

THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

The *work of God* through the Church can be accomplished **only** by the energizing of the Holy Spirit. If we are doing work in our own strength and by our natural talents, then it is no longer the “work of God” but our own work.

Without defining the various gifts of the Spirit, let us first look at **why** the gifts are given. In Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus (Eph 4:12) we see a reason: “for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Notice there are no commas in this passage. There are not three purposes but one. The saints do the work of the ministry so that the Body of Christ is built up (edified). The saints can do the work only when they are equipped (perfected or made complete).

There are four basic ingredients for the work of God to be accomplished by the Spiritual Gifts.

1. Believers (individually and as a church) must be thoroughly consecrated to Christ’s glory only. Ego trips are not allowed.
2. Christians must be engaged in an effective, fervent prayer life. God responds to the prayers of His people. One miraculous answer to prayer within a congregation will do more to lift, encourage, and solidify the people of God than any other thing.
3. Each believer must recognize his or her dependence on the Holy Spirit and
4. Christians must be willing to exercise the Spirit’s gifts.

Perhaps you would like to know how to discover your particular gift(s). We just covered the subject. Do these four things and you will discover your gift(s). A warning is needed here in that God’s timetable is almost never the same as ours. Patience is needed and we do well to remember the Scripture that advises “Let us not be weary in well doing, for we shall reap in due season, if we faint not.” There is a great reluctance in the traditional church to allow the gifts to operate. Any gift that can be simulated by human talent is allowed and encouraged while all others are ridiculed and/or relegated to the first century.

Gifts can be divided into various group or categories. These are office gifts, power gifts, revelation gifts, and inspiration gifts.

Office Gifts are represented by such offices or ministries as *apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher* (or pastor and teacher), *governments* (administration), *helps, evangelists*, etc.

Power Gifts are *miracles, healings, and faith*.

Revelation Gifts are seen in *word of knowledge, word of wisdom, and discerning of spirits*.

Inspiration Gifts are *prophecy, tongues and interpretation of tongues*.

The way gifts are manifested are varied. For example, the “office” holder may manifest revelation gifts, inspirational gifts, or power gifts; a Pastor may speak prophetically, and an Evangelist may exercise the gift of healing.

Some have a tendency to confuse the Gifts of the Spirit and the Fruit of the Spirit. Both are representative of the divine life of God in our human experience. The “gifts” represent the divine **ability** of God while the “fruit” represents the divine **character** of God.

Another point of confusion in such matters is differentiating between the Gift of the Spirit and Spiritual Gifts. In the record of the early church in Acts 2 we see the Gift of the Spirit (and the promise of the Spirit) mentioned.

33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise

of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear.

38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The Gift of the Spirit is the Holy Spirit resident within the believer. A. W. Tozer writes that every Christian has a measure of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian is defining of "who is Christian" as Paul wrote in Roman 8:9 "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

Once we have received the Gift of the Holy Spirit, all the Spiritual Gifts are potentially available to us since the Holy Spirit distributes the gifts "to every man severally as He will." (1 Cor 12:12)

It is clear that all Christians do not function in the realm of Spiritual Gifts. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians, "I do not want you to be ignorant about spiritual gifts."

Why did Paul want them to know about Spiritual Gifts? Faith comes by hearing. We cannot walk in an area where we have no faith and we cannot have faith in something about which we are ignorant. Therefore, it is possible to have the "Gift of the Holy Spirit" and not be able to function in any of the "Spiritual Gifts" for lack of faith or the lack of exercise of the faith we have.

The Spiritual Gifts are the enablement of God to do the work of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, Spiritual Gifts are not only desirable in the Church, they are absolutely necessary **if** we are to fulfill the mission of the church which is to carry out God's will on earth.

Office Gifts

The need for organization in the church is clear to God Who gifted people with ability to bring order out of chaos. God likes order. The Creation itself was bringing order out of chaos. When God formed the nation of Israel from a disorderly crowd of former slaves he led Moses (through Moses' father-in-law Jethro) to organize the people and set up elders as leaders. There is order in heaven and God has an order for families. Therefore, it is not surprising that God provides for orderliness in the administration of the affairs of the church. In 1Cor. 12:28 we see, "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." It is not clear whether the listing here is meant to imply order of position or order of time – it could be neither, but just simply the order in the list. Clearly, the apostles (the twelve disciples) were the first in time to be set in the church. It is also clear that in the early church, these men (at least some of them) were first in positions of rule or authority. It would be difficult to attempt to justify either a hierarchy or a sequence of events for the other offices or abilities (gifts) listed.

Apostles: The word Apostle is a derivation of the Greek *apostolos* and literally means "one who is sent." We might call such a person a delegate, messenger or a representative. Traditionally, the term has been limited to the twelve disciples of Christ and Paul. However, according to Strong's Concordance it is also "in a broader sense applied to other eminent Christian teachers." John Gill, in his 18th Century commentary writes regarding apostles, "as were the twelve disciples, and Paul the apostle; men that were immediately sent by Christ himself, and had their commission and doctrine directly from him; and a power of working miracles, to confirm the truth of their mission and ministry; they were sent into all the world to preach the Gospel, to plant churches everywhere, and to ordain officers in them; they were not confined to any particular church, but had power and authority in all the churches, to preach the word, administer ordinances, advise, counsel, direct, reprove, and censure." New Testament references to apostles show us that James, the son of Joseph and Mary (Gal 1:19), Barsabas and Silas (Acts 15:22), and Barnabas (Acts 14:4) were referred to by this term

in addition to Paul and the twelve disciples (apostles) who were with Jesus.

Most of the mainline churches today do not use the title or office of apostle because of the adherence to the traditional ideas that the office was for those whose commission had come directly from Jesus. Whether this tradition is what God intended for government in the church is, at least, questionable.

Prophets: The office of prophet was recognized in the early church. These were people who either had the gift of foretelling things to come, as Agabus and others; or who had a special gift, by divine revelation, of explaining the prophecies of the scriptures, and of preaching the Gospel. Others were referred to as prophets such as Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32). Acts 13:1 mentions several others: “Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.”

As is the case with the office of Apostle, the office of Prophet is not recognized in most mainline churches today. Some groups will recognize a gift or ministry of prophecy. This gift is usually attributed to people who are somewhat “blunt” or “tactless” in their proclamations of Biblical truth. Seldom, if ever, is the claim made that such a person did or could foretell things to come or had divine revelation in seeing new light on application and meaning of Scriptures.

Teachers: In Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus (4:11), he develops a similar list to that in 1 Cor. 12:28. The first two items in these lists are the same: apostles and prophets. It would appear that Paul combined the role of teacher with that of pastor in the Ephesians passage. In the Corinthian passage it stands alone. This two-fold way of considering the role of teacher is consistent with current day practice. Most pastors are expected to be teachers. In addition, many others also fulfill the role of teacher in the church but are not recognized as having a pastoral office.

In the list Paul provided in 1 Cor. 12:28, he seems to switch from a list of offices or roles to a more abstract list of ministry functions. For example, miracles, healings, helps, governments, tongues. I doubt Paul was trying to tell us there should be a position of “miracle worker,” “healer,” or “helper.”

Evangelists: From the list of offices or roles in Ephesians 4:11 we see a distinct role for those whose have been called to bring the good news to those who have not heard it. Unlike apostles and prophets, the role of evangelist is still recognized and we find many “preachers” in evangelistic ministries. Today, we typically see them in city-wide crusades or in revival meeting settings. The audience of the evangelist of the early church likely had not heard the gospel message and were probably polytheistic. This is vastly different from the audience of today’s evangelist who are apt to be speaking to people who attend church. Those with evangelistic ministries in other parts of the world are closer to the evangelists of the early church in that the hearers are not familiar with the gospel message.

Pastors: More people who have positions or offices in the church today refer to themselves as “pastors” than any other title. However, this term is used only once in the entire New Testament. The Greek word *poimen* is translated “shepherd” 17 times and “pastor” once. The original meaning was simply that of “herdsman.” Through the years it has come to mean the presiding officer, manager, or director, of any assembly. Thus, today, the office of the pastor is expected to be filled by an all capable, all knowing, combination of manager, supervisor, administrator, public relations and personnel specialist. In addition, he is expected to be an excellent public speaker and Bible scholar as well as a counselor and psychologist.

