they enjoy communion. They enjoy the good advice of the Word of God. They enjoy all the privilege of being together, even if they are not saved.

**Dr. Dan Lacich**

God's covenant is so amazing and so vast that even people who do not have a relationship with Christ, but are a part of a church family, benefit from that covenant. Paul makes this rather startling statement in 1 Corinthians 7 where he says that the spouse, the unbelieving spouse of a believer, is made holy by their relationship, and even the children of that believer are made holy. Now, we can debate exactly what does it mean that they're made holy, but clearly it's a good thing. There's a benefit there in some way because that unbeliever is connected in a relationship with a believer. God blesses them. God does something more in their life than he does if they're not connected to it at all. So, there is some spiritual benefit there; there's something going on that God is doing for them that they would not receive otherwise. But then, even in a more general sense, being a part of a covenant people, a people who are seeking to follow God and to live a Christ-like life, there's going to be kind of an excess, an overflow of that in the nonbeliever's life. They'll benefit even from the community, from the fellowship, from the love and the service that comes out of that community. And all of that ultimately, I think, is designed to steer someone to God who is the author of that covenant.

**Question 4:**

**What is the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?**

**Dr. J. Scott Horrell**

The inspiration of the Holy Spirit is, in the broad sense, the Spirit guiding the human authors to write precisely what God wanted to communicate, *in words*. So, the theological term is "confluency," that is, you have both the human and yet the divine. And of course that varies; sometimes it's very obvious — the divine — other times the human seems very obvious, even with grammar that's not quite right and other things like that. And yet, very exactly God is using that human author, *superintending* that human author to write in the words of the original manuscript exactly what God wanted to communicate. And so, you have 2 Timothy 3:16, that God inspired, or that the word of God is God-breathed, it's breathed out, "*theopneustos*"... And yet, it is authoritative, it is absolute, it is verbal, it is again this confluency, and it is without error. We can trust it in every way. And so, it is sufficient to judge everything else, whether creeds, whether the magisterium and church tradition, all else, finally comes back to the Bible itself. Does it align rightly with the word of God?

**Dr. Uche Anizor**

When we speak about the inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit, what we're primarily referring to is that Scripture is a product of divine activity primarily, and so inspiration has to do with the product being produced through the very working of God. Now, this doesn't mean that God in producing Scripture in its various forms and

genres that God is overriding the natural human abilities and capacities and language, etc., of these human authors. But what it does mean is that the primary person moving in the creation of Scripture is God himself. Now, God's moving is not in contradiction to the moving, so to speak, of the human authors, but there is what we would call a "confluence," a coming together of divine and human activity, so that what the very human authors wanted to say, and in fact did say, are the very things that God in fact moved them to want to say, so to speak. This doesn't mean that these writers were robots or that God completely sort of extracted their minds. It just means that God is able to, through the want and desires and language and abilities of humans, to say exactly what he wants to say. And so, the inspiration of Scripture has to do with God as the author of Scripture through human authors, and truly human authors.

### **Question 5:**

#### **What do we mean when we say that the writers of Scripture were inspired by the Holy Spirit?**

##### **Dr. Alan Hultberg**

When we say that the writers of Scripture were inspired by the Spirit, we mean that God moved in such a way in their minds that, without subverting their individual personalities, without erasing the cultural influences that they had, etc., God ensured that what they wrote was his word, were the very words that he wanted on paper to reveal to mankind who he is and how he acts and what he requires of us. So, when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he didn't first sit down and pray and say, "Lord, inspire me to write 1 Corinthians," he just wrote a letter to the Corinthians. And yet, in that process, the Spirit was working in the mind of Paul so that 1 Corinthians is not only a letter to a first century church, but is revelation to the people of God.

