

## Are Spiritual Gifts Supernatural?

There is much discussion and speculation about whether the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament are supernatural abilities given by the Holy Spirit or whether they are the strengths and talents one has inherited. I think that the answer lies in the kind of worldview we espouse.

In our western culture, particularly in Europe and the United States, our educational systems and religious institutions have been built on a belief system and worldview that includes only the physical or material world, that is a belief that our reality is based solely on what we can experience with our senses or rational mind. This thinking comes out of the ‘*Age of Enlightenment*’ and was influenced more specifically from theologians in Germany in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. This worldview has pervaded our western culture for over 100 years. It excludes the unseen world or the ‘supernatural’ because that cannot be explained with the natural laws of cause and effect. Some scholars, schooled in this worldview, have reinterpreted the Bible through a lens that excludes the ‘supernatural’ activity of God. So, when it comes to a discussion of spiritual gifts, in the church, we may be prone to think of them in purely human terms such as strengths and talents.

The writers of the Bible [and John Wesley], however, were quite comfortable with a worldview that included the unseen or spiritual world, a supernatural world, as well as a physical world and they expected to hear God speak to them in dreams and visions. They and John Wesley also expected the power of God to be displayed in miraculous or supernatural activity. People of other cultures, particularly eastern nations and in Africa today also have in their belief systems a worldview that includes both the unseen world and the physical material world.

So, whether your worldview does or does not include both worlds, I invite you to journey with me through the Bible as we look at spiritual gifts and the role the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit seems to play. I invite you to try on the lens that includes both the unseen and seen world as we go.

The first stop on our journey will be in Exodus 31:1-5 NASB. The setting is on Mount Sinai and Moses is getting instruction from God regarding the building of the tabernacle.

*‘Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship, to make artistic designs for the work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship...” ’*

This is the first place that spiritual gifts are mentioned, that is gifts with which the Spirit of God endows a person who was not necessarily born with the natural ability to accomplish a specific task- the building of the tabernacle.

When we look through the Old Testament, we find other characters in other stories who have special abilities given them by God through the Spirit of God. Some of these include:

Joseph, who had dreams and the ability to *interpret dreams*, and an extraordinary ability for *administration* over every environment he in which he was placed; (Genesis 27-50)

Moses, who had the ability to hear God speak to him as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11) and had gifts of *administration* and *wisdom* for judging conflicts. When Moses was overwhelmed with the burden of judging, in Numbers 11:17 NASB, God says, “*I will take of the Spirit who is upon you (Moses) and I will put on them (the seventy elders)*” so they could share in the judging. It records that these seventy *prophesied* when the Spirit came upon them but did not do that again.

There were judges like Gideon who had the Spirit of God come upon him and equip him to lead an army (Judges 6-8) and Samson who was born in response to a prophecy and had supernatural strength related to the length of his hair (Judges 13-15).

There were kings like Saul and David who were anointed with oil as a symbol of an anointing with the Spirit of God. In 1 Samuel 10:6, Samuel tells Saul, “*Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them (the prophets) and be changed into another man.*” In 1 Samuel 16:13, Samuel anointed David and “*the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward.*” David was mighty in battle and had a gift of writing psalms and setting them to music. David’s son, king Solomon, was given the gift of great wisdom.

There were prophets like Elijah (1 Kings 17-19) and Elisha (2 Kings 2, 4-7), who heard God’s message for a specific time and people (*prophecy*), but also had *miraculous* things happen such as multiplication of flour and oil and seeing dead persons raised. Daniel, another prophet who served during the time of the exile, like Joseph had the ability to *interpret dreams* and also had a gift of *administration*.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit described in the Old Testament seems to be a special gift of supernatural power and ability that God gives to certain people such as kings, prophets, and priests for certain tasks. And the gift of the Spirit of God seemed to give the person a special close relationship with God so that they could hear God speak to them.

Then through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34), God announces that there will be a New Covenant. Our next stop is Ezekiel 36:27, where God says, “*I will put My Spirit within you (the nation of Israel) and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.*” Another prophet, Joel gets a message from God that says, “*It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on My servants, both men and women I will pour out My Spirit in those days.*” (Joel 2:28-29 NIV)

I hope that you can see from these Scriptures that the New Covenant will give the Spirit of God to ordinary people not just prophets, priests, and kings and not just to the nation of Israel but to all people. Our next stop will be to look in the New Testament to see what happened and how the message given to Joel was fulfilled. In Luke 24:49, Jesus tells the disciples to wait for

the promise of the Father so they would be “*clothed with power from on high.*” This is fulfilled in Acts chapter 2. On the day of Pentecost, 120 disciples were gathered in a house when “*there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.*”