Revelation Gifts

The Revelation Gifts are Word of Wisdom, Word of Knowledge, and Discerning of Spirits. These gifts are closely related to the inspirational or utterance gifts in that, in the church, a Word of Wisdom, Word of Knowledge, or Discerning of Spirits might be shared through speaking out via Prophecy or Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues.

The Revelation Gifts are essential to the effective operation of such office gifts as Exhorting, Teaching, Giving. A counselor giving encouragement to a brother or sister in Christ needs a Word of Wisdom. Without this enablement, the advice might be worldly or just an expediency. Teachers need “revelation knowledge” to keep from being no more than researchers (See Matt 13:52). The Giver in being a good steward would do well to exercise discernment in giving.

In a real sense all we can truly **know** is given by revelation. As used here **knowledge** is not just having information passed along to us by someone else. All of us have known something without understanding how it could be or how we came to know it. The working of our conscience is very much like revelation knowledge. If no one ever told you that murder is wrong, you would still know it is wrong. Conscience is a function of the spirit and is one element that functions even in unregenerated (natural) man.

Power Gifts

The **Power Gifts** are equipment for evangelism. In Acts 8:5-8 we see

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. The crowds with one accord listened eagerly to what was said by Philip, hearing and seeing the signs that he did, for unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, came out of many who were possessed; and many others who were paralyzed or lame were cured. So there was great joy in that city.

Philip cast out evil spirits following the example of Jesus. This was done by the spoken word through the exercise of the gift of *faith*. As Philip continued in ministry at Samaria, the two associated gifts of *healings* and *miracles* came into operation. Remember, we said that gifts are for “equipping the saints for the work of the of the ministry to build up the body of Christ.” This is exactly what was happening in Samaria.

Regarding the differentiation between Spiritual Gifts and Fruit of the Spirit, we see “faith” appearing in both lists. Though the same Greek word (*pistis*) is used in both places the first usage is to mean “conviction of the truth of anything or *belief*.” In the second case (fruit of the Spirit) the word means “fidelity or the character of one who can be relied on.” This second usage is better translated “faithfulness” to distinguish it from “faith” as belief. (This distinction is used in newer translations and paraphrases of the Bible such as NAS, NIV, TEV, Living Bible, Amplified Bible.)

We can further divide faith into natural faith (planting seeds is an act of natural faith), saving faith (trusting or relying on the word of God and God of the word to do what He said), and special faith (a supernatural endowment to believe that which is spoken or desired will come to pass). This is the Mark 11:23 kind of faith. It is a “God said it, I believe it, it will happen, that settles it,” kind of faith.

The gifts of power are mentioned elsewhere in connection with the spread of the Gospel. In 1 Thess. 1:5, Rom. 15:18,19 and 1 Cor 2:4,5.

Thess 1:5 because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake.

Rom 15:18,19 For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ.

1 Cor 2:4,5 My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

The gift of *healings* are given for a purpose:

- ! To deliver those who are oppressed of the devil. (Acts 10:38)
- ! To establish the claims of Christ. (John 10:36-38)
- ! To establish faith in the resurrection of Jesus. (Acts (3:15,16)
- ! To attract people to the gospel. (John 6:2)
- ! To turn people to God. (Acts 9:35)

Miracles are the supernatural intervention of God in the ordinary course of nature.

Inspirational Gifts

The Inspirational Gifts (Tongues, Interpretation, and Prophecy) are for functioning in the church. They are not specifically for evangelizing, though (as we shall see, prophecy can convict unbelievers). We see a thorough discussion of these gifts and their use in the church in 1 Cor 14:1-40. These gifts are also sometimes referred to as “utterance” gifts.

Prophecy is not so much foretelling as it is forth telling. It is telling forth a message from God in an understandable language for the purpose of building up the church, to exhort (encourage) its members and to comfort them. (1 Cor 14:4)

The need for such a gift to be operating in the church is immediately evident. Without this gift in operation a local body will cease to grow spiritually and its members will despair because they are not being encouraged and comforted in their spirits. No wonder Paul says “desire earnestly to prophesy.” (1 Cor 14:1 and 39)

The term used to describe the gift of Tongues in the Greek is *glossa*. The phenomenon called Speaking in Tongues is in the Greek *glossalalia* which is translated literally as “tongues speaking.”

The operation of this phenomenon on the Day of Pentecost was in languages understandable by various people from the surrounding areas. In reference to the “gift,” Paul writes of the “tongues of men and of angels” (See 1 Cor 13). Consequently, many have said that some expressions are “heavenly language(s).” Some present-day commentators on the subject refer to *glossalalia* as “ecstatic utterance.” This description would imply that *glossalalia* is a result of overpowering emotion. If this is what those writers mean when they speak and write about *glossalalia*, then they are correct in rejecting the experience. However, in both Acts and 1 Corinthians there is nothing to indicate that those who spoke in tongues were overpowered with emotion. This is not to deny that the emotions of the people involved were affected by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 2, Luke records “they spoke as the Spirit gave utterance.”

In 1 Cor 14:32, Paul wrote regarding speaking in tongues and keeping order in the church, “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.”

From 1 Cor 14:27-28 we can conclude that if the speaker can keep silent when no interpreter is present, then he can control the *glossalalia* and it is NOT an overpowering emotional thing; that is, it is **not** ecstatic utterance!

The purpose of *glossalalia* is communication! This has three aspects. First, the communication could be given directly from God the Holy Spirit to a hearer in his native language through a person who does not understand that language. This is what happened in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.

Next, the communication could be a language no one present understands normally but either the speaker or someone else receives an interpretation (not a translation) of that message. It is again directly from God to a third party via another speaker.

The third communication is from us to God. In 1 Cor 14:2 we see

For he that speaks in an unknown tongue speaks not unto men, but unto God: for no man understands him; but in the spirit he speaks mysteries.

The last part of this verse in the King James Version shown above could be interpreted to read “but in the Spirit, he speaks mysteries.” This would tell us that the Source of the utterance is from the Holy Spirit. Many of the newer translations render this portion as “but in his spirit, he speaks mysteries.” Even if we adopt the newer translations, we may reach the same conclusion regarding the source of the utterance by recalling that in Acts 2 those who spoke did so as the Holy Spirit gave utterance. If we combine these thoughts, the passage can be amplified to read “but in his spirit (by the Spirit) he speaks mysteries.

A mystery is simply something **we** do not understand. If the utterance is being provided by the Holy Spirit, then we should be safe in concluding that God understands it and it is no mystery to Him. In Roman 8:26 we see another example of how the Holy Spirit intervenes in our prayer life.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words (sounds beyond our natural ability to express).

Why would one pray this way? Notice that this expression is “prayer.” Prayer is speaking to God and those are the words Paul used in verse 2. From 1 Cor 14:4 we see that prophecy builds up the church corporate, tongues (praying in tongues) builds up the individual members. No wonder Paul wrote in verse 5 “I wish all of you would speak in tongues and even more that all of you would prophecy.” In other words, Paul wished that they would work on building up themselves and especially that they would work on building up the church corporate. Both individual growth and corporate church growth are needed.

Interpretation of Tongues in conjunction with *glossalalia* works as prophecy does to build up the church. In 1 Cor 14:6 we see

Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I speak to you in some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?

In verse 26 we read

What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

The appropriate use of *glossalalia* and interpretation of the message is to benefit the church body in the same way a prophecy, teaching, revelation, singing hymns and studying lessons are to build up the church. Any other use is likely to be based on some carnal motive.

The Greek word translated “interpret” is *diemeneuo* and can mean to expound the meaning of something or to translate into one’s native language. Therefore, interpretation is not necessarily a word-for-word translation of the message but can be an explanation of the meaning of the message.

Paul’s advice to those who had the gift of *glossalalia* was to pray that they might also have the gift of interpretation. Lacking that second companion gift (or the presence of someone who can interpret) Paul advised them to restrict the use of such a gift to their private devotions. Even this practice is done with the realization that the understanding of the speaker is not benefitted. In verse 14 Paul stated “For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.”

Apparently, our understanding is by-passed when we exercise the gift of *glossalalia*. This

would mean that our spirit is praying by acting directly on the body (tongue) which would involve by-passing the function of the soul. Our “understanding or intellect” is a function of the soul. Having said all that, we might well ask, “So what should we do?” Paul answers that question in verse 15.

What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

Simply stated — do both. Praying in the spirit (as used here) clearly means praying in tongues. Other places where praying in the Spirit or praying in the Holy Ghost is mentioned are as follows:

! Eph 6:18 — Application of the armor of God.

! Jude 20 — But you beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God.

The phrase “build up yourselves” used by Jude is consistent with Paul’s claim in 1 Cor 14:4 that prophecy builds up the church corporate while those who speak in tongues builds up the individual believer. (Most main line church groups, would never associate Eph 6:18 or Jude 20 with *glossalalia*.)

Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church.

Much has been written regarding the use of “tongues” in the presence of unbelievers stemming from verses 20 through 25 of Chapter 14. In the early church, they experienced disorder in their worship times. There were manifestations of the Spirit. There were miracles happening. People were healed. Words of prophecy came forth from ordinary church members. Some spoke in languages they did not understand. Sounds rather chaotic. It was OK. All these things were the building blocks that the Holy Spirit was using to build the church.

Problems arose in the early church because of their immaturity and failure to yield themselves to the work of the Holy Spirit to bring order out of the chaos. Part of the problem grew out of their fascination with glossolalia or speaking in tongues and their misuse of this spiritual gift.

Brethren, be not children in understanding; but in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serves not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth. (1 Cor 14:20-25)

Paul had chided the church at Corinth about being like children. There is a time to be child-like and a time to exercise adulthood. We can learn from children about innocence. We can learn from their child-like faith and their refusal to hold grudges. When it comes to understanding the word of God and interpreting it for our lives, then we need to not be naive. The Corinthians had found a verse from Isaiah's writings that pointed to the fact that God would use the Gentiles to carry the message of salvation and they were trying to make it mean that "tongues" were a sign to be used in the presence of unbelievers as a way to evangelize. They further argued that prophecy was only useful for those already in the body of Christ.

Paul poked holes in this misinterpretation. It was obvious to Paul that a non-believer would think the church was made up of insane people if he came in and all were speaking in tongues. On the other hand, if the church members were prophesying, then the non-believer would be brought under conviction because of the words of the prophets. He would hear things that he knew to be true about himself and he would know that he was in the presence of God. Not only would he know he

was in the presence of God, he would be a witness to others that God was there. You recall that the "woman at the well" was so impressed that Jesus told her all about herself she told everyone in the village to come out and meet Him. If people sense that God is really in our church, then they will invite others.

Coming from the worship experience, God would have us move toward growth or building up the church. Paul tells us how to effectively function in a church setting in which the Spiritual Gifts operate.

What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. (1 Cor 14:26-28)

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, each member may have something to share with the others. It may be a spiritual song, a word of teaching, it may even be a message to the church in an unknown tongue or an interpretation of such a message. The earth did not stay formless, empty, and dark. God took the chaos and created something. Paul urged the Corinthian Christians to let these spiritual gifts be used in such a way that the body of Christ is built up. Whether it is sharing a song, insight into a doctrinal issue, or a message in "tongues," do it in such a way as to avoid confusion. He spoke specifically about "tongues." If there is no one to interpret, then Paul's advice was to not speak aloud.

Paul had already instructed the Corinthians about the importance of prophecy. The same cautions would need to be heeded with exercising the gift of prophecy as with speaking in tongue.

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, for God is a God not of disorder but of peace. (1 Cor 14:29-33)

The prophets would speak one at a time. Others would be allowed to speak as they were inspired and the first speaker would allow that to happen. Each of us should have something to share that will help someone else. The way we conduct our "church services" today, it is rare that we learn from each other. We fear that the situation may get out of control and we tend to avoid letting people give a word from God to the church. This should not stop us from sharing insights with our friends and family in other settings. Sunday school classes should be places where people would feel free to share spiritual insights with each other. Wherever it is done, the results should be to strengthen the church. Any type of behavior in our lives that brings confusion and doesn't move us from chaos to creativity should be questioned.

Just as in the Creation there was a time for chaos and a time for order. So it is in our worship. The touch of the Spirit should re-arrange us. We should expect God to be in control of our worship times. This requires that we yield ourselves to His creative influence as He produces in us spiritual growth that comes out of the worship experience. As we yield, then God can put us in His order and we then become what He wants us to be rather than what we want ourselves to be.