##### **Rev. Dr. Emad A. Mikhail (translation)**

The Bible says about itself that it is inspired. In 2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is breathed out by God"... God breathed out, by his Holy Spirit, into the lives and minds of the apostles and prophets and led them in the writing process. So, the inspiration, or breath, which God used to give us Scripture, came through the Holy Spirit. There is another verse in 2 Peter 1:21 that illustrates this point further. The apostle Peter said,

**For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but [holy] men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21, ESV).**

The holy men here are the writers who wrote either the Old Testament or the New Testament, and it says, "they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." They were carried along as if the Holy Spirit held them up and led them during the process of inspiration. Indeed, we don't know how the details of this process happened. It was a



miraculous process. We cannot put the details under the microscope to know how the Holy Spirit worked in them. What we know is that he used their backgrounds; he used their cultures; he used their circumstances and the circumstances of their original readers. He prompted them to think and answer questions. However, the writers were prepared by the Holy Spirit; they were prepared for this role and were led in this role, without becoming like typewriters. No, God did not make the apostles and prophets into computers or typewriters. Rather, he used all their gifts, all their culture, and all their ideas, which he himself put in them, and he led them in the process of inspiration in a great, miraculous way that produced this unique book for us.

### **Dr. Steve McKinion**

The real idea of the Spirit inspiring the writers of Scripture is captured by Peter. Peter describes to us the difference between one's own personal experience of events that they see, that they're eyewitnesses of. Peter says that on the Mount of Transfiguration he hears a voice from heaven, but he says that there's a more certain Word, which is available to his readers, and that is the word of Scripture because the writers of Scripture are men who are carried along by the Holy Spirit. And he says that because they're carried along by the Spirit, *inspired* by the Holy Spirit, these writers are not subjecting us to their own interpretations of things that they see or that they experience. In other words, Scripture becomes a genre unto itself because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. These writers aren't like just typical writers who sit down to record their thoughts or their experiences and aren't just trying to interpret those experiences for us. One person may see an event, interpret it one way, and another person sees an event and interprets it a different way. The writers of Scripture, though, are inspired by the Spirit to ensure that the message they give to us is the very message of God, the proper interpretation of the things that they record. The Gnostic gospels, just as an example, being not inspired by the Spirit, may tell us some of the same events from Jesus' life, but they interpret Jesus as a different person than the Jesus of the canonical Gospels. Because these Gospels are inspired by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is presented to us as the Christ, the Son of the living God, Christ according to the Old Testament. To be inspired by God, then, means to be given the words that the writer is going to give to us, as well as, which of the events from Jesus' life and the sayings from Jesus' life in the Gospels. Or in the Old Testament, which events from God's work among Israel are you going to record? Which kings are you going to tell us about? And in the epistles, what are the ways in which the church is to operate? Paul and Peter and the other writers of the New Testament as well as the writers of the Old Testament aren't just giving to us what their best thoughts are or their best guesses of how we should live as Christians. They instead, being "carried along by the ... Spirit," are giving to us the very word of God.

**Question 6:****How did the Holy Spirit and human authors work together in organic inspiration?****Dr. Mark L. Strauss**

By “organic inspiration” theologians mean, it’s a way of describing how God communicates to us. The Bible, we believe, is God’s inspired word, his message to us through human instruments. By “organic inspiration,” they mean that human authors spoke with their own words, with their own vocabulary, with their own personality, addressing context-specific situations. For example, Paul hears of concerns — the church in Philippi — so he thinks about these, he responds. In his humanity, he responds using his words, his language, his personality, his understanding of the situation. Yet, God is working through that. The Holy Spirit is inspiring him, guiding him, giving him the words to say even though they’re coming through his mind, his personality, his own language. So, it’s organic in that sense. Scripture is fully human and fully divine and coming through the human authors, but it is God’s word communicated.

**Dr. Craig S. Keener**

God can speak directly from a mountain. We see that in Scripture. But the Holy Spirit also can inspire our human faculties. And even when the Holy Spirit was speaking directly to the prophets, sometimes the style would come out differently from one prophet to another. God even has a special nickname for Ezekiel, “Son of man,” for example. So, it didn’t mean that the style couldn’t include the style of the author, that God didn’t work through the human faculties, but it was still God’s product when it came out. God ensured that his message was preserved carefully through these human authors.