Then Peter gets up to explain what just happened and quotes the Joel 2:28-29 passage. He talks about Jesus who performed miracles and wonders and signs and when asked by the crowd what they must do, Peter says, “*Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.*” (Acts 2:38-39)

This means that the gift of the Holy Spirit is available to those who believe on the name of Jesus Christ. Theoretically at least, when we profess our faith in Christ and are baptized, we should receive the Holy Spirit. That means that the potential for manifesting the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit lies in each believer. Whether we experience this or not, I think is a matter of expectation. In history, at least by the third century after Christ, the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit were on the decline and the expectation that every believer would receive the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts was also on the decline. The response throughout history was to formulate new beliefs to explain why this was or rather was not happening. Maybe only the clergy were to have these gifts. Next, maybe the gifts stopped when the Bible was written and canonized or when the apostles died. A plethora of doctrines remain with us to explain why we are not seeing these supernatural gifts in our day. However, despite these theories, a study of history also reports that the supernatural gifts such as prophecy or healing actually never ceased. We can see a slim thread throughout history where they have occurred (see *The Supernatural Thread in Methodism* by Dr. Frank Billman).

In the early 1900’s in Kansas, a group of students, in a Bible school run by Charles Parham, experienced the infilling of the Holy Spirit with the gift of tongues. They were followed by a revival on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California led by William Seymour, an African American preacher, who had been touched by the teaching of Charles Parham. Many of the spiritual gifts mentioned in Bible were experienced. The response of the mainline denominations at the time was to reject this and claim the movement was not of God because it did not match their idea of how God works. In a counter response to the rejection, those who had experienced this powerful move of the Holy Spirit began to leave their churches and begin a multitude of “Pentecostal” denominations. Those in other denominations refused to take these ‘new’ churches seriously believing they had fallen into error.

Then in the 1950s and 1960s, several more moves of God began to be in evidence: the Jesus movement and the Charismatic Renewal. This move of the Holy Spirit began in the mainline denominations and in the Catholic Church and contrary to the Pentecostal move, these people often stayed in their churches and prayed for the renewal of their church or denomination. In addition, what are called non-denominational or independent churches sprang up. This move of the Holy Spirit was also accompanied by a new wave of music and worship, often called ‘contemporary worship’, consisting of hymns and choruses sung in medleys of songs that

sometimes lasted for over an hour. This sometimes replaced the practice of singing two or three hymns placed throughout the worship service. Guitars and other instruments began to replace the organ in some churches. In fact, a document dealing with this movement called, *Guidelines: The UMC and the Charismatic Movement* was passed by the 1976 General Conference and renewed in 2006 and 2016. It appears in *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church* as Resolution 2015. This document can be procured through Aldersgate Renewal Ministries, 121 East Ave, Goodlettsville, TN 37072.

I personally lived through this move of God and was touched by it in 1974, in the middle of a worship service in my local United Methodist Church. The Holy Spirit fell on me as I sang a duet by Mendelssohn, “*I Waited for the Lord.*” As I sat down in the choir loft, praise began to well up within me and I began to pray for all those who came forward for Communion. I was lost in the presence of God. In the months previous to this experience, I had made friends with a new neighbor who witnessed to me of miraculous things such as healings happening by the Holy Spirit and I had been seeking God for an answer, since my belief system at the time was having a hard time believing this was true. I had never heard of such a thing except maybe about the ministry of Oral Roberts, but I didn’t take him very seriously. Eventually though, I determined that I would trust that this move of supernatural things were coming from God and I prayed for God to fill me with the Holy Spirit. I had read books of others’ search for evidence that this was real and their resulting experiences of the Holy Spirit.

In the weeks following my experience in my church, I found that I had a new love for the people around me, even those I did not like. I had a new thirst to read the Bible and often spent hours reading and searching the Scriptures for the activity of the Holy Spirit. I had a new boldness to pray aloud with others. I also began to experience the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as tongues, administration and teaching.

In my study, I found that the Bible speaks of the disciples being filled more times than just on Pentecost, and through the years, I have found that the Holy Spirit fills me often and especially when I need a boost in my faith. I have found that with God, there is always something more God wants to do in me to equip me for ministry in the world. I found that my level of expectation to believe that the Holy Spirit lives in me and stands ready to manifest the spiritual gifts I need to respond to God’s call has increased.

I would encourage you, especially if this is new to you, to search the Scriptures and pray and ask God to show you whether or not the gifts of the Holy Spirit are real supernatural abilities available to you for ministry. If you would like to do further study on this, I have written a 12-week Scripture study on the ministry of all believers and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. *Royal Priesthood* includes a spiritual gifts inventory and is available for purchase from me. A digital file is \$5 and a printed copy \$10. You may email me at: [annpeat@columbus.rr.com](mailto:annpeat@columbus.rr.com) for details.

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