

*The Gifts of
the Spirit*

by
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THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT, second revised edition

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Cataloguing Data

Brueggemann, Dale A., 1949–
Gifts of the Spirit, 2d rev. ed.

1. Bible - Theology. 2. Holy Spirit, gifts of

I. Title. II. Brueggemann, Dale A.

BT767

234.13 - dc21

List of Abbreviations

Bible

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Josh	Joshua
Judg	Judges
1-2 Sam	1-2 Samuel
1-2 Kgs	1-2 Kings
12 Chr	12 Chronicles
Ezra	Ezra
Neh	Nehemiah
Esth	Esther
Job	Job
Ps/Pss	Psalms
Prov	Proverbs
Eccl	Ecclesiastes
Song	Song of Songs
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Lam	Lamentations
Ezek	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniel
Hos	Hosea
Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Obad	Obadiah
Jonah	Jonah
Mic	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zeph	Zephaniah
Hag	Haggai
Zech	Zechariah
Mal	Malachi

New Testament

Matt	Matthew
Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke
John	John
Acts	Acts
Rom	Romans
1-2 Cor	1-2 Corinthians
Gal	Galatians
Eph	Ephesians
Phil	Philippians
Col	Colossians
1-2 Thess	1-2 Thessalonians
1-2 Tim	1-2 Timothy
Titus	Titus
Phlm	Philemon
Heb	Hebrews
Jas	James
1-2 Pet	1-2 Peter
1-3 John	1-3 John
Jude	Jude
Rev	Revelation

Miscellaneous

//	Indicates parallel passages, such as in the Synoptics
C.D.	Karl Barth, <i>Church Dogmatics</i>
DRA	Douay-Rheims 1899 American ed., literal translation of the Vulgate
ESV	English Standard Version
G ¹²⁴⁸	<i>Strong's Concordance</i> , G for Greek
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint, a pre-Christian Greek translation of the Old Testament
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NET	The NET Bible
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>

Spiritual Gifts

THE NEW TESTAMENT PROVIDES VARIOUS LISTS of gifts and roles in the church. The shortest, if you can call it a list, is Peter's twofold classification: "the gift of *speaking*" and "the gift of *helping*" (1 Pet 4:10–11). Paul specifies more gifts, but each of them falls fairly neatly into one of Peter's two classes (Eph 4:11; Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:8–10, 28). Peter also provides a twofold regulative principle that does a fair job of summarizing Paul's more detailed regulations:

Twofold classification:
"speaking" and "helping"

Do you have the gift of speaking? *Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you.* Do you have the gift of helping others? *Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies.* Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen. (1 Pet 4:11)

That sounds much like Paul's directions to employ your giftedness "with as much faith as God has given you" (Rom 12:6).

The following material answers three key questions about the gifts of the Spirit: (1) *How do they work?* The Holy Spirit exalts Jesus Christ, promotes the common good, and manifests unity in diversity. (2) *What are they?* The lists comprise about twenty gifts of speaking and serving. (3) *How are they regulated?* The Scriptures provide a regulating principle of love, which promotes the common good and aims to build up the church.

Think of what a wonder any congregation would be if it found itself self-consciously receiving and exercising all twenty gifts of the Spirit that we find in the New Testament. Think of the results: spiritual nurture in a unified fellowship of saints, self-confidence in the faith, power in witness, and focus in discipleship. Why it would be nothing less than a manifestation of the heavenly community on earth.

How do the gifts of the Spirit work? (1 Cor 12:1–7)

BEFORE WE LIST AND UNPACK how each individual gift operates, we should pay some attention to the effect that *any* truly spiritual gift will have when it operates as God intended it to. Romans 12 describes the gifts as the Spirit endowed activities of a transformed people serving God and edifying each other; Ephesians 4 describes the gifts as the offices that God has granted the church so the entire body will mature into the image of Jesus Christ; and 1 Corinthians 12–14 describes the gifts as activities meant to edify the church when they are exercised in truth and love.

The Spirit proclaims, “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor 12:1–3)

Now, dear brothers and sisters, regarding your question about the special abilities the Spirit gives us. I don’t want you to misunderstand this. You know that when you were still pagans, you were led astray and swept along in worshiping speechless idols. So I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor 12:1)

Paul insisted, even if it were an ecstatic shout from a so-called charismatic, the call “*Anathema* Jesus” (v. 3) could never be from God. Twenty-first century Christians might wonder why Paul needed to give this warning to anyone claiming to be a Christian, but remember these three things. (1) The Law pronounced anyone hung on a tree to be accursed, and that had happened to Jesus (Gal 3:13, quoting Deut 21:23). Some early Christians may have failed to understand that the one who “took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing” (Gal 3:13) was not himself accursed. (2) Jewish anti-evangelists like Saul pressured Jewish Christians to curse Jesus Christ (Acts 26:11, cf. Matt 10:17; Acts 9:1; 22:5, 19). It’s even possible that Paul may be remembering with shame a time when that blasphemy would have been on his own lips as he forced it on the churches he persecuted. (3) Imperial powers menaced Christians with demands that they curse Jesus Christ rather than acknowledge anyone other than their Roman rulers as “Lord” and master.¹

On the other hand, every loyal confession of Jesus as Lord is from the Spirit. Just as the Spirit confesses that God is “Abba Father” (Gal 4:6), the Spirit confesses that Jesus is the Lord. Of course, this verbal confession

1. E.g., Pliny the Younger (AD 62?–113?) was the Roman governor of Bithynia. In AD 106, he reported to emperor Trajan that he tried to force Christians to “curse Christ,” but admitted, “a genuine Christian cannot be induced to do so.”

must genuinely signal a cry for salvation (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:14–40) and acknowledge submission to the title’s authority. Jesus must really *be* Lord, or your use of the title only testifies against you. Jesus complained, “Why do you keep calling me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ when you don’t do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). And he warned, “Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter” (Matt 7:21).

In other words, even while a liturgical tongue chants, “Jesus is Lord,” disobedience can mumble, “Not mine!”

Even as a liturgical tongue chants, “Jesus is Lord,” disobedience can mumble, “Not mine!”

Paul’s argument identifies all Christians as spiritual persons, by virtue of their confession of Jesus’ lordship.² Margaret Mitchell says,

Paul relativizes all claims to greater or less spiritual attainment because of ecstatic gifts by insisting that every Christian is a spiritual person, because every Christian who makes the common acclamation [*Kurios Iēsous*] (cf. 8:6) shows that he or she is possessed by the Holy Spirit.³

The Spirit works for the common good (1 Cor 12:4–7)

The Holy Spirit interlaces all of the church’s human individuality and frailty with divine unity and power.

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts [*pneumatikōs*^{G4152}], but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service [*diakonia*^{G1248}], but we serve the same Lord. God works [*energēma*^{G1755}] in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. (1 Cor 12:4–7)

On both the human and divine sides of the matter, the Holy Spirit’s work reflects unity. On the human side, authentic exercise of spiritual gifts will promote church unity, effecting actions for the common good (v. 7). And genuine exercise of the gifts of the Spirit reflects inner-trinitarian unity as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work among us: There are varieties of gifts by the same *Spirit*, varieties of service by the same *Lord*, and varieties of activities by the same *God*.

2. A Eriksson, *Traditions as Rhetorical Proof: Pauline Argumentation in 1 Corinthians*, ConBT (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1998), 217.

3. Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991), 267–68.

In general, one's spiritual gifts determine function. But such matters as holiness, spiritual maturity, and good order also play a critical role in determining who does what in a church. For example, one might have the administrative skills of a Fortune 500 CEO but have an unloving spirit and therefore be disqualified for church leadership. One might have a knack for helping others but not rule one's own home well and therefore be disqualified from serving as an elder or deacon (1 Tim 3:4, 12; Titus 1:5–9). One might even have administrative, prophetic, and teaching gifts but have fallen into immorality and thus be disqualified from being a pastor (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:5–9).

And God is sovereign in his distribution of the gifts. When Paul notes that “a spiritual gift is given to each of us” (1 Cor 12:7), he implies distribution as the Spirit wills (v. 11). By definition, all believers have faith, but the Spirit gives some a special gift of faith; all disciples should share the good news, but God calls some in particular to be evangelists; all Christians should be merciful, but Christ gives some a special gift of mercy. Referring to *uniquely* apostolic work, Paul spoke of God, “who worked through Peter as the apostle to the Jews” and through himself as “the apostle to the Gentiles” (Gal 2:8). But Paul could also refer to God's work through the general believer: “God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him” (Phil 2:13). Whether apostle, pastor, or laymen, we can all work out our calling in ways that manifest the Holy Spirit.

It is not so much a matter of having a gift, as being a gift.

The loving and edifying work that Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians 12–14 aims to build up the body of Christ. Ephesians 4 emphasizes the growth of the whole body, not the perfectionism of individual saints pressing on to a “higher life.” Paul insisted that immature individualism must yield to corporate maturity, to the one mature man in Christ.⁴ In the end, “It is not so much a matter of *having* a gift, as of *being* a gift.”⁵

The Spirit brings about unity in diversity (1 Cor 12:12–13)

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles,

4. Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 313.

5. Jean Jacques Suurmond, “A Fresh Look at Spirit-Baptism and the Charisms,” *Expository Times* 109, n. 4 (January 1998): 103–06.

some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit. (1 Cor 12:12–13)

The body is a favorite Pauline analogy for the church. It speaks of diverse manifestations, unified purpose, and interdependence under the overall authority of Jesus Christ. Paul taught the basic analogy: “We are members of his body” (Eph 5:30) and are made “complete through... union with Christ, who is the head” (Col 2:10). Sometimes he expanded on the analogy. For example he told the Roman congregation, “Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other” (Rom 12:4–5). Likewise, he told the Ephesians, “He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (Eph 4:16). This is the idea behind Paul’s regulation of the gifts (1 Cor 14).

The source of that unity is the work of the Holy Spirit, who effects regeneration and reconciliation. (1) *Regeneration*: “In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12:13). This baptism gives us new life, so “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). In other words, we are one body because we share the life of Christ. We “have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come” (Heb 6:5), we “were all made to drink of the one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). (2) *Reconciliation*: We are also one body because the Holy Spirit breaks down real and perceived barriers, working by diverse gifts and through many members to produce and sustain the common good. Ultimately, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, black nor white, male nor female, slave nor free; rather, Christ is all and is in all (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). He reconciled us all into one body by the work of the cross (Eph 2:16).

THE NEW TESTAMENT PROVIDES FIVE LISTS of spiritual gifts, one two-fold classification scheme by Peter (1 Pet 4:11) and four listings by Paul (Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:8–10, 28; Eph 4:11). None of the lists entirely parallels any other, though considerable overlap shows up. The following table arranges the lists, numbering each unique gift, classifying them according to Peter’s twofold heading, and paralleling identical or closely related gifts. Although individual gifts can overlap categories, the following classification provides a helpful way of organizing the discussion of the gifts.

1 PET 4:11	1 COR 12:28	EPH 4:11	1 COR 12:8–10	ROM 12:6–8
W H O E V E R S P E A K S				
	1. <i>Apostle</i>	Apostle		
	2. <i>Prophet</i>	Prophet	Prophecy	Prophecy
		4. <i>Evangelist</i>		
	3. <i>Teacher</i>	5. <i>Pastor-Teacher</i>		Teaching
			6. <i>Word of wisdom</i>	
			7. <i>Word of knowledge</i>	
			8. <i>Distinguishing between spirits</i>	
	9. <i>Tongues</i>		Tongues	
			10. <i>Interpretation of tongues</i>	
W H O E V E R S E R V E S				
	11. <i>Helps</i>			12. <i>Serving</i>
				13. <i>Mercy</i>
				14. <i>Encouragement</i>
				15. <i>Contributing</i>
	16. <i>Administration</i>			17. <i>Leadership</i>
			18. <i>Faith</i>	
	19. <i>Healings</i>		Healing	
20. <i>Miracles</i>		Miracles		

In all the other lists, the gifts are the ministries, but in the Ephesians list, the gifts are the persons themselves: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. This probably denotes what we would today consider “offices.”

Prophet/prophesy is the only gift that Paul includes in all four of his lists, and he includes Pastor-teacher or teacher in all but one (1 Cor 12:8–10). Otherwise some of the gifts show up in two of his lists, or even only once.

Although I numbered them as distinct gifts, I have listed the similar gifts of *helps* and *serving* on the same line in the table, and the same with *admin-*

istration and leadership. I also contemplated listing *mercy* and *contributing* on the same line, since the Greek word for mercy frequently has to do with alms giving, but I decided against it, because the gift of mercy has wider impact than just providing financial relief.