**Question 7:****Was Scripture primarily written to God’s covenant people?****Dr. Greg Perry**

In Exodus and Deuteronomy, we read how God asked Moses to write down everything that he had given to them in the covenant. These are covenant-making events where God is giving his law to his people. And there’s provision in the law to recopy these documents, and so we read in Joshua how Joshua also was asked to copy down the words of the law. And this retold the story of how God had delivered his people from slavery, from Egypt and how he was making them to be his unique, peculiar people. Now, of course, this mission is repeated in the New Testament when Peter picks up the words from Exodus 19 to say how the church in Asia Minor is also a royal priesthood and a holy nation. And so, throughout Scripture we see that the Bible is given to God’s people primarily, but also for the sake of telling God’s story to the world, as Peter says, that you might tell of the excellencies of his greatness and how you have been brought from darkness into his marvelous light.

**Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.**

There are lots of people who will try to distinguish between Christians and non-Christians, or the world in general and the special people of God who have been saved by the blood of Jesus, by speaking of those that are inside the box of God's people, or God's special people who are saved as the "covenant community," and then will say that the revelation of God that's given to us in Scripture is for that community and not for the rest of the world... But there's something we have to always keep in mind when we think this way. In a very general sense, every human being is in covenant with God, and therefore, in covenant community with God. After all, the covenants with Adam and Noah were made with all people. So, there's this broad sense, this general sense, in which every single human being, whether they're in the church or not in the church, whether they're in Israel or not in Israel in the days of the Old Testament, they were in covenant with God by virtue of those primeval covenants. So, do these people have responsibility to receive the Scriptures and to obey them? Will God hold them accountable? Well, to whatever degree they have understanding of the Bible, I think the answer is yes. Now, God does hold his special covenant people — in the Old Testament Israel and in the New Testament Israel and the church together in Christ — they are specially responsible to obey the written word of God. But the fact is, is that the whole of the earth, insofar as they understand and know the teachings of the Bible, they are to obey God as well because they are in covenant with God by virtue of Adam and Noah. That's why it's fair to say, as the Westminster Confession does, that all people in all places in all times are responsible to obey the moral law of God summed up in the Ten Commandments. It's because these things are revealed, according to Romans 1 and Psalm 19, these basic principles of God's law are revealed to all people whether they have the Bible itself or not. It's given to them by general revelation... So, we always have to remember that when we talk about the special covenant people of God, whether we're talking about Israel in the Old Testament, or we're talking about Jews and Gentiles together in the church today in Christ, we're talking about people who have a special accountability to the teachings of Scripture. But the whole world is also responsible to obey what they know that the Scriptures teach, to whatever degree God has revealed it to them by general revelation.

**Dr. Dan Laciach**

Scripture was really written *primarily* to God's covenant people, but that's not the same thing as saying *exclusively*. It has a primary purpose. Even in terms of the original audiences, we would say that it was written *to* them, but it was also written *for* us. So, Paul wrote to the Corinthians; he wrote to Timothy. Moses wrote to the people of Israel, but it was also written for us to gain and benefit from it down the line as a part of God's covenant people. But beyond that, it's still God's Word. It's still truth. There's still a power to it regardless of our relationship to the covenant. So, it also has an application to everyone because it shows us who God is. It shows us our relationship to him and our need for him. So, it was written to a particular audience primarily, but it has a much broader application and is not exclusive by any means.

**Question 8:****Why is it important to know that the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to all believers?****Dr. Dennis E. Johnson**

It's important for us to realize that the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to all believers to keep us humble and to keep us dependent upon one another. That seems to have been forgotten by the church in Corinth. Paul has to use the "body of Christ" imagery in a very powerful way in 1 Corinthians 12, on the one hand, to rebuke those with high-visibility ministries who may think that they don't need the other members of the body who have very low-visibility spiritual gifts. Paul says, "the eye cannot say to hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor can the head say to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" We need all the members of the body. By the same token, those who may not have highly-visible spiritual gifts — teaching, leadership — may be tempted to think, I have nothing to contribute to the body. And Paul uses that analogy there too as he talks about a foot who says, "Because I'm not a hand I don't belong to the body at all." And that may tempt us to be reluctant to serve, or passive, only receiving other's service; whereas, if we remember that God gives gifts through the Spirit to all the members of the body, we honor every member of the body, we glorify God for his wisdom in putting every member in just the right place, and we're humbled enough to know how much we need one another.

**Dr. Tim Foster**

It may surprise some Christians to realize that the Holy Spirit is dispensed very sparingly in the Old Testament. It's given to certain people, typically leaders of Israel, or King David, for a period of time. What happens when we come to Pentecost and the church after Jesus' ascension and the gift of the Spirit is what we might call the "democratization" of the Spirit, the gift of the Spirit to all believers. That's important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it's important because God made a promise in Joel 2 that in the last days, that is, when God's purposes had come to a fulfillment, when God's kingdom had come, a sign of that would be the gift of the Spirit on all people. And that's exactly the passage that Peter quotes at Pentecost in Acts 2. So, it's important because it's a gift and sign of the new covenant. Secondly, it's important because the Holy Spirit is given to empower us for mission, and so that's why the apostles were told to wait in Jerusalem until the gift of the Spirit came, and when the gift of the Spirit came, they were sent out into mission. So, the importance of the Spirit is that all believers have the Spirit, it is the last days, the kingdom of God has come, but with that is the impetus and the command and the power to mission.

**Prof. Mumo Kisau**

It is the Holy Spirit who gives the gifts to all believers, and it's so important for us to know that it is the Holy Spirit who is the provider, who is the giver. And as a giver, he gives to anyone and to everyone according to his will and purpose, so that we have nothing to brag about. If you are a good preacher, you are a good preacher because it

is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and therefore, it is not of us. Therefore, we would not be able to boast about whatever it is that we do in the church because it's a gift, as a free gift. We don't have to even begin to ask for it. I know that some people would want to say, "Oh, give me this gift or that gift." If your father or your mother goes to the market and brings you a gift, you don't solicit over it. It is he or she who decided what to bring to you. The same way the Holy Spirit is the provider, is the giver of all the spiritual gifts to the church.

### **Question 9:**

#### **What is the primary purpose of spiritual gifts?**

##### **Dr. Gregg R. Allison**

The primary purpose of spiritual gifts is to build up the body of Christ, to edify the church and make it fully mature in Jesus Christ. And so, Christ, in ascending on high gave gifts to his people. The Holy Spirit distributes these gifts to each member of the church, so that as each member uses his or her gift or gifts, the church builds itself up in love and becomes all that Christ means for it to be. So, to each believer, to each member of the church, the Spirit gives a gift or gifts — leading, or teaching, or faith, or from a continuationist's position, prophecy, speaking in tongues — the Spirit is the one who sovereignly gives these gifts. We recognize the gift or gifts that the Spirit has given to us. We should be ready to use those gifts and engage in ministry using those gifts, and as we do, the church grows, the church expands, the church is built up to become all that Jesus Christ means for it to be.

##### **Dr. Greg Perry**

Both Peter and Paul agree that the primary purpose of spiritual gifts is to build up the body of Christ, both in size and in spiritual maturity. Peter writes in 1 Peter 4 that if you have gifts, use them to serve one another, whether gifts of speaking, speak as speaking from God, or gifts of service, serve as ones who have been supplied with strength by God. And whether writing to the Romans or to the Corinthians or to the Ephesians, Paul describes these gifts as tangible expressions of grace where each member is given different gifts so that we might depend on each other. So, it's an expression, a very unusual expression, of social interdependency between Jew and Greek, between male and female, between slave and free. Paul was going right against the stoic ideal of self-sufficiency. And we struggle with that in the West today and this idea of rugged individualism. So, spiritual gifts are given and distributed to different members of the body of Christ in order that we might serve one another and then together serve Christ's mission in the world.

##### **Dr. Craig S. Keener**

When Paul is dealing with an abuse of spiritual gifts in Corinth, in chapters 12–14 of 1 Corinthians, Paul emphasizes the primary purpose of spiritual gifts is to build up the body of Christ. He emphasizes that in chapter 12, elaborating about the body. He emphasizes that in chapter 14 showing how some particular gifts are more edifying to

the body in general than are others. And smack-dab in between them he has chapter 13, a chapter about love, where he starts off by saying that if I have all the gifts, but I don't have love, I'm nothing. And then at the end of the chapter he says, "Well, the gifts will some day pass away, but love will be forever." And right in the middle he has this definition of love, he lists characteristics of love, which, if you've read the rest of the letter, contrasts precisely with the behavior of the Corinthians. So, spiritual gifts are good, and God's gifts *are* good, but it's because of love that we know how to use those gifts for the purpose for which God gave them to us — to build up the body of Christ.

### **Question 10:**

#### **What role should spiritual gifts play in the life of the church?**

##### **Dr. Dennis E. Johnson**

The various gifts that the Holy Spirit gives have an important role in the life of the church. Fundamentally, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, their purpose is to enable each one of us as members of the body of Christ to build up the whole body for the common good. So, the Spirit's mission in giving us gifts is really to glorify Christ and to cause us to grow in maturity. And you see that not only in 1 Corinthians 12, but also when Paul talks about some specific spiritual gifts for teaching in Ephesians 4, where he says apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are all given to equip the saints for works of ministry so that each member of the body of Christ can contribute as we serve together to the building up of the body in maturity, in truth and in love.

##### **Rev. Vuyani Sindo**

What role should spiritual gifts play in the life of the church? This can be one of those divisive questions. So, for example, you can find certain churches emphasizing one spiritual gift over other spiritual gifts. But it is important to bear in mind that in 1 Corinthians 12:7, for example, we are told that:

**To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good  
(1 Corinthians 12:7, ESV).**

So, the spiritual gifts were given by God to the church for the common good that all believers might serve him and that they might serve one another within the church, and they are brought together as a body. And therefore, that will mean that there is no spiritual gift that's inferior to the other, but all spiritual gifts are equally important in the kingdom of God for building the church and for helping us to serve God better together.

## **Question 11:** **How can we discover our spiritual gifts?**

### **Dr. David W. Jones**

Spiritual gifts are such an important part of the Christian life. I think it's again natural to ask, what's my spiritual gift? As we read in Scripture, we all have them, but how do we know them? How can we use them? I think a few things come to mind. It's certainly helpful to ask others in our Christian circles if they can identify and see spiritual gifts in us and perhaps give some direction. I think, secondly, it's helpful to just try various areas. If you think you might have the gift of service, well, try serving. If you think you might have the gift of teaching you seek out a venue to teach, and so forth. And I think if that gift is really present within us, by the Spirit, there'll be a degree of success and blessing, and certainly ministerial furtherance as we use those gifts. Maybe thirdly, there's just, I think, an inner kind of confirmation that comes once we hit upon that gift, kind of like Jeremiah saying he has fire in his bones. I think of a friend of mine who has the gift of giving, and God has blessed him tremendously with the ability to make money in the realm of business. And I asked him one day, "Why do you give so much?" He said, "Really, you know, I can't *not* do it because of that spiritual pleasure that I receive as I do give. It's just like it feels like I'm singing the song that I was made to sing." So, I think those three things: advice from others, trial and error, and then maybe sort of an inner almost subjective personal blessing or confirmation as we do find that "right" gift that we have.

### **Yohanes Praptowarso, Ph.D. (translation)**

In 1 Corinthians 12:7, a spiritual gift or other gifts are given by the Lord to those who are members of Christ's body for the mutual needs of that body of Christ. And we find [our spiritual gifts] when we try them out. And if we continue trying them, and we begin to try whatever ministries that exist around us, then we begin to be comfortable doing them, we enjoy doing them, we are happy doing them, and then we produce fruits from our work, from what we do. And people around us are blessed by our work, and we are happy. We also feel blessed to do them. That means we have found our spiritual gifts, similar to how we discover our physical talents.

## **Question 12:** **What is the proper use and emphasis of spiritual gifts?**

### **Dr. Uche Anizor**

To understand the proper emphasis on spiritual gifts, we need to turn to Paul. So, Paul in 1 Corinthians, his main point there was that spiritual gifts are for the up-building of unity in the body of Christ. So, as much as there is a diversity of gifts, there's the overarching aim of building unity in the church. And so, Paul will build on that in a book like Ephesians where Paul says the ultimate goal of these spiritual gifts is the building up the body of Christ to a mature man, but also to unity. And so, as we think about what's the proper emphasis, the proper emphasis isn't sort of finding self-

fulfillment or operating in our strongest gifts. That isn't the proper emphasis; while those things are good they're not the proper emphasis. The emphasis that Paul gives us is that we are to aim at service for the up-building of the church. And so, when you look at the catalogue of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, for instance, what you see is Paul saying, all these things are meant for one purpose, one purpose: to build up the body of Christ. And even when Paul says at the end of chapter 12, "desire the greater gifts," what his emphasis there is, is not that certain gifts are just so much better — so speaking in tongues is better than teaching or something along those lines — his point is, desire those gifts that will maximally build up the body of Christ, that will maximally build up the body of Christ in terms of unity, that will maximally build up the body of Christ in terms of spiritual and theological maturity. And so, I think that's what we need to sort of emphasize when we talk about the use of spiritual gifts in the church.

### **Dr. Benjamin Quinn**

So, with respect to proper use and emphasis of spiritual gifts, first of all, I think we should recognize the diversity of gifts within the body of Christ. So, if we can understand and agree together that everyone is gifted in some way by the Spirit to serve him, to serve his church, to serve God's world as a whole, then there's a great diversity there. I personally don't see the gifts in the New Testament that Paul lists, especially, as being exhaustive. I think there may be more than that. But this gets directly to the question of the use and emphasis of these things. In terms of the use of these things, I want to say two things immediately. One is that they're not limited to the local church itself, certainly not to undermine the use of them in the local church with respect to the gift of love, or compassion, or administration, or mercy, or whatever the case may be. There's so much opportunity within the body of Christ when it comes to our fellowship and love together and service together to employ those gifts. But those gifts also must, I think, be flexed outside the church as well, and those are done through our various vocations. When I say "vocations," I mean the places where we work, but beyond that: our neighborhoods, our family lives, those places where we're called to live and to be and to do. So, spiritual gifts seem to be flexed in those directions as well. In terms of the proper use and emphasis of these things, again, there's so much diversity there it's hard to be specific, but one thing that I think we must always keep in front of us is that any exercise of a spiritual gift that we can't draw straight lines to the love of God and the love of other people is probably a misuse of that gift. So, regardless of where this gift is being flexed, whether inside the church or outside the church, or whether it's in your family life, in your parenting strategies, in your business practices, in whatever that you're doing, if you're flexing a gift that the Spirit has actually given you and you can't draw straight lines between what you're doing, how you're exercising that gift, and the love of God and love of other people, we should probably back up and reconsider.



**Question 13:****Can the Spirit give spiritual gifts that are not in the lists of gifts found in Scripture?****Dr. Craig S. Keener**

The Holy Spirit is free to bestow gifts that aren't specifically mentioned in Scripture, I would say because, you know, if you look at Paul's lists of gifts — Romans 12 includes things like prophesying but also giving and so on. First Corinthians 12, and actually 12–14, includes about three different lists of gifts. Sometimes we only look at the one in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, but you've also got 12:28, 29. You've also got 14:26 and so forth. Then you have Ephesians 4:11, and that one's a little bit different. But when you compare the different lists of gifts, it looks like these are kind of random lists, that the point is that God just has different members of the body, he creates us, he gifts us in different ways, and each of us is a blessing, each of us is important and we need to work together for the up-building of the body. The point isn't so much on making a particular list definitive.

**Rev. Mike Osborne**

A spiritual gift is something that God gives to all of his people. I believe that every single Christian has at least one and that the lists of gifts in the New Testament are just examples. There are many, many more than are listed in the New Testament. But what they all have in common is that they are used and exercised for the benefit of others to advance the gospel and ultimately, of course, to glorify God.

**Dr. Dan Lacich**

In Scripture there are a number of gifts of the Holy Spirit that are listed, and certainly that can raise the question, is that all of them or are there possibly more gifts that are never mentioned in Scripture? And there's part of me that wants to say, well, who am I to tell the Holy Spirit, "No, you can't give any more gifts unless they're on that list?" But I think when we look at even how those gifts are listed and the places they're listed, none of them are complete in and of themselves. There's no two identical gifts. There's some crossover, there is some overlap, but what Paul says to the Romans or to the Corinthians or what Peter says, they're all different. So, it would be possible that the Corinthians would look at their list and say, "Oh, this is it. This is all there are." And the Romans would say, "Oh no, no, no, there's others." And I think also, as we look at how the Holy Spirit operates within the New Testament, within Scripture as a whole, there are lots of things that we're told that God does that Scripture doesn't get specific about. We're told of other prophets that prophesied, but we don't know what they prophesied. But we know they did, and we know it was from God. So, I think we need to allow God to have the free rein, if you will, that if the Holy Spirit so desires to give gifts that aren't particularly in a list, that that's absolutely acceptable.

**Question 14:**

**Do you believe that the miraculous spiritual gifts have ceased or that they continue today?**

**Dr. Gregg R. Allison**

Have the miraculous spiritual gifts ceased today? There are two positions to this issue. The cessationist position believes that these miraculous supernatural gifts have indeed ceased; that is, the Holy Spirit is no longer distributing gifts like prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, word of knowledge, word of wisdom, healings and miracles. Cessationists do not affirm that God can't heal or can't perform the miraculous, but the position does affirm that God does not heal, does not perform the miraculous through people who possess these supernatural miraculous gifts. A key support for this position is that the purpose of spiritual gifts, particularly these miraculous gifts, was to confirm the message of the gospel and the *messengers* of the gospel, that is, the apostles. Once the gospel and the gospel messengers were confirmed by these miraculous gifts, the Holy Spirit ceased distributing them in the church. The continuationist position affirms that the Holy Spirit continues to distribute these miraculous gifts, the gifts of prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, word of knowledge, word of wisdom, healings and miracles. He continues to distribute these gifts today, so they continue in the church. A key support for this position is that the primary purpose for spiritual gifts is to build up the body of Christ, to edify the church so it becomes fully mature, and since the church has not completed its pathway towards maturity, all spiritual gifts, including the miraculous gifts, are needed today, and the Spirit continues to distribute them to the church.

**Rev. Sherif Gendy (translation)**

The supernatural spiritual gifts ceased by the end of the apostolic age in the early church. We know this because Paul tells us clearly in Ephesians 2:20:

**built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20, ESV)**

Paul says that there is an apostolic age, the age of establishing the foundation for the church, upon which we are built today. So, we do not establish the church, but we are built upon this foundation that was laid by the apostles, prophets, and Christ himself. Therefore, the spiritual gifts were tied to the era of establishing the church with regards to the apostolic teachings. Also, the spiritual gifts are related to revelation, God's revelation about himself. Because of their revelatory nature, they are instruments God used to reveal himself. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews says these words in Hebrews 1:1-2:

**Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (Hebrews 1:1-2, ESV).**

God spoke long ago to our fathers through the prophets in dreams and visions and in many ways. But in the last days, he has spoken to us by Christ, by his Son. Christ became the divine incarnation to the revelation, and subsequently, because he is the Word of God, God has spoken to us in the last days in Christ, and by the completion of recording this revelation in Scripture, the revelation has stopped. God does not reveal himself to us in a new revelation, because the revelation was completed by the incarnation of Christ in his person and in his work. Therefore, the supernatural, miraculous spiritual gifts, because they were linked to the revelation, had ceased by the end of recording the revelation in Scripture. We understand that this does not mean that God doesn't do miracles today or that the Holy Spirit is not working today. On the contrary, God emphasizes the importance of praying for the sick because the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick... Another point I would like to make is that the Holy Spirit has a continuous work, as he renews people and transforms sinners and regenerates them. And this is a very great miracle that the Holy Spirit does every day in the life of sinners. So, I can't say that miracles have ceased. Miracles still exist; the Holy Spirit still works. But the miraculous gifts exclusively were for the apostolic age.

**Dr. Craig S. Keener**

Some people have argued that certain spiritual gifts and miraculous happenings aren't for today. But, you know, when Paul lists gifts he doesn't distinguish, you know, here are "super gifts" and here are other kinds of gifts. He doesn't distinguish natural and supernatural. That wasn't the kind of distinction somebody would have made in the first century in any case. So, we need all the gifts. We need all the members of the body of Christ. If you're amputating certain members, or maybe some other churches like to collect all the amputated members, but, you know, it's still not a whole body. So, what we see in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 is that gifts like prophecy and tongues *and knowledge* — again, that's what we don't always consider a supernatural gift, but in the context of 1 Corinthians it probably has to do with the gift of teaching — but that these things will pass away when we have full knowledge, in the context, when we see him face to face. So, at Jesus' return then we won't need those gifts because we'll have something so much better. But there's no indication that such gifts will pass away before that time... There's no mention that the gifts like that would stop. It's actually the teaching that they would stop that's postbiblical, not the idea that it would continue. And so, if the concern is, well, we can't have postbiblical gifts like prophecy because they might compete with the Canon, they didn't compete with the Canon while the Canon was being written. Obviously not all prophecies were recorded in Scripture because we have like hundreds of thousands probably in the first century if we can believe Paul that in a regular house church in 1 Corinthians 14 you've got maybe two or three people prophesying per week, and all these per year; you add up the years for all the house churches in the Roman Empire, that would be a lot of prophesying. But it didn't compete with the Canon. It never was meant to have that function. So, to say that those things would have ceased because it would compete with Scripture, I mean, teaching might run the risk of competing with Scripture too, but it doesn't. You have false prophecy; you have false teaching, things

that contradict Scripture. In those cases we need to use discernment and see which is which. But you also have, because there's the possibility of false teaching... You know, I've experienced some of these spiritual gifts. I believe in them, but sometimes I've been tempted to believe that they ceased just because it would make it so much simpler, you wouldn't have to use discernment. But that's not the solution that Scripture gives us. Scripture says that we need to discern the right from the wrong. That's true of prophecy. That's true of teaching as well.

**Dr. Todd M. Johnson**

There are two reasons that we should believe that miracles continue within Christianity today. One of them is if we look back at Christian history there's evidence well after the apostles that there were miraculous events taking place practically all over the world, from the Irish islands all the way into central Asia on the Silk Road. There's one terrific story after another of God's miraculous provision. So, we see it in Christian history. Now that Christianity is spread all over the world today, the second way in which we see it is that Christians around the world are reporting miraculous events in their own lives, miraculous healings, visitations of angels, and all sorts of other stories that we read about in the New Testament, and perhaps should not be surprised to see all around the world today. So, there's a continuity throughout all of Christian history, and there's a continuity as we look at what's happening all around the world in Christianity today.

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