Speaking

Speak as though God himself were speaking through you.

Peter exhorts anyone who has one of the speaking gifts, “speak as though God himself were speaking through you” (1 Pet 4:11). The first four on the list of ten speaking gifts come from Paul’s fourfold list of roles that God has established in the church: “Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers” (Eph 4:11). The other Pauline gift lists repeat three out of these four, omitting evangelists, and include five more speaking gifts: word of wisdom, word of knowledge, distinguishing between spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues.

Given the fourfold list in Ephesians 4:11, and the hierarchical language for the first three in 1 Corinthians 12:28, we can conclude that they have the preeminence among all the gifts. Indeed, we might see them as formally recognized offices in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third pastor-teachers, and perhaps evangelists.

1. Apostles

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: *the apostles*, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. (Eph 4:11)

Here are some of the parts God has appointed for the church: *first are the apostles*, second are prophets, third are teachers, then.... (1 Cor 12:28).⁶

The labels “first” and “second” indicate that Paul refers to the foundational figures of the church, “the foundation of the apostles and the prophets”

6. *Prōton apostolous*. (1) *prōtos*^{G4412}: Can be used for order in time, as *first, former* (Rev 2:5), or it might refer to rank and value, as in *foremost, most important of all* (Mark 6:21). In a list like this, it can refer to sequence, *first* (Matt 21:28; Heb 10:9). When speaking of priority or value, *first of all* (Matt 5:24); and of degree, *above all, especially, in the first place* (Matt 6:33). (2) *apostolos*^{G60652}: (a) one sent on a mission with full authority, *apostle, messenger, envoy* (John 13:16); (b) a commissioned representative of a congregation, *delegate, missionary, representative* (2 Cor 8:23); (c) in the New Testament, a messenger for God. As a general term (Luke 11:49) or as a more specific reference to a person who tells the Gospel message, *apostle* (Rom 16:7); often a person who has the special task of founding and establishing churches, *apostle, messenger* (Eph 2:20).

(Eph 2:20). As Thiselton notes, “The apostles are first not least in the sense that the church does not ‘raise up’ its apostles, but responds to the apostolic witness.”⁷ These would be the twelve, then Matthias (Acts 1:15–26), Paul (Rom 1:1, etc.), Barnabas (Acts 4:36), and perhaps Jesus’ brother James (Acts 15). This refers primarily to those who were with Jesus and sent out by him (Acts 12:21–22, cf. Mark 3:14). These exercised an unrepeatable role like Jesus assigned to Peter: “I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church” (Matt 16:18). It will not do for us to react against Rome’s over-reaching claims for an apostolic succession for its priesthood and use that as an excuse for diminishing the unique foundational role of Peter and the other apostles. That would be Protestantism run

The apostles confront the church with a word which it did not originate, and by which it is both created and judged.

amuck. But neither can we see this as a continuing office; rather, we see it as a unique and unrepeatable foundational office. Barrett writes:

Are all apostles? Perhaps some in Corinth thought the answer should be Yes (see Barth, *C.D.* III.ii.309; and cf. iv. 8); but it must be No, for the apostles confront the church with a word which it did not originate (cf. xiv.36), a word by which it is both created and judged.⁸

This is true of only the apostles and could not be said of any subsequent figures in church history.

If a more *general* sense of apostles is also in view, it would be the ongoing missionary arm of God’s work. That would include the pioneering of new fields and then the discipling and appointing of pastors in every place (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).⁹ In that case, the “first” would be referring to their primary role wherever the church is established anytime throughout church history. If anyone today might claim the general title, it would be the pioneering missionary and the church planter, not the charismatic TV celebri-

7. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 1014.

8. Charles K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistles to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 296.

9. I distinguish this apostolic task from the ongoing pastoral and diaconal work in existing local congregations and believe foreign missions should focus on the former and the established national churches should do the latter.

ties. Even then, if the label fits at all, these would definitely be apostles with a small ‘a’, not the authoritative foundational figures with a large ‘A’.

2. Prophets

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, *the prophets*, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. (Eph 4:11)

...if God has given you *the ability to prophesy*, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. (Rom 12:6)¹⁰

He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another *the ability to prophesy*.... (1 Cor 12:10)

Here are some of the parts God has appointed for the church: first are apostles, *second are prophets*, third are teachers, then.... (1 Cor 12:28)

Paul continues his list of offices: “*second prophets*” (1 Cor 12:28), which is also listed as a non-office gift in each of the other Pauline gift lists. Prophecy came first in the list in Romans 12, which reflects the high estimate that the New Testament church had for it (1 Cor 12:28–30; 1 Cor 14; Eph 2:20; 4:11).

Some claim that this foundational role was an office with canonical authority like that of Old Testament writing prophets. By this definition, they infer that the office ceased sometime around the end of the apostolic period, with the closing of the New Testament canon. But defending the idea of ongoing existence of prophets doesn’t necessarily imply an open canon of Scripture. Even during the Old Testament age, relatively few prophets contributed to the canon, and fewer still from those who experience the democratization of the prophetic gifts throughout the New Testament age. Moses wished, and Joel prophesied, that all God’s people would be prophets (Num 11:25–29; Joel 2:28–32). That surely didn’t promise 70 books added to the Old Testament when Moses got help in the wilderness and 120 books added on the day of Pentecost—to say nothing of millions of books added to the New Testament since the day of Pentecost. We can be fairly certain that Moses wasn’t wishing for two and a half million Old Testament books to follow his own five books.

Others agree that the gift of prophecy still functions, but only through anointed preaching; however, that reduces the gift to the point that we hardly need to call it a revelatory gift at all. However we see it functioning—whether in pulpit, at lectern, or from the pew—we should acknowledge that by this gift God still speaks to his church with revelatory authority and

10. ...with as much faith as God has given you (NLT), according to the rule of faith (DRA).

power. That doesn't threaten the unique authority of Scripture; it doesn't take prophets out from under the authority of the church. New Testament prophecy is subject to the spiritual judgment of the church, but that's always been the norm, not a New Testament innovation. The Old Testament people of God were told to reckon with the authority of the prophet's message, but only if it was true prophecy. That meant, prophecy that didn't violate Scripture and predictions that came to pass (Deut 13:1-5; 18:9-20). They were given standards for judging, and were expected to do so. Likewise in the New Testament. Paul said, "Let two or three people prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said" (1 Cor 14:29).

Some charismatic circles abuse personal prophecies to manipulate fellow believers. For example, I know of one congregation in the 1970s where you couldn't change jobs, choose a wife, or make a major purchase or sale without a "prophet" giving you the go-ahead. After awhile, it just looked like a cult-like device for controlling people, rather than empowering them. Of course, we shouldn't rule out the possibility that God might give such specific guidance through the gift of prophecy. For example, see the prophecies of Joseph about Egypt's famine (Gen 41) or of Agabus about the famine in apostolic times and about Paul's imprisonment (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11).

If you receive prophetic guidance, test it.

If you do receive prophetic guidance, test it, asking other spiritual people to join in judging the utterance. And settle it that it is something with which your own obedient spirit bears witness. In Paul's case, he heard the prophecy about what Jerusalem Jews would do to him, which prompted the Christians to try to talk him out of going there (Acts 21:10-12). Earlier Paul had said, "I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I don't know what awaits me" (Acts 20:22). After hearing Agabus's prophecy of what awaited him, Paul said, "I am ready," so his fellow believers said, "The Lord's will be done"—and he left for Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-15).

Prophecy doesn't necessarily involve predicting or prescribing the future at all; rather, it's speaking for God to explain his ways with man. It might indeed deal with future matters, but it might just as well explain the present, or even the past. It's quite appropriate to call some of the Old Testament historical books the "former prophets," and the chronicler makes occasional reference to the prophetic sources he used to write his postexilic history (1 Chr 29:29; 2 Chr 9:29; 12:15; 32:32; 35:25).

Nor is prophecy something that provides the ongoing equivalent of canonical revelation. But it is certainly something more than human assess-

ment of the situation—even from a point of view inculcated by Scripture and enriched by a disciplined spiritual life. Wayne Grudem defines New Testament prophecy this way:

Paul is simply referring to something that God may suddenly bring to mind, or something that God may impress on someone’s subconscious in such a way that the person has a sense that it is from God. It may be that the thought brought to mind is surprisingly distinct from the person’s own train of thought, or that it is accompanied by a sense of vividness or urgency or persistence, or in some other way gives the person a rather clear sense that it is from the Lord.¹¹

I’m not sure that “suddenly” is necessary, especially if “vividness or urgency or persistence” keeps a prophetic message on your mind for hours or days before you deliver it to the congregation. I don’t know that any attempt to explain the psychology of the prophetic experience will give us sure guideline for judging whether what we speak is prophetic, but the truth of prophetic self-apprehension must lie somewhere along the lines Grudem outlines.

In the Old Testament, examples of prophecy are so numerous that we couldn’t begin even to survey them. Nonetheless, it would be good to note some Old Testament examples of true prophecy that didn’t entail the production of infallible Scripture. Some didn’t even necessarily involve propositional revelation at all. Think of the seventy in the wilderness plus Eldad and Medad prophesying as a demonstration that they were anointed to serve alongside Moses in leading Israel (Num 11:25–29). Or think of Saul and his messengers prophesying (1 Sam 10:9–13; 19:20–24). Nothing they said ends up in the Scriptures preceded by “the word of the LORD came to...” or the proclamation, “Thus saith the LORD!” Indeed, nothing they said is even recorded—if they even *said* anything when they were prophesying. In Saul’s case, prophetic activity involved musical performance and laying “naked on the ground all day and all night” (1 Sam 10:5–7; 19:21). It just provoked people to ask if Saul were a prophet (1 Sam 10:10–12; 19:24). If you will, these were cases of what classical Pentecostals often describe as the “initial physical evidence” of the Spirit baptism. The only information this *prophesying* was intended to convey to God’s people is that Saul was anointed—as their king, not as a prophet.

Even prophecies that were intended to convey information were not necessarily canonical, or even generally authoritative. Think of the example of

11. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 1056.

a young Saul and his companion who were seeking out a prophet and paying him to inform them where to find some lost livestock (1 Sam 9:6–9).¹² Or think of Agabus, who prophesied the great famine (Acts 11:28) and Paul’s captivity (Acts 21:10–14). And even when they were intended to be authoritative, even that didn’t constitute a claim on canonicity for the prophet (e.g., 2 Chr 24:20).¹³

3. Teacher and Pastor-Teacher

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and *the pastors and teachers*. (Eph 4:11)

Here are some of the parts God has appointed for the church:... *third are teachers*, then... (1 Cor 12:28).

If you are a *teacher*, teach well. (Rom 12:7)

Here Paul includes the last of his *enumerated* roles before moving on to those he lists without hierarchy or implied position (1 Cor 12:28). This important ministry occurs third in this list and in Romans 12:6–8, where it’s behind prophecy and serving, rather than behind apostles and prophets (1 Cor 12:28). In Ephesians 4:11, it’s fourth, behind apostles, prophets, and evangelists; and there, it’s the dual role of pastor-teacher.

.....
...to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church.

The gift can be pastoral, as Paul implies by referring to the double office of pastor-teacher (Eph 4:11). Its inclusion in two lists, once as the single title “teacher” the other as “pastor-teacher” indicates that all pastors must be teachers, though not all teachers are pastors. He says God gave “pastors and teachers.”¹⁴ Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work¹⁵ and build up the church, the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). It’s interesting to note that this “work of service” for which a pastor trains a congregation could well refer to the very gifts and functions that compose the second half of the table of gifts, labeled with Pe-

12. Or would this be a word of knowledge?

13. We have no Old Testament book by this preexilic Zechariah; our canonical “Zechariah” was postexilic.

14. Some speak of the fivefold office (Eph 4:11), but this doesn’t refer to a fourth and fifth role in the list; rather, it refers to a dual fourth role, *pastor-teacher*. There can be no such functionary as a pastor without the gift of teaching that he exercises. If God has called you to the pastorate, he has called you to be a teacher.

15. *Diakonia*^{G1248}: *Service, ministry*, e.g., the deaconate.

ter's second label, "whoever serves." The pastoral training task strengthens the church's ability to serve and has this ultimate aim: "This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ" (Eph 4:13).

The role of pastor-teacher requires *devotion*. Paul told Timothy, "Focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them" (1 Tim 4:13). It requires a *calling* and should be exercised with caution. James warned, "Not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly" (Jas 3:1, see Ezek 3:17–18; Luke 12:47–48; Acts 20:26–27). O'Brien describes the pastor's role as a leader as well as teacher:

The term "pastor" or "shepherd" was used alongside "overseer" and "elder" to describe the church leaders (cf. Acts 20:17, 28, where "elders" are "overseers" who "pastor" the flock). Note particularly the example of Epaphras, through whom the congregations of Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis were founded (Col. 1:7–8; 4:12–13)¹⁶

The pastor's function is similar to those of overseers (Phil 1:1) and elders (cf. Acts 20:17, 28; 14:23; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:17, 19, etc.): the nurture, care, and management of congregations (1 Thess 5:12; Rom 12:8). Although the noun "pastor" occurs only in Ephesians 4:11 in reference to church ministry, the related verb "to shepherd" occurs several times in this sense (John 21:15–17; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2). And using the term "flock" as an image of the church implies the same things (Acts 20:28–29; 1 Pet 5:2–3).

This shepherd imagery comes first from God, who is our shepherd (Gen 49:12; Ps 23:1; 89:1; 40:11), and then from Israel's leaders (2 Sam 5:2; Ps 78:71; Jer 23:2; Ezek 34:11). So too, in the church "the Great Shepherd" is Jesus Christ (John 10:11–18; Matt 18:12–14; Luke 15:3–7; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:4), after whom pastors should pattern their ministry (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2).¹⁷

The Bible provides many examples of the exercise of the gift of teaching. In the Old Testament, we see Solomon as a teacher, especially as depicted in Proverbs (Prov 1:1; 10:1; 25:1), but also in Ecclesiastes—though a bit jaded (Eccl 1:1–2, 12; 7:27; 12:8–10). And we see Ezra, the model teacher who "had

16. O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 299; and for further discussion, O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), 61–64.

17. O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 300.

determined to *study* and *obey* the law of the LORD and to *teach* those decrees and regulations to the people of Israel” (Ezra 7:10).

In the New Testament, we see Jesus, who was the very *Logos* made flesh and thus “taught them like one who had authority” (Mark 1:22); we see Paul, who had been “chosen... to teach the Gentiles about faith and truth” (1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11); and those of Antioch who were “prophets and teachers:¹⁸ Barnabas, Simeon (called ‘the black man’), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (the childhood companion of King Herod Antipas), and Saul” (Acts 13:1). Note the authoritative roles played by these teachers, as apostles and prophets.

A teacher’s job is retaining, passing on, and interpreting the already-given apostolic tradition. Sometimes that involves the exposition and interpretation of Scripture (Acts 15:35; 18:11, 25; Rom 2:20–21; Col 3:16; Heb 5:12). Sometimes it means explanation or reiteration of apostolic injunctions (1 Cor 4:17; Rom 16:17; 2 Thess 2:15; 2 Tim 2:2; 3:10). In the Pastoral Epistles, teaching appears to be an authoritative ministry passed on to men especially chosen to transmit the apostolic message faithfully (2 Tim 1:13–14; 2:1–2; Titus 1:9). So Timothy was not only to pursue that ministry but to teach others to do the same (1 Tim 4:13, 16; 2 Tim 2:2).

A notice about Apollos and his teaching indicates that the teaching gift doesn’t make you infallible or above learning from others. “He was an eloquent speaker who knew the Scriptures well. He had been taught the way of the Lord, and he taught others about Jesus with an enthusiastic spirit and with accuracy” (Acts 18:24b–25a). Those sound like stellar qualifications for any teacher’s resume; however, “he knew only about John’s baptism” (v. 25b). So “when Priscilla and Aquila heard him,... They took him aside and explained the way of God even more accurately” (v. 26). Indeed, the best teachers are teachable and lifelong learners.

4. Evangelists

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, *the evangelists* [*euangelistēs*^{G2099}], and the pastors and teachers. (Eph 4:11)

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*God is the first evangelist*  
The terms based on the forms of the Greek root *euangel-* refer to announcing good news. The title evangelist occurs only three times in the New Testament and identifies only two people by name, Philip

18. This appears to indicate a double role of prophet-teacher, although I suppose it could mean some in this list were prophets and others were teachers.

(Acts 21:8) and Timothy (2 Tim 4:5). But its third appearance, in this gift list, indicates a wider distribution than just those two. Indeed, God himself is the first evangelist, who “proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, ‘All nations will be blessed through you’” (Gal 3:8; quoting Gen 12:3; 18:18). Throughout the four Gospels we see Jesus Christ as the evangelist,<sup>19</sup> proclaiming “the Good News” everywhere he went. In turn, Paul became an apostle whose task it was to serve as an evangelist to the Gentiles (Rom 1:15). The apostles would have been the church’s earliest evangelists, but we note that this gift was given also to an early deacon, Philip (Acts 21:1), and we note that all Christians were evangelists: “The believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went” (Acts 8:4).

But like many other gifts, Christ provides not only a general dispersion of the task to all believers, but the Holy Spirit also provides a special distribution to some members. In this regard, Paul’s list includes this as something we might identify as an *office*, along with apostles, prophets, and pastor-teachers (Eph 4:11). Eventually, the church came to identify the four gospel writers as the four evangelists.

Present church practice is to recognize itinerant preachers of the Gospel and people who hit the streets witnessing as evangelists. But nothing in the New Testament indicates that being an evangelist is by nature a traveling ministry. All of the apostles were evangelists, and the apostolic wish to build where no one had built before (Rom 15:20) would certainly mean an itinerant ministry; but not all evangelists are foundational apostles. In turn, most itinerant evangelists today avoid the apostolic task and expect to work through a local church with an already established foundation. Perhaps we should take it one step further, and emphasize the gift of evangelizing as a local church gift, rather than just an itinerant ministry, and seek out and develop evangelists in our own congregations. O’Brien suggests that the task covers a range of activities from primary evangelism and church planting to the ongoing discipling of Christians and development of growing congregations (Rom 1:11–15).<sup>20</sup>

In Timothy’s case, we see that he received that calling and gift through a prophetic ordination service (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:16, 18). It’s likely that others came into their gifts and offices through similar ordination services (Acts 13:2–3; 14:23).

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19. Matt 9:35; Mark 1:1, 14; 10:29; Luke 4:18.

20. O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 299.

## 5. Word of wisdom

To one person the Spirit gives *the ability to give wise advice* [*logos sophias*].... (1 Cor 12:8)<sup>21</sup>

Thiselton speaks of “articulate utterances relating to ‘wisdom,’” putting wisdom in quotes because the term *sophia* is a catchword for a key controversy throughout 1 Corinthians.<sup>22</sup>

This isn’t the shallow “words of eloquent wisdom” (1 Cor 1:17), or “clever speech” (NET, NLT) that Paul loathed. It might be the resident wisdom that comes with growth in grace, study of the Scriptures, and disciplined reflection on a life well-lived in God’s presence. But that it’s a *word*, or *message*,

*This gift doesn't qualify anyone as... resident answer-man*

points to occasions when God grants someone supernatural insight into a particular situation. In any case, this gift doesn’t qualify anyone as a local congregation’s resident answer-man on all subjects—whether he’s an autocrat in the pulpit or an opinionated member in the pews. This is a gift only in operation when God is speaking (1 Pet 4:11).

The Bible gives examples of those who exercised this gift. Think of Solomon, who showed wisdom in particular cases, such as the one where two women claimed the same child (1 Kgs 3). And of course we read about Jesus amazing the elders (Luke 2:41–52) and confounding his opponents with his wisdom (Matt 9:4; 12:25; Mark 8:16–17; 12:15; 22:15–22; Luke 5:22; 9:47; 11:17; John 6:61, 64; 16:19; 18:4). It’s also possible that we should consider the Lord directing Ananias to Saul and sending Peter to the household of Cornelius (Acts 9:11–16; 10:9–17). Some also suggest that Paul’s answer before the council fits the bill (Acts 23:6).

I can think of an occasion during my own ministry where I thought a fellow pastor exercised this gift at a regional meeting of pastors and elders. We had carried on a heated exchange on how we would organize and fund our region’s youth ministries. The younger pastors generally argued for spending more money on the work because the young were the church’s future—

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21. *Logos sophias*. *Logos*<sup>G3056</sup>: a general term for *speaking*, but with rational content. *sophia*<sup>G4678</sup>: ability to use knowledge for correct behavior, *insight*, *understanding* (Col 4:5), or in a clever way, *skill*, *cleverness* (1 Cor 1:17); here it denotes *enlightenment* given through divine revelation (2 Pet 3:15).

22.1 Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 938–39. See 1 Cor 1:17, 19ff., 24, 30; 2:1, 4ff., 13; 3:19; 12:8. And Paul uses it elsewhere quite a bit too, Rom 11:33; 2 Cor 1:12; Eph 1:8, 17; 3:10; Col 1:9, 28; 2:3, 23; 3:16; 4:5.

perhaps implying that anyone who disagreed didn't love the church's young people. The older pastors generally cautioned that we needed to be careful stewards of the limited finances of our small district and not put our hand to the plow until we could see our way to financing it successfully—perhaps implying that the young pastors were reckless and irresponsible. We had reached an angry impasse when someone invited the district youth director to address the proposal. He said, "Well, some of my friends are for it, and some of my friends are against it. I'm with my friends." The delegates at the council all chuckled at his wit and waited for him to continue with his recommendation. But he returned to his seat without saying anything more. We all looked at each other a little shamefacedly, resolved the issue peacefully, and moved on to other business. We had been reminded by a humorous word of wisdom that we were all co-laborers in Christ—and friends.

James exhorted his readers, "If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you" (Jas 1:5). Later in the book, he noted that genuine wisdom will make for righteous and merciful peace:

If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness. (Jas 3:13–18)

If you will, James was counseling his readers to be like Christ, who embodies and grants all wisdom (1 Cor 1:24, 30; Eph 1:17; Col 1:28; 3:16). Of the future messiah, Isaiah said, "The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of *wisdom* and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of *knowledge* and the fear of the LORD" (Isa 11:2). The word of wisdom and the word of knowledge are messianic wisdom, fulfilled and made abundantly available in Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:17, cf. 2 Cor 1:20).

## 6. Word of knowledge

...to another the same Spirit gives a message of *special knowledge* [*logos gnōseōs*]. (1 Cor 12:28)

As he does with “wisdom” above, Thiselton treats “knowledge” as a catchword for an ongoing controversy when he speaks of “articulate utterances relating to ‘knowledge.’”<sup>23</sup> Certainly, the “message of special knowledge”<sup>24</sup> is the opposite of what Paul derided as “so-called knowledge,” which only generates foolish debates, profane chatter, absurdities, and angry division (1 Tim 6:20). It’s a gift of supernatural knowledge not gained by mere observation, questioning, or research. Indeed, it may be impossible for you to quite grasp the very ideas you’re communicating in a word of knowledge: “Oh, how great are God’s riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible for us to understand his decisions and his ways!” (Rom 11:33). But it doesn’t make the recipient omniscient: “Our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture” (1 Cor 13:9). Paul can pray for “complete knowledge of his will” (Col 1:9). But notice that Paul focuses on *ethical* understanding rather than facts about the world, on the divine imperative rather than the human intellect, on obedience rather than speculative theorizing.

It doesn't make you a genius—to say nothing of a fortune teller.

As with the word of wisdom, that it’s a *message* of knowledge suggests that it’s not so much a resident gift as a divine provision for specific occasions. It doesn’t make you a genius—to say nothing of a fortune teller. It provides a message spoken as if God himself were speaking (1 Pet 4:11), so it’s divinely timely (Prov 25:11). And often, a word of knowledge cuts right to the heart of a matter, as only a word from God can (Heb 4:12).

We see various examples throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, we see Joshua uncovering Achan’s theft of plunder at Jericho (Josh 7:10–11) and Elisha denouncing Gehazi’s back door deal with Naaman (2 Kgs 5:20–27). We see Samuel using the gift when he met and selected Saul as king (1 Sam 9–10). We see Elijah communicating Aramean war plans to the king of Israel, operating as a spiritual fifth column for the people of God (2 Kgs 6:9–10). In the New Testament, I think especially of examples from Jesus’ ministry, such as when he told the Samaritan woman who denied having

23. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 938. “Knowledge” (*gnōsis*) is catchword throughout Paul’s epistles, especially in 1 Corinthians (Rom 2:20; 11:33; 15:14; 1 Cor 1:5; 8:1, 7, 10–11; 12:8; 1:2, 8; 14:6; 2 Cor 2:14; 4:6; 6:6; 8:7; 10:5; 11:6; Eph 3:19; Phil 3:8; Col 2:3; 1 Tim 6:20).

24. *Logos gnōseōs*: *Logos*<sup>G3056</sup> (see above). *gnōsis*<sup>G1108</sup>: information, *what is known*, *knowledge*; in this case, as a result of divine enlightenment.

a husband, “You’re right! You don’t have a husband—for you have had five husbands, and you aren’t even married to the man you’re living with now” (John 4:17–18). Also, Jesus frequently confounded his opponents because he knew their thoughts.<sup>25</sup> Or think of Peter, who exposed Ananias and Sapphira’s charitable giving fraud (Acts 5).

As with any other claim to be speaking God’s very words, this gift requires godly reverence. We certainly can’t lay claim to “superior knowledge” and then parade it as though it were any credit to our IQ. We could possess “all knowledge,” but without love it would mean nothing (1 Cor 13:2ff). And the word of knowledge isn’t a plaything for impressing and manipulating gullible audiences. You really need to have heard from God to represent what you’re saying in this way.

The late 1980s and early 90s abounded with charismatic scams who gave Pentecostalism and charismatic faith a horrible black eye. Among these frauds were those who played the word of knowledge card for all it was worth. For example, they would have their staff do extensive research in an area where they were headed for an upcoming campaign, collect their notes, then wait for the targets they had listed to arrive for meetings. One occasion shows what it looked like when the subject just wouldn’t quite cooperate with the con:

At a healing rally where the research had already been done, an evangelist asked a lady if she had ever met him before.

“No.”

He repeated, “So we have never had a conversation before this moment, right?”

She responded, “No, but I spoke with your staff members.”

Irritated, he said, “That’s not what I asked. Pay attention. You and I have never had a conversation before this moment, right?”

She responded, “No, but...”

“Do you believe God knows your name?”

“Yes.”

“Do you believe God knows everything about you?”

“Yes.”

“Is your name \_\_\_\_\_, and do you have a son named \_\_\_\_\_?”

“Yes.”

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25. E.g., Matt 9:4; 12:24; 16:7–8; Mark 12:15; Luke 5:22; 6:8; 7:39–40; cf. John 6:61, 64.

“Let me ask again. Have you and I ever had a conversation before tonight?”

“No, but...”

“Don’t interrupt the atmosphere, just answer yes or no to my questions. Have you and I ever had a conversation before tonight?”

“No...”

She looks down at me, pleadingly, as if to say, “What do I do?”

He continues, “You had a wreck about two years ago, yes or no?”

“Yes.”

“Do you believe Jesus heals?”

“Yes, but...” He stops her as she tries to say, “But I spoke to *your staff* and told them these things!”

“Don’t grieve the atmosphere, just answer yes or no to my questions. Do you believe Jesus heals?”

“Yes, of course I do! But...” As he stops here from speaking, she begins to cry nervously.

“There it is! Don’t be afraid to weep! That weeping shows that he’s coming on you right now!”<sup>26</sup>

This appalling manipulation, deception, and abuse will get its answer in the last judgment. Don’t be fooled by things like this, and don’t take up the practice yourself.

Don’t be like the false prophets who speak out of their own dreams and out of their own hearts, while claiming to be speaking for God (Jer 23:25ff). God condemns that attitude: “Let these false prophets tell their dreams, but let my true messengers faithfully proclaim my every word. There is a difference between straw and grain!” (v. 38). There’s a world of difference between a word of knowledge and something that’s just a brainstorm—to say nothing of a cold-blooded scam. On the other hand, if God has indeed spoken, his word will burn in your heart like a fire, and you shouldn’t withhold it when the loving, edifying moment avails itself (Jer 29:9).

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26. I found this sketch on a forum at <http://lit4ever.org>. JoniAmes@aol.com had posted it. Actually, as appalling as this example is, it seems like the author found it acceptable—as long as somebody gets healed.

7. Distinguishing between spirits

...He gives someone else *the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit....* (1 Cor 12:10)<sup>27</sup>

Paul is talking about a supernatural ability to evaluate the origin of extraordinary manifestations. This critical analysis of spirits would help determine whether the utterance were supernatural and holy, merely natural human activity that could be safely ignored, or even dangerous activity of evil spirits that should be resisted and anathematized. The first feeds the church, the second can be fairly harmless though inane, but the third is downright lethal. As Paul said, “The Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from the true faith; they will follow deceptive spirits and teachings that come from demons” (1 Tim 4:1). John even warned of “demonic spirits who work miracles” but battle against the Lord (Rev 16:14). Any congregation where the speech gifts operate ought to pray that God will give some members the ability to tell the difference between spirits so they can know whether the messages they hear are from God; it’s only the Spirit himself who “searches out everything” (1 Cor 2:10).

Why not be just as aware of who regularly operates with the gift of discernment as congregations tend to be about who speaks in tongues, who interprets, who prophesies— or who the pastor is?

As biblical examples of people who displayed the gift of discerning spirits, we think of Paul and Silas at Philippi with the young demon-possessed slave girl, who was magnifying their reputation, but for dark purposes (Acts 16:16–18). She shouted out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved” (v. 17). An unspiritual recipient of such praise might have valued the publicity, and it was *accurate*; however, Paul got exasperated and cast out the public relations demon that had kept that announcement running day after day.<sup>28</sup>

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27. *Diakriseis pneumatōn*: *Diakrisis*<sup>G1254</sup>: ability to evaluate and decide, *discernment, differentiation*. *pneuma*<sup>G4151</sup>: spirits, whether divine, human, or supernaturally evil: ...discernment of spirits (NJB), distinguishing between spirits (ESV), i.e., to tell them apart. The NLT makes explicit what the context clearly implies, that this is for judging “whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit.”

28. It’s possible too that Paul saw this announcement about the “God most high” offering “salvation” as potentially confusing to his pagan audience. They could have thought the god mentioned was Zeus, and their world brimmed with claimants to the title *soter*, or savior (John B. Polhill, *Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Expositi-*

In the context of Paul’s gift list, distinguishing the spirits would especially denote the ability to determine the spiritual value of what was said by charismatic utterance. Regulating the prophecies, Paul says, “Let two or three people prophesy, and let the others *evaluate* what is said” (1 Cor 14:29, see 1 Cor 2:6–16). The basis of that evaluation would certainly be Scripture, but God gives insight that even the most careful exegete of Scripture could never unravel on his own. To the degree that people in a congregation exercise the speaking gifts, a healthy congregation should also seek for the gift of discernment. Indeed, why not be just as aware of who regularly operates with the gift of discernment as congregations tend to be about who speaks in tongues, who interprets, who prophesies—or who the pastor and the deacons are?

## 8. Tongues

...another person is given *the ability to speak in unknown languages* [*genē glōssōn*], while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. (1 Cor 12:10)

This isn’t the linguist’s philological skills or natural talent for picking up a language. Rather, it’s “the ability to speak in *unknown* languages” (1 Cor 12:10).<sup>29</sup>

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*The gift is “different kinds of tongues.”*

Although some elevate this gift as though it were the pre-eminent gift, it should not predominate, even as the most common utterance gift. It definitely shouldn’t dominate the prophetic and pastoral teaching ministries in a church service. As we shall see when we get to the regulation of these gifts, Paul even limits the number of manifestations of this gift in a single service—and that was in a time when the preaching might run to midnight! (Acts 20:7).

The gift is “different kinds of tongues,” which might indicate that we shouldn’t narrow down our understanding of their nature too much. Thielton speaks of various understandings of what might be going on with tongues, and says these shouldn’t be treated as mutually exclusive: angel-

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*tion of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary [Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1992], 351).

29. *Genē glōssōn*: *Genē*<sup>G1085</sup>: *species, kind, class* (1 Cor 12:10). *glōssōn*<sup>G1000</sup>: means of verbal communication, *tongue, language* (Acts 2:4, 11); here, *tongues(-speaking)*, understood variously as unintelligible ecstatic utterance (1 Cor 14:2), heavenly language (1 Cor 13:1), or foreign languages not learned through natural means (Acts 2:4, 11).

ic speech (1 Cor 13:1, cf. *Testament of Job* 11:24; 12:7; 1 *Enoch* 40; 71:11–12; 4 Macc 10:21), miraculous powers to speak other languages (Acts 2:4–11), archaic liturgical rhythmic phrases, ecstatic speech (1 Sam 10:5–7; 19:20–22; 1 Kgs 18:29, 30; 2 Kgs 9:11, cf. the charge of drunkenness in Acts 2), and sighs too deep for words (Rom 8:26).<sup>30</sup> I wouldn't vouch for every suggestion in the list, but I wouldn't be quick to begin excluding options either. I certainly wouldn't spend much time listening to see if I could identify a human language before accepting the message, and I would have no way of knowing if what I heard was the language of angels.

As examples, some think the Old Testament “prophesying” of such figures as the seventy elders and Eldad and Medad in the wilderness (Num 11:25ff.). Saul could also have displayed tongues-like ecstatic speech in confirmation of his anointing as Israel's king (1 Sam 10:11ff; 19:24ff). Note that these accounts say nothing about the propositional content of the prophesying. I remember once asking my students in Bulgaria, “What do you think Eldad and Medad did?” I was hoping to hear someone suggest that they may have acted somewhat like Saul, who had an ecstatic experience when the Spirit came on him. What I heard was, “We believe they spoke in tongues.” This certainly can't be proven, but this answer showed a good awareness that they were correctly viewing the experiences of the seventy, of Eldad and Medad, and of Saul as being coupled with prophetic behavior that served as a sign of anointing rather than as a vehicle for propositional revelation to the people of God. Clearly, in none of these cases was the speech intended to be revelatory or authoritative; rather, it was to indicate to onlookers that the speaker had received the promised anointing of the Spirit.

In the only New Testament examples of tongues as a speech gift, it's about its abuse. Paul talks of the gift of tongues being abused in the Corinthian congregation, but worth correction for use as a gift that edifies the church. As we'll see in the section on regulating the gifts, the only way public proclamation in tongues is useful is if it's interpreted so everyone understands; otherwise, it needs to be kept as a private utterance, used only in your closet of prayer, in your private prayer during a chorus of corporate prayer, or as a glad signal that you have been filled with the Spirit.<sup>31</sup>

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30. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 972–83.

31. I believe uninterpreted tongues might be allowed in the church so long as they remain private as individual prayers can in times of corporate prayer among fellow-believers.

## 9. Interpretation of tongues

...Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given *the ability to interpret what is being said* [*hermēneia glōssōn*]. (1 Cor 12:10)<sup>32</sup>

This isn't the linguist's skill to qualify you for work as a United Nations interpreter—or as a missionary. It may not even be the gift of *translating*; rather, it's probably the gift of *interpreting* the sense of the message.<sup>33</sup> The New Testament gives no examples of this gift in operation; however, modern Pentecostalism is familiar enough with the gift to need little explanation. But in the Old Testament we may see something like this in the work of Ezra and the Levites, who taught the postexilic residents of Jerusalem, who spoke Aramaic but not Hebrew: "They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people to understand each passage" (Neh 8:8).<sup>34</sup>

I am not saying that anyone who claims to have the gift of interpreting tongues should suddenly become a long-winded expositor of the ideas embedded in messages in tongues. But I am saying that listeners shouldn't be surprised if the interpretation sometimes runs longer than the message by a few phrases or sentences. Interpretation can be a wordy business. Nor should they be surprised if the interpretation is shorter than the message. A concise summary can be just as enlightening as a long excursus.

## Helping Others

**T**he second ten gifts compiled from the lists fall into the broad category that Peter describes as "the gift of helping others" (1 Pet 4:11): Paul can speak generally of serving or helping others (Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28). Or he might detail how this is to be done, through such gifts as mercy, encouragement, contributing, leadership and administration, faith, healing, and mir-

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32. *Hermēneia glōssōn*: *hermēneia*<sup>G2058</sup>: *interpretation, explanation*; the ability to make intelligible the message given in words that otherwise would not be understood (1 Cor 12:10). *glōssōn*<sup>G1100</sup> (see above).

33. I distinguish *translating*, which attempts exact representation of what was said, from *interpretation*, which explains the meaning of what was said. *Hermēneia*, from which we get "hermeneutics," has to do with getting at the sense of a message.

34. Commentators argue whether this involved linguistic work (i.e., translating from Hebrew to Aramaic) or hermeneutical work (i.e., explanation and exposition). I'm inclined toward the latter (Ezra 7; Neh 8).

acles. Of those who serve with one of these service gifts, Peter says, “Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 4:11).

10. Serving and Helps

If your gift is *servng others* [*diakonia*<sup>G1248</sup>], serve them well. (Rom 12:7)

...then... *those who can help* [*antifēmpsis*<sup>G2941</sup>] *others*.... (1 Cor 12:28)

This can refer to Christian ministry in general,<sup>35</sup> the ministry of Jesus Christ,<sup>36</sup> someone’s specific ministry,<sup>37</sup> the ministry of collecting funds for the saints in Jerusalem,<sup>38</sup> or a recognized office in the church.<sup>39</sup> Here it could refer to a general ministry of Christians, but given that it’s in a gift list, we should see it as a specific gift, if not necessarily an “office” *per se*. Schreiner leans toward “the gift of service in general, perhaps especially the task of rendering financial and material assistance.”<sup>40</sup>

Having this gift of serving doesn’t put you in a servile position. Eve was “a helper just right for [Adam]” (Gen 2:18), and God is *our* “helper”<sup>41</sup>; however, that doesn’t make our wives our servants or God our slave. Deacons especially are to help those in need, which indicates that this is a gift that deacons should earnestly covet. The exercise of this gift would involve doing anything that is “helpful,” with a priority on helping fellow believers (Gal 6:10). But it could also refer to helping and serving the broader community, among which the church functions as salt and light (Matt 5:13–17; Phil 2:15).

.....  
*Having this gift of serving doesn't put you in a servile position.*

A New Testament example of someone exercising this gift was Dorcas, who “was always doing kind things for others and helping the poor”

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35. Rom 15:25; 1 Cor 3:5; 12:5; 16:15; 2 Cor 3:3–9; 4:1; 6:4; 11:15, 23; Eph 3:7; 4:12; 6:21; Col 1:7, 23, 25; 4:7; 1 Tim 1:12; 4:6; 2 Tim 1:18; 4:11; Phlm 13.

36. Rom 15:8; Gal 2:17.

37. Rom 11:13; 2 Cor 5:18; 6:3; Col 4:17; 2 Tim 4:5.

38. Rom 15:31; 2 Cor 8:4, 19, 29; 9:1, 1, 13.

39. Rom 16:1; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8–13.

40. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1998), 657.

41. Pss 54:4; 70:5; 146:5; Exod 18:3; Isa 41:10, 13.



distribution means bounty not lack; it means he freely distributes it, even to the unworthy (Rom 11:30ff), rather than hoarding it only for the so-called worthy. Freely you have received, freely give (Matt 10:8). So, in an important sense, everyone who is in Christ Jesus has been given the gift of mercy.

But like faith, mercy can also be a special gift sovereignly distributed to some—and by implication, not given to all in that same degree. God gives a special compassion to some, a special empathy, an especially kind heart. And then God empowers that empathy so that what results isn't just psychological torment at all the suffering you can see more clearly than others, but a healing response.

How should someone with this gift exercise it? *First*, we have the Bible's own counsel. Where Paul lists it as a special gift, he prescribes a cheerful attitude towards the display of mercy. And Jesus' counsel is that it should be done without show or display (Matt 6:2–4).<sup>47</sup> This isn't a gift that gives you a platform for parading how self-sacrificing you are; it isn't a melancholy penchant for giving up so much for the unfortunate.

*Second*, we can rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us; after all, it's a *spiritual* gift. Just as one speaks in tongues as the Spirit gives utterances, so too one displays and distributes mercy as the Spirit prods and provides. I doubt if that means you're supposed to wait for a direct revelation from God before you act with mercy toward someone; we should all show bountiful mercy. But the one who has this gift is more likely to sense a divine prompting than just a human emotion, a mandate from God rather than just an innately compassionate response to someone's misfortune or folly. And in that divine prompt there is the potential for ministry that goes beyond mere humanitarian relief to genuinely spiritual succor.

*Third*, it will pay to see the connections that the Scriptures itself make with showing mercy. (1) The Gospels closely connect the call for mercy with requests for Jesus to heal.<sup>48</sup> So perhaps the one who has the gift of mercy ought to seek earnestly the gift of healing, just as one who has the gift of speaking in tongues wants the gift of interpretation (1 Cor 14:13). Or, following that same principle, the one who has the gift of healing might seek the gift of motivating mercy. (2) And Jude connects the display of mercy with edifying, sanctifying, restoring love:

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47. The term for "giving alms" is *eleémosunē*, a term related to the terms for mercy (*eleos*) and for showing mercy (*eleēō*).

48. Matt 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; 20:30–31; Mark 10:47–48; Luke 16:24; 17:13; 18:38–39.

But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourself safe in God's love. And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives. (Jude 20–23)

This indicates that the one who has the gift of mercy might get involved with efforts to restore a congregation's wandering sheep (Jas 5:19–20); that's certainly a spiritual work (Gal 6:1). By contrast, note how God rebuked Israel's false shepherds for failure in this regard (Ezek 34:4). And anyone whose position put them in the role of implementing programs of restoration should pray for this gift. And of course, the gift of mercy would always be a useful gift for anyone involved in the church's diaconal ministries.

*Finally*, we might even turn to sanctified common sense. Where you see someone in need, show the mercy of helping them get financial help. Where you see someone suffering alone, come alongside them in burden-bearing companionship. Where you see someone doubting and drifting, refuse the attack mode of discipline in favor of friendship and fellowship. And where you yourself suffer under the lash of harsh and unfair attacks, forgive those who do it—seventy times seven times (Matt 18:22; Luke 17:4). That would be 490 times; by then, you've probably lost track—and who's really counting anyway? “Blessed are those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matt 5:7).

## 12. Encouragement

If your gift is *to encourage others* [*parakaleō*<sup>G3870</sup>], be encouraging... (Rom 12:8)

Paul uses the verb *parakaleō* frequently, sometimes meaning *to exhort* or *encourage*,<sup>49</sup> *to implore* or *entreat*,<sup>50</sup> or *to comfort*, *encourage*, or *cheer up*.<sup>51</sup> So for this list, some translations opt for *encourage* (e.g., NIV, NLT, NJB) and some for *exhort* (e.g., KJV, NASB, NET, ESV). I prefer *encourage*, but *exhort*

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49. To *urge strongly*, *appeal to*, *exhort*, *encourage* (Rom 12:8; 15:30; 16:17; 1 Cor 1:10; 14:31; 16:15–16; 2 Cor 2:8; 5:20; 8:6; 10:1; Phil 4:2; 1 Thess 2:12; 3:12; 5:11, 14; 4:11; 1 Tim 2:1; 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:9; 2:6, 15).

50. 1 Cor 16:12; 2 Cor 9:5; Phlm 9.

51. Rom 12:8; 2 Cor 1:4, 6; 2:7; 7:6, 7, 13; 13:11; Eph 6:22; Col 2:2; 4:8; 1 Thess 3:2, 7; 4:18; 2 Thess 2:17; Titus 1:9.

works well too, so long as you understand that there is nothing sharp or polemical in the exhortation.

This is a gift exercised on behalf of those who are in prison for the faith or who are sick (Matt 25:36, 39, 43),<sup>52</sup> for those who grieve (1 Chr 7:22; Job 29:25; Isa 57:18; Jer 31:13–15; Lam 1:2; Matt 2:28; 5:4; John 11:31), and even for the backslider who is seeking restoration (2 Cor 2:6–7). Ultimately, our Comforter is God himself; so to the degree this is a speaking gift, we should exhort or comfort as though God himself were speaking through us (1 Pet 4:11). For our God is the God of all comfort (2 Cor 1:3–4). Ultimately, he is the one who comforts those who mourn—and even blesses them (Matt 5:4).

Because God ministers through us, we can offer deep and eternal comfort. If we exhort, we do so as “Christ’s ambassadors; God... making his appeal through us” (2 Cor 5:20). We will do it “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” as we are motivated by love for one another (Rom 15:30). It’s only in Christ that we find our own encouragement, comfort, and sympathy and then communicate it effectively to others (Phil 2:1).

Note the connection between suffering and comforting, which Paul illustrates with his own experience:

For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us. (2 Cor 1:5–7)

With those who mourn, we can look *back* to remember the good times. We often do this at funerals, mixing weeping for loss with laughter at fond memories. But our greatest comfort as Christians is to look *forward*. This forward look encouraged Jesus Christ himself to despise the shame of the cross, because he knew he was destined to be “seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). Likewise, God has destined us for heavenly thrones (Rev 22:5). Indeed, our chief focus, whether exhorting from a pulpit or consoling family in a hospital waiting room, is the gospel. Even before Jesus Christ came, Isaiah spoke of gospel-comfort: “‘Comfort, comfort my people,’ says your God. ‘Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad

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52. Visiting those in prison in New Testament times meant visiting those who were imprisoned for their faith, not for breaking and entering or car jacking.

days are gone and her sins are pardoned” (Isa 40:1). So Simeon, who had waited for that comfort, recognized it when it came in the person of the baby Jesus (Luke 2:25, 28). In the fullness of time, Jesus came preaching that comfort (Matt 5:4), and eventually John saw a vision of its final realization:

I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.<sup>53</sup> He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!” And then he said to me, “Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.” (Rev 21:3–5)

### 13. Contributing

...If it is *giving* [*matadidōmi*<sup>G3330</sup>], give generously [*haplotēs*<sup>G572</sup>]....  
(Rom 12:8)

Paul uses a term for *sharing*, for transferring part of what you have to another. For example, it’s the same term Jesus uses when he tells the one that has two coats to give one to someone who has none (Luke 3:11). The Philadelphia art museum has a painting of the story of St. Martin. He’s astride a horse, using a sword to split his own cloak so he can give half to a naked beggar. The story continues: In heaven, St. Martin saw Jesus wearing half of a torn coat. When he asked about it, Jesus said, “Don’t you remember? You gave it to me.” You can give without stripping yourself. Sometimes the most generous giving comes from those who have little (Mark 12:41–44; Luke 21:1–4; 2 Cor 8:2). And when the giving comes out of divinely supplied bounty, the giving can actually exceed the need (e.g., Exod 36:5).

Translations differ in how to render *haplotēs*. Some take it to refer to *simplicity*, as opposed to ostentatious show (KJV) or to *sincerity* that shows no mixed motives (NET). This would advise against the flamboyant mode of philanthropy that seeks headlines and honors for involvement in charitable causes. Most take *haplotēs* to mean with *generosity* (RSV, NASB, NIV, NKJV, NLT, ESV). Bengel attempts to combine both senses and may hit a good note: “Neither prevented by the desire of private advantage, nor by anxious delib-

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53. This promise of God’s presence among his people is central to the hope of comfort, and it was a core covenantal promise (Lev 26:11–12, cf. 1 Kgs 8:27; 2 Chr 6:18; John 1:14).

eration whether another be worthy of the favor, and whether proper moderation be observed in giving.”

Although Paul elsewhere uses the term *metadidōmi* to describe imparting a share of the *spiritual* gifting he has (Rom 1:11; cf. Num 11:25–29), here it’s certainly about sharing *material* help. Paul’s own drive to collect an offering for the beleaguered Jerusalem church provides a good example of this practice, describing the proper approach to sharing and its expected outcome. It represents how to exercise this gift so well that it’s worth quoting at length:

I want it to be a willing gift, not given grudgingly. Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. “For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.” And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. As Scripture says, “They share freely and give generously to the poor. Their good deeds are remembered forever.” For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God. As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. (2 Cor 9:5–13)

Paul was talking about the Corinthian congregation’s gifts for Christians at Jerusalem. But the same principle would apply to individuals giving to help others who are in need—especially if the needy are fellow believers (Gal 6:10; cf. 1 Tim 5:8). If God has been generous with you, he’s done so to enable you to be generous to others; if God has lavished wealth on you, he has done so to enable you to give largely—and joyfully. Indeed, if he’s given you gainful employment, it’s so you can “give generously to others in need” (Eph 4:28).

#### 14. Leadership and Administration

...If God has given you *leadership ability* [*proistēmi*<sup>G4291</sup>], take the responsibility seriously.... (Rom 12:8)

...those who have the *gift of leadership* [*kybernēsis*<sup>G2941</sup>].... (1 Cor 12:28)

Leadership and administration are related; in fact, the New Living Translation renders both Greek terms as *leadership*. Paul's term in Romans [*proístēmi*] means to *go first, preside, direct, or lead*. So I like the translation, "if you are put in charge, you must be conscientious" (Rom 12:8 NJB). But because the term so often occurs in contexts that involve providing care and protection for those you lead, it almost comes to mean a responsibility *to care for*. The term occurs eight times in the New Testament, all in Pauline literature. A key idea is that those whom the church appoints to direct its pastoral and diaconal ministries (1 Tim 5:17; Titus 3:8, 14) must first show themselves able by doing a good job of leading and caring for their own families (1 Tim 3:4–5, 12). Such people are worthy of honor (1 Thess 5:12) and even obedience (Heb 13:17), but not as people who lord it over others, rather as servants (Luke 22:26; 1 Pet 5:3).

Paul's term in 1 Corinthians 12 is [*kybernēsis*], which has to do with administrative and managerial skills. In secular Greek literature it was used for a ship's helmsman, and in the LXX of Proverbs, it referred to wise guidance (Prov 1:5; 11:14; 24:6). The older English translations opted for *government* (e.g., KJV, ASV, GNV), and newer translations opt for *management* or *administration* (e.g., NASB, NIV, NKJV, RSV, ESV) or just *leadership* (NET, NRSV, NLT).

These gifts of leadership and administration are especially necessary for ruling elders at local, regional, and national levels, such as pastors, elders, and bishops. They would also be useful for those who organize the various diaconal works at all those levels, from the local church benevolence committee to the national offices of a denomination or its international compassionate ministries. In the New Testament church, it involved such matters as the distribution of aid to the widows, the first task of deacons (Acts 6). It would also come into play in such matters as the "binding and loosing" of church discipline (Matt 16:19; 18:18–19; John 20:23) and the ordaining of ministers and sending of missionaries.

The seventy elders that God gave Moses for a help likely had at least a measure of this gift (Num 11:25–29). Solomon's reign certainly illustrates this, with his imperial organization and his building projects. I would say the men picked to function as the church's first deacons would have had the gift (Acts 6). And of course, Paul told his congregations to look for good household managers to appoint as bishops and deacons (1 Tim 3:4–5, 12).



## 16. Healings

...and to someone else the one Spirit gives the *gift of healing* [*charismata iamatōn*]. (1 Cor 12:9)

...then... those who have the *gift of healing* [*charismata iamatōn*]...  
(1 Cor 12:28)

In both cases, this is more literally “gifts of healings,” perhaps more of a reference to occasions where healing comes than to the person who is the vehicle of those healings.<sup>55</sup> Fee also notes that the manifestation of the gift is given to the *healer*, not to the healed, which underlines the corporate nature of how these gifts operate for the good of all.<sup>56</sup> Thiselton thinks the reference to “various kinds of healings” (1 Cor 12:9) leaves the door open for any way the Lord wants to heal. He speaks of “sudden or gradual, physical, psychosomatic, or mental, the use of medication or more ‘direct’ divine agency.”<sup>57</sup> He warns against imposing a false natural/supernatural dichotomy on this discussion and notes that medicine isn’t ruled out (1 Tim 5:23).

The religious offer of healing was not a new thing in New Testament times. The healing God “Aesclepius is a conscious and deliberate alternative to the Saviour of Christianity.”<sup>58</sup> But Christianity reflected the Old Testament sense that the LORD was the true physician, present among his people by virtue of the incarnation and then by his Spirit after his ascension.

As biblical examples, think of Elijah (1 Kgs 17) and Elisha (2 Kgs 4) in the Old Testament, and Jesus and the apostles in the New. On the one hand, Jesus discounted any rigid connection between personal sin and sickness (John 9:3ff; 11:4; Luke 13:1ff), which enabled Paul to bear even chronic sickness without lapsing into hopelessness (Rom 8:28; 2 Cor 4:17; 12:7–10). On the other hand, Jesus noted the relation of sickness and demonic powers that sometimes existed (Matt 12:22 // Luke 13:11), which the early church also recognized (Acts 12:23; 1 Cor 10:10; 2 Cor 12:7; Rev 16:2). Jesus avoided the sensationalism that characterized the work of many of the Graeco-Roman healers; indeed, he sometimes asked that the miracle be kept private

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55. *charismata iamatōn*: *iama*<sup>G2386</sup>: *healing, cure*; and *gifts of healing* describes the power to heal, ability to cause people to be well again.

56. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 594.

57. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 948.

58. *TDNT*, 3:199.

(Mark 1:44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26). And he wouldn't accept payment; he wanted only gratitude to God (Luke 17:7ff).

Despite the refusal of fame- and wealth-producing sensationalism, Jesus' healings signalled the age of salvation, which the prophets had foretold (Matt 11:5; Isa 35:5-6; 61:1). They were signs that the kingdom of God had come (Matt 12:28; Luke 17:21). Not to acknowledge that is wickedly obtuse (Luke 12:54-59). Indeed, every healing is a partial victory for the kingdom of God and thus a foretaste of full and final victory that awaits us.

While he was still on earth, Jesus passed on the ministry of healing to his disciples, to make them effective witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 3:14-15; 6:7). And that was how the early disciples worked; they performed many miracles and healings, but they attributed them to Jesus Christ (Rom 15:18-19; 2 Cor 12:12; Acts 2:43; 5:12; 6:8; 14:3). The early disciples never claimed that this power to heal was innate; rather, they attributed it to the exalted Christ working through them by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 3:16; 9:34; Rom 15:18-19). And this is how we should view it today—especially anyone who operates with the gifts of healings or miracles.

Although some Christians believe the gifts of healing were a uniquely apostolic activity and thus limited to the apostolic age, we note that these gifts continued to operate well into the church age,<sup>59</sup> and in these last days they have been renewed. That is only fitting for a gift that the Holy Spirit promised to distribute throughout the church for its edification and for the glory of Jesus Christ.

How should you operate if God works through you by gifts of healing. The most obvious counsel is to watch the example of Jesus and the early apostles, who always used it as a pointer to the Gospel, as a demonstration of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. Anything that doesn't issue in proclamation of the word with increased effectiveness should be suspect. The second thing to note from their example is that the gift isn't inherent; you're not a "healer," only God can claim that title. Perhaps a third thing to note is the suggestion that anyone through whom this gift operates might also seek the gift of discerning spirits, since Jesus connected some sickness to demonic influence that

Anything that doesn't issue in proclamation of the word with increased effectiveness should be suspect.

59. Ronald Kydd, *Charismatic Gifts in the Early Church* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1984) and Kydd, *Healing through the Centuries: Models of Understanding* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996); *contra* B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, reprinted from Thomas Smyth lectures, Columbia Theological Seminary, 1917-1918 (London: Banner of Truth, 1972).

needed to be addressed if recovery was to happen. On the one hand, it certainly won't do to go around attributing every sickness to the demon of this, that, or the other; on the other hand, it would never do to ignore the real possibility that the sickness has an underlying spiritual cause that should be addressed through counsel, prayer, or even exorcism at times. And sometimes that underlying spiritual problem may require confession and repentance.

Finally, we should note that this gift has strong pastoral tones, as James notes:

Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. (Jas 5:14–16)

Maybe you whom God, through the church, has appointed as elders should pray that God would operate through you by the gifts of healing, since you'll often be called upon to pray for the sick—and they're promised healing.

## 17. Miracles

He gives one person the *power to perform miracles* [*energēmata*<sup>G1755</sup> *dunameōn*<sup>G1411</sup>]. . . . (1 Cor 12:10)

...then *those who do miracles* [*dunameis*]. . . . (1 Cor 12:28)

God does not give the church “miracle workers” but rather “miracles” and “workings of miracles.”<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the focus is on the timely occurrence of miracles rather than on the human vehicle through which God works to provide them. Certainly, God doesn't give us people who merit or should

covet the title “the Great One—the Power of God” (Acts 8:9–10). The power at work isn't human potential realized at its highest level; rather, it's God's power at work for his own sovereign purposes and glory. The one working isn't the human but God.

*The one working isn't the human but god.*

The scope of this gift is broader than the gifts of healing, although it would include any healing that serves as wonder-provoking pointer to God's presence. It would also include other miraculous interventions to shape hu-

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60. *Energemata dunameōn*: *Energemata*<sup>G1755</sup>: activity as an expression of capability. *Dunamis*<sup>G1411</sup>: supernatural manifestations of power, *miracle, wonder, powerful deed* (e.g., Heb 2:4).

man affairs for God’s glory, whether quieting a sea or removing a mountain, making an ax head float or floating a prophet up on a beach on his way to Nineveh—or raising the dead.

In the Old Testament, we think especially of Moses performing miracles before Pharaoh’s court (Exod 7–10). We also think of the many miracles that Elijah and Elisha performed, sometimes with Elisha’s paralleling an earlier one of like kind performed by Elijah.<sup>61</sup> In the New Testament, we think of Jesus during his incarnation, and of the apostles, who confirmed the apostolic message by miracles (2 Cor 12:12). It might be an occasion where apostles were miraculously delivered from physical danger, such as when they were imprisoned (Acts 5:19–20; 12:6–11) or bitten by a viper (Acts 28:3–6). It might be a powerful work of judgment on the enemies of the Gospel or on someone requiring discipline in the church, as with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11; 13:9–12). It might be a powerful triumph over demon possession (Acts 16:18; Luke 10:17). It might be a healing apostolic shadow (Acts 5:15). And God aims to work miracles through his people and on their behalf, even greater than Jesus did during his incarnation (John 14:12)—for the same purposes.

The guidance that applies to the gifts of healing also applies to anyone through whom God acts by other miracles. These should all be done for God’s glory. We should never point to the miracle, but to the miracle worker, saying, “This is the finger of God” (Exod 8:19; Luke 11:20). And if God does use us that way, we shouldn’t claim “to be someone great”; rather, we should shudder if we hear someone talking about us like we’re “the Great One” (Acts 8:9–10). With great power comes the need for divinely sustained humility—perhaps even through means of a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7).

## How are the gifts of the Spirit regulated? (1 Cor 13–14)

**P**ENTECOSTALS SOMETIMES ACT as though the divine origin of the gifts frees them from human control and good judgment. But that would be a recipe for disaster that the apostle Paul won’t countenance. Love and its constant aim to edify must govern their every orderly manifestation.

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61. E.g., Elijah’s power encounter with the Baal prophets on Carmel (1 Kgs 8), both prophets replenishing a destitute widow’s food supply (1 Kgs 17:8–16 // 2 Kgs 4:1–7), both raising a widow’s son (1 Kgs 17:17–24 // 2 Kgs 4:8–37, esp. vv. 32–35), and Elisha purifying poisonous stew (2 Kgs 4:38–41), feeding a hundred from little (4:42–44), healing Naaman (5:1–19), floating an ax head (6:5–7), and striking an Aramean army blind (6:18).

## The role and nature of regulating love (1 Cor 13:1–12)

When Paul announces love as the regulating principle, he implies that love is a controlling principle that can be defined, not just felt. If God is love (John 4:8, 16), we shouldn't be surprised if the main regulating factor for his gifts is love. Indeed, any loveless operation of a so-called gift of the Spirit would call into question not only the human agent but even the source of the activity.

### Love regulates the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 13:1–3)

I might herald a message in the tongues of men and angels, even genuinely exercising a gift from the list we've gone through earlier. But without love, this would be meaningless, and even irritating like a bad garage band (v. 1). I might define everything around me with the supernatural insight provided by prophecy, and I could have a probing apprehension of deep mysteries (v. 2a). But without love, I can only become concise in my critical assessments of others. I might even have an active and powerful faith but be "nothing" (v. 2b). I might be inclined to grand gestures of self-sacrifice. I might give everything in an effort to relieve the poor, an act that you would think must surely be motivated by love; however, without love, it would end up looking like I was throwing a bone to a dog. I think of the banking, mining, and railroad barons of nineteenth century America, who distributed their largess in grand gestures of philanthropy—on their own terms—but kept their workers in dire poverty and called for military action against them if they dared to seek better compensation to care for their families. I might even surrender my body to the flames, but without love behind it, "I have gained nothing" by way of the martyr's crown (v. 3).

Love can be defined,  
not just felt.

### Love can be defined, not just felt (1 Cor 13:4–12)

Love is *patient*, or long-suffering (v. 4, *makrothumeō*<sup>G3114</sup>). The LXX used this term to translate the expression "slow to anger."<sup>62</sup> Love never has a short fuse; it has the ability to bear extreme provocation without blowing up or giving up. If the idea is more general patience, it would have to do with the idea that love is at root hopeful, and because love doesn't blunder in or faint before reaping, love receives what was promised. Some of history's great missionaries labored for long years before they saw their first fruit. William Carey, waited for seven years before he saw his first Hindu convert in

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62. Prov 19:11; 25:15; Jer 15:15.

Burma, and Adoniram Judson waited seven years for his first convert. But hopeful love kept their hand to the plow, and what they sowed in tears they reaped in joy.

Love is *kind* (v. 4, *chrēsteuomai*<sup>G5541</sup>). This is love going beyond abstract commitment, to display itself in reliable kindness.

It suggests the warm, generous welcome the Christian always gives his brothers... does his utmost to be thoughtful, helpful and kind, always in a pleasant way..., and confirms the element of magnanimity in *agape*.<sup>63</sup>

Chrysostom spoke of showing kindness “not only by enduring nobly, but also by soothing and comforting” so that “they cure the sore and heal the wound of passion.”<sup>64</sup> Somerset Maugham’s mother was a beautiful woman married to an ugly man. When someone asked how she could have married such an ugly man, she replied, “He has never once hurt my feelings.” Kindness is a language the dumb can speak and the deaf can hear; it’s a form of spirituality that will light up the lives of those around who are otherwise condemned to dwell in deep darkness. And love doesn’t perform merely the requisite actions associated with outward piety; rather, it operates out of deep affection and heartfelt consideration.

Love is *not jealous* (v. 4, *zēlōō*<sup>G2206</sup>). There are two kinds of jealousy: one is the positive intense interest in something or someone, such as God shows for Israel,<sup>65</sup> Paul shows for his churches (2 Cor 12:1:32), and a husband shows for his wife. The other kind of jealousy is the unhealthy *envy*. It not only covets another’s wealth, but it even begrudges him that wealth. But the loving response to another’s prosperity is joy over their favor. One sign of this evil jealousy is when it’s easier to “weep with those who weep” than it is to “re-joyce with those who rejoice.”

Love isn’t *boastful* (v. 4, *perpereuomai*<sup>G4068</sup>). Love doesn’t brag, doesn’t boast of status, isn’t a braggart or blowhard. The Scottish Bible commentator Barclay tells the story of the little boy who came home with a good school report, saying, “Mother, am I no’ a wonder?” We can laugh at the cute boy’s delight, but we find it less attractive in an adult who thinks—and insists—that he is something. Some boast without any reason at all: “A warrior putting on his sword for battle should not boast like a warrior who has

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63. Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. and trans. James D. Ernest (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), “Agape,” 2.151.

64. Chrysostom, *1 Cor. Hom.*, 33.1.

65. Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; 32:21; Josh 24:19; 1 Kgs 19:10, 14; Ezek 36:5–6; 39:25; Nah 1:2.

already won” (1 Kgs 21:11). Some think they have good reasons to boast, but God says, “Don’t let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches” (Jer 9:23). And certainly, no one should boast over another’s misfortune (Obad 12). Whatever the case, the psalmist knows, “The proud may not stand in your presence (Ps 5:4); he says, “I warned the proud, ‘Stop your boasting’” (Ps 75:4). Ironically, the only boasting that Paul would countenance was boasting about his own weakness, which was tantamount to proclaiming God’s strength. He said, I won’t boast, even about the fruit of my ministry, “because I don’t want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message” (2 Cor 12:5–6). At root, everything about gracious salvation undercuts any possibility of boasting; it’s totally by grace, and not at all by works (Eph 2:9).

Love isn’t *proud* (v. 4, *physiōd*<sup>G5448</sup>), it won’t maintain an exaggerated self-perception. This term uses the metaphor of inflation to warn against taking on airs, having an over-inflated sense of self-importance. I’m not speaking here about praiseworthy self-dignity. But “there is this paradox in pride—it makes some men ridiculous, but prevents others from being so.”<sup>66</sup> William Carey, a shoe repairman, went off to India and eventually became an accomplished linguist and one of the greatest shapers of modern international missions work. At an embassy dinner party, a snob said, “I suppose, Mr. Carey, you once worked as a shoe-maker.” Carey’s response gave telling evidence of his humility, which enabled him to avoid any humiliation: “No, your lordship; not a shoe-maker, just a cobbler.” As Samuel Johnson noted, one of the reasons that pride is so out of keeping with love is that it “is seldom delicate; it will not please itself with very mean advantages.”

Love... won't behave disgracefully,  
dishonorably, or indecently.

Love isn’t *rude*, it won’t behave disgracefully, dishonorably, or indecently toward another (v. 5, *archēmoneō*<sup>G807</sup>). The LXX uses the term for shaming someone by a too severe lashing in front of neighbors (Deut 25:3) and for stripping something bare in shame (Ezek 16:7, 22, 39; 23:29). Love does exactly the opposite; it covers shameful offenses.<sup>67</sup> Elsewhere in the New Testament the same term denotes impropriety (1 Cor 7:36) or parts that shouldn’t be seen (1 Cor 12:23). Love shows a concern for propriety, good taste, and polite order. By contrast, there is a so-called holiness that prac-

66. Charles Caleb Colton.

67. Prov 10:2; 17:9 Ezek 16:8; 1 Pet 4:8; see Jas 5:20.

tices cold rudeness toward anyone their legal system brands as “worldly,” and there is a certain brand of religiosity that finds no polite discourse with the wicked—and thus no conversation that could ever lead to evangelism. Love doesn’t tear down bridges to evangelism or restoration like that.

Love *does not demand its own way*; it isn’t self-seeking and doesn’t demand self-fulfillment (v. 5). Thiselton notes that love can even give up its own rights—to say nothing of its own selfish interests. Just as Jesus Christ didn’t please himself (Rom 5:13), so it should be with us. Instead, we should seek the good of our neighbor (1 Cor 10:24), especially for the sake of effective evangelism (v. 33). And within the church, this attitude is what will assure that we care for one another (1 Cor 12:25). Even the things we might freely enjoy should be sacrificed for the sake of the weak among us (Gal 5:13). Paul said, I’ll endure anything for the sake of the church (2 Tim 2:10). Ultimately, it comes down to this: we don’t seek our own interests, but those of Jesus Christ (Phil 2:21), who himself was not self-seeking but laid down his life for us (1 John 3:16). By contrast, the Corinthians had insisted on having their own way about idol worship (1 Cor 10:24, 33), rushed to feed themselves at the Lord’s table (11:21–22), foisted unintelligible tongues on public services (14:27–28), and interrupted speakers with “instant revelations” or carried on forever when others might have contributed if given a chance (14:29–33).

Love *is not irritable* (v. 5, *paroxunō*<sup>G3947</sup>). Love doesn’t fly off the handle. Notice that this doesn’t say “never angered.” Aristotle said, “Anybody can become angry—that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way—that isn’t within everybody’s power and is not easy.” The Bible gives examples of well-placed anger, such as the wrath of God, Jesus’ anger that provoked the temple cleansing, and Paul’s provocation on Mars Hill. But it just will not do to label every loss of our temper as “righteous indignation”; that’s too easy—and sacrilegious. Proverbs tells us, “A man of quick temper acts foolishly” (Prov 14:7). And Jesus warned, “Everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment” (Matt 5:22). James concludes from all of this teaching that we ought to be “quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (Jas 1:19). The quick-tempered way is not the righteous, loving, or wise path—it’s vindictive, hateful, and foolish. Thiselton says,

Love, Paul urges, does not become exasperated into a pique, partly because patience delays exasperation and partly because lack of self-interest diverts

a sense of self-importance away from reaction on the grounds of wounded pride: “it is not embittered by injuries, whether real or supposed.”<sup>68</sup> Thiselton notes that many congregations “contain some who parade their ‘gifts’ while others nurse their ‘hurts.’ Does either side, Paul asks, genuinely put the other before the self?”<sup>69</sup>

Love *keeps no record of being wronged* (v. 5). This expression might include the idea of failing even to take notice of being wronged. But more likely, it means love doesn’t keep a running record of offenses with any intent of balancing the books one day; it doesn’t foresee a time for pay-backs. Publilius Syrus said, “The remedy for wrongs is to forget them.” That isn’t easy without God’s forgiving love reigning in our hearts. But for those who have been forgiven much, forgiving works (Luke 7:36–50, esp. v. 47). For those who know that God causes all things to work together for good, forgiving makes sense (Rom 8:28; Gen 50:20, cf. Gen 45:5).

Love *does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out* (v. 5). It has no taste for the bitter, hateful, vengeful, or malicious comment. It won’t gloat or take hidden pleasure in another’s shame. Thiselton thinks this would rebuke anyone whose sense of moral superiority found pleasure in delivering a “prophetic” rebuke or threatening judgment. Love cannot rejoice over what makes another weep; it will only weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. Think of the psalmist weeping over lawbreaking Israel (Ps 119:136), Jeremiah weeping over Israel’s captivity (Jer 9:1), and Jesus weeping for Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–42). Or think of the foreigner Jethro rejoicing over the favor God had showed Israel in leading them out of slavery (Exod 18:9).

Love *never gives up* (v. 7, *stegō*<sup>G4722</sup>).<sup>70</sup> If we take *stegō* to mean *bear, stand, or endure*, we would follow the NLT. This would speak of love’s ability to bear a heavy burden without collapsing into hatred, despair, or cynicism. Paul uses the term in that sense elsewhere, when he notes that he “would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the Good News about Christ” (1 Cor 9:12). If we take it to mean *cover, pass over in silence, keep con-*

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68. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1052; quoting Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistles of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (New York: Scriber’s, 1911), 294.

69. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1053.

70. “Bears all things” (KJV, ESV), “always protects” (NIV), “never gives up” (NLT).

*fidencial*, or *fend off*, we would follow the NIV with the idea that love won't drag out the faults of anyone. Rather, love draws a veil of silence over another person's shame and sin (1 Pet 4:8). In either case, love would rather mend a break than exploit it, quietly exhort rather than publicly denounce. Rather than blasting hellfire, love would always prefer to apply the healing balm, no matter how much forbearance that requires.

Love *never loses faith* (v. 7). In relation to God, that means we take God at his word; in relation to man, it means we believe the best and discount the worst as long as it is really possible. Frank Crane said, "You may be deceived if you trust too much, but you will live in torment if you don't trust enough." The broader canon would remind us that this doesn't prescribe gullibility. Indeed, we're fools if we trust our work or fate to fools or sluggards. But among the loving, the trustworthy man will always find trust and the acceptance that it engenders. It's just the way God is.

Love *is always hopeful* (v. 7), never exhausts hope. Even when one's worst suspicions have dismissed the possibility of trust, love will go on hoping for better. This is mother-love; better, it's the love of our heavenly Father. It's the love of the prodigal son's father, who maintained a watch on the road home to embrace the returning rebel. And by definition, hope is about what you cannot yet see (Rom 8:24-25). Job had it (Job 13:15), and so must we.

Love *endures through every circumstance* (v. 7). Love reaps, not only because it sows, but also because it faints not. Love sows even in tears, love presses on from seed time to harvest, even if a period of apparent death precedes the first sight of a crop. "Like Christ on the cross, love endures scorn, failure, ingratitude.... At the end shines out the light of Easter. But love never ends."<sup>71</sup> Love has staying power. It endures to the end (Matt 10:22), whether it faces the lack of a blessing sought or outright persecution. So "love will last forever!" (1 Cor 13:8). Think of Jacob, who served seven years to earn Rachel's hand in marriage: "his love for her was so strong that it seemed to him but a few days" (Gen 29:20). In this day of disposable marriages, where people can glibly admit, "We just don't love each other anymore," the staying power of love has been discounted. But perhaps people who talk that way never loved. Perhaps they're only talking about infatuation, which fades because it makes no demands on commitment and self-sacrifice. Perhaps—by the

Friends may fail us—lovers may fail us—but love itself never fails.

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71. Gaston Deluz, *A Companion to 1 Corinthians*, ed. and trans. Grace E. Watt (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963), 193.

definition that this very list provides—they were always clueless about love. I wonder, could the spiritual gift of love heal marriages?

### **Imperfect things cease when the perfect realities come into being (1 Cor 13:8–13)**

Friends may fail us—lovers may fail us—but love itself never fails. That adds poignancy to the promise, “God is love” (John 4:8). In keeping with the staying power of love, John continued, “All who live in love live in God, and God lives in them” (v. 16). It’s that last phrase that makes all the difference: *and God lives in them*. Now that’s an eternal matter!

The speaking gifts will cease.<sup>72</sup> When what is perfect reaches its fulfillment, prophecies, tongue talking, and the special words of wisdom or knowledge will go quiet (1 Cor 13:8). Even prophecy and a word of knowledge are “incomplete” and thus can reveal “only a part of the whole picture” (v. 9). Paul uses a couple examples of this. The first comes from childhood development: He says, “When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things” (v. 11). The second comes from the shaving mirror: He says,

Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know is now partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely. (v. 12)

When the eschaton brings “full understanding” in the blazing light of the full revelation of Jesus Christ, “these partial things will become useless” (v. 10). To that end, we say, “Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20). But until that day, we will hold fast to the gifts that Jesus Christ has distributed in his church. Until we’re glorified and living in the New Jerusalem, we’ll enjoy the manifold blessings God has given to his church for its growth and encouragement.

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72. There was a time when many Evangelicals argued “that which is perfect” referred to the completed New Testament canon, and then they said the completion of the New Testament eliminated any need for a continuation of the speaking gifts. Now there is general agreement among Evangelicals that the “perfect” that Paul describes is still in our future, that it will accompany the Lord’s return, rather than being in our past, accompanying the passing of the apostolic age. Indeed, vv. 10 and 12 make that clear.

## Prophecy and tongues (1 Cor 14)

Before Paul leaves behind his discussion on how the church should regulate the gifts, he turns from the general exercise of all the gifts to two of the speaking gifts, prophecy and tongues. Apparently, the Corinthian church wasn't doing so well with these gifts. So Paul laid down some pretty specific guidelines that would ensure orderly edification in their church services.

Let love be your highest goal.

The loving way prefers gifts that edify the whole congregation, which means love prefers prophecy or mandates tongues plus interpretation of tongues (1 Cor 14:1-25)

*The loving way prefers prophecy over tongues (1 Cor 14:1-5).* The way of love will lead a congregation to desire the gifts that edify the most. So Paul says, "Let love be your highest goal! But you should also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives—especially the ability to prophesy" (1 Cor 14:1). Paul notes that uninterpreted tongues have no power to edify anyone other than the speaker: "You will be talking only to God, since people won't be able to understand you" (v. 2). This is in contrast to prophecy, which "strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them" (v. 3).

Notice three things that Paul *doesn't* do. (1) He doesn't accuse tongue talkers of being unspiritual; rather, he accuses them of being unedifying. Indeed, he says, "You will be speaking by the power of the Spirit"; it's just that it's to no good effect for others (v. 2). (2) He doesn't even deny the edifying power of tongues; he just says it edifies only the speaker (v. 4). (3) So he doesn't forbid tongues; indeed, he says, "I wish you could all speak in tongues" (v. 5). If Paul had wanted to discount or stop tongues, he would never have included this in the list of edifying gifts for the church; instead, he would have left it only as initial physical evidence of the Spirit's filling (Acts 2). So even though he says, "prophecy is greater than speaking in tongues," he can still note that tongues can edify the whole church, as long as they are interpreted (v. 5). A classical Pentecostal formulation of this is that functionally tongues plus interpretation equals prophecy.

*Uninterpreted tongues have no power to convey meaning, and thus no power to edify others (1 Cor 14:6-12).* Paul asks the obvious question, if I came talking in tongues, "How would that help you?" (v. 6a). Instead, he offers helpful "revelation or some kind of knowledge or prophecy or teaching" (v. 6b). He uses the example from music, where you must "recognize the melody," or military bugle calls, which require "a clear call" so soldiers know their battle

orders (vv. 7–8). The same for languages; if understanding doesn't happen, edification is impossible (vv. 9–12).

*The one who gives a message in tongues has a responsibility to make sure understanding occurs so edification can occur (1 Cor 14:13–17).* Rather than forbid tongues, Paul says, “Anyone who speaks in tongues should also pray for the ability to interpret what has been said” (v. 13). This isn't only to edify the whole congregation but even to make the gift more profitable to the speaker: “If I pray in tongues, my spirit is praying, but *I don't understand what I am saying*” (v. 14). So Paul prescribes mixing two languages for anyone exercising the gift of tongues—none of this “I just couldn't stop speaking in tongues” business: I will ask for the gift of interpreting tongues in our own language (v. 14). Even with that, “I will pray in the spirit, and I will also pray in words I can understand. I will sing in the spirit, and I will also sing in words I understand” (v. 15). No one is a worshipping island.

*One may use tongues without interpretation in private, but public messages in tongues should ALWAYS be interpreted (1 Cor 14:18–19).* Far from concluding that tongues should be dropped from the arsenal of spiritual gifts, Paul said, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than any of you” (v. 18). Clearly

||||| *It's only the understanding that allows words “to help others.”* this would be Paul claiming frequent exercise of private glossolalia, where the Spirit pours out words that Paul himself couldn't necessarily formulate intellectually, although his own spirit would be resonating with the prayer. Charismatics have come to call this a personal “prayer language,” an apt label. “But in a church meeting, I would rather speak five understandable words... than a thousand words in an unknown language,” because it's only the understanding that allows words “to help others” (v. 19, cf. vv. 4, 21–22).

*Don't be babies with the practice of speaking in tongues without assuring the rest of the congregation an interpretation (1 Cor 14:20).* Paul says it's childish to ignore the concern for edifying others. He refers not to the praiseworthy child-like faith that Jesus praised (Matt 10:14–15; 18:3; Luke 18:16–17; 1 Pet 2:2), but to brat-like selfishness. This probably grew out of the immaturity that he'd already noted in the Corinthian congregation (1 Cor 3:1–2, see also Eph 4:14; Heb 5:12–13; 6:1).

*Uninterpreted tongues are a sign of judgment for unbelievers, interpreted tongues or prophecy can serve as a sign that might lead to repentance (1 Cor 14:21–25).* Uninterpreted tongues are a sign to the unbeliever in the same way that Assyrians were a sign to unbelieving Israelites as they tramped through Israel's streets speaking their foreign language—condemning

evidence of God's judgment for disobedience (v. 21; quoting Isa 28:11–12). Paul follows this with an argument that appears to contradict itself. He calls tongues a sign for unbelievers not for believers (v. 22) but then goes on to describe prophecy functioning as a sign for unbelievers (vv. 23–25).

So you see that speaking in tongues is a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers. Prophecy, however, is for the benefit of believers, not unbelievers. Even so, if unbelievers or people who don't understand these things come into your church meeting and hear everyone speaking in an unknown language, they will think you are crazy. But if all of you are prophesying, and unbelievers or people who don't understand these things come into your meeting, they will be convicted of sin and judged by what you say. As they listen, their secret thoughts will be exposed, and they will fall to their knees and worship God, declaring, "God is truly here among you." (1 Cor 14:22–25).

Grudem says, "Here Paul uses the word 'sign' to mean 'sign of God's attitude' (whether positive or negative). Tongues that are not understood by outsiders are certainly a negative sign, a sign of judgment. Therefore Paul cautions the Corinthians not to give such a sign to outsiders who come in."<sup>73</sup>

When the church gathers and unbelievers will be present, an understandable message is mandatory. If unbelievers don't understand, they'll only accuse you of being out of your minds, blaspheming the Spirit by ascribing its actions to drunken men (v. 23). But if they heard prophecies, and perhaps a word of knowledge or word of wisdom, conviction and repentance might arise in their hearts as the Spirit laid it bare (vv. 24–25). And of course, even if unbelievers are not present, the general requirement for interpretation still rules, so that others will be edified.

Scripture mandates regulating the gifts (1 Cor 14:26–40)

*The gifts should be regulated so that the congregation can maintain order (1 Cor 14:26–33a).* This means that a congregation should regulate the frequency of exercise of even the edifying gifts that both sinner and saint understand. Paul wants to ensure that a variety of ministry occurs, that even the gift of prophecy doesn't dominate and rule out the "one who will sing," the pastor who would "teach," and another who would "tell some special revelation God has given," and even tongues and interpretation (v. 26). He also may be concerned to assure that edification rather than display remains the object (v. 26).

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73. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1075.

So Paul says two or three messages in tongues, one at a time, and only with interpretation (vv. 27–28a). Otherwise, speak in tongues to God privately” (v. 28b). I would think this injunction can be heeded in several ways. *First*, you might limit all speaking in tongues that might not be interpreted to your own private times of prayer at home (Matt 6:6). It seems likely that this was Paul’s practice, since when he was among the congregation, he was busy teaching but claimed to speak in tongues more than them all. This would mean speaking in tongues in church only if you also exercise the gift of interpreting tongues or are confident that someone else present does.

*Second*, even in the congregation you might speak inaudibly, in a whisper or less, mouthing the words as some do when reading, but not aloud. Similarly, you might withhold speaking in tongues until there is a time of general prayer in concert, when others are not listening but all are speaking to God in prayer. Then you might lift your prayers to God rather than man, even in tongues. Some would think that this disobeys Paul’s command of silence if there isn’t an interpreter. But I think Paul’s point is this: Don’t speak to the congregation in tongues, unless they will be interpreted; speak them to God. I think either version of this second option would satisfy this in most Pentecostal churches where prayer in concert is frequent and often loud.

Of course, you still need to avoid making the unbeliever think you’re crazy (v. 23). I would certainly think that the practice of public singing in tongues disregards Paul’s injunction, since it’s not a private song to the Lord but a public song but uninterpreted. It may be beautiful, but it will most likely tempt unbelievers to say, “you are crazy” (v. 23) and certainly won’t fulfill the Pauline recipe for what edifies, namely, *understanding*. The same would go for any public leading of worship that lapsed into uninterpreted tongues—it should never happen unless it’s intended for interpretation.

Even prophecy should be regulated in favor of order. So Paul says, two or three prophecies, and only with others judging what is said (v. 29). That last

note could mean that the other *prophets* are to make these judgments about what was said; however, I think the whole of the congregation should undertake this task. There’s no reason a clique of prophets should assume the whole congregation’s duty to search the Scriptures and assess the teaching it hears (Acts 17:11). And of course, this assessment should be undergirded by those who have the gift of teaching, the gift of discerning spirits, and perhaps those who deliver a word of wisdom or word of knowledge. We’re not opening the door to the chaos of an *ad hoc* debating society here; we’re recommending the confidence inspired by multiple reliable witnesses to the truth of what’s

Prophets can and should be orderly.

said. It makes way for a congregation to say, “It seemed good to... the whole church.... It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:22, 28).

Paul says the prophets can and should be orderly (vv. 30–33a). They should yield to one another in an orderly way so that various ministries will all have their place (vv. 30–31). No prophet is under the uncontrollable urge of the Spirit; rather, each responds to his own spirit’s impulse to report what God has told him (v. 32). To the degree that the Spirit of God is at work, their response will be orderly and edifying (v. 33).

*Women and the orderly exercise of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14:33b–35).* This text is one of the most controversial in the New Testament, along with other Pauline texts that regulate the church role of women in particular and mandate a submissive role toward their husbands—not toward man in general.<sup>74</sup>

Women should be silent during church meetings. It is not proper for them to speak. They should be submissive, just as the law says. If they have any questions, they should ask their husbands at home, for it is improper for women to speak in church meetings. (1 Cor 14:33b–35)

Some say Paul’s advice was warped by his culture and the religious expectations of his day. They say this counsel reflects the rabbinic religion in which Paul had been raised and educated. This tradition said, “To teach the law to a woman might as well teach her Impiety,” and was “to cast pearls before swine.” Thus, they say this counsel can be safely ignored because it was a holdover from Paul’s own misguided religious background. Of course, we find that Paul proved himself quite bold in rejecting any Judaizing tendencies that undermined the freedom found in the Gospel. This is a view that we utterly reject as incompatible with a high view of Scripture. It’s impossible to harmonize with the idea that “all Scripture is inspired by God” and regulative for doctrine, moral behavior, and ministerial equipping (2 Tim 3:16–17).

Others say it was inspired and authoritative counsel for Paul’s own times, when Hellenistic culture looked upon women who appeared in public at best as immodest and more likely immoral. Of course, if that had been the case, Paul would have told them to remain at home rather than come but be quiet. This doesn’t necessarily do a disservice to our view of Scripture, since many things in the Scripture were indeed time-bound, such as the whole of the ceremonial law that Christ made obsolete by fulfilling it. I don’t think this view does justice to the text itself though, since these directions were

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74. 1 Cor 11:3, 5, 7; Eph 5:22, 33; Col 3:18; 1 Tim 2:11–12; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1.

given to “all the meetings of God’s holy people” (v. 33b), an expression that tends towards universalizing.<sup>75</sup> And elsewhere, Paul bases similar regulations clearly on the created order rather than upon any cultural bias (1 Tim 2:11–13).

A proper view of Paul’s own arguments and a high view of Scripture require that we see this text as profitable for instruction today, as an authoritative word for the church today. The opening and closing verses of the section certainly move us in that direction, which apply it to “all the churches” (v. 33b) and warn, “If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized” (v. 38). So what do we make of it?

Some use this injunction to forbid a woman to preach, exhort, pray, or prophesy. I suppose it could even be extended to forbid their singing or joining in prayer at all. That is clearly too sweeping a prohibition, given the mention of such public ministries as those of Philip’s daughters (Acts 21:9), who were prophetesses, and of Priscilla’s role in correcting and supplementing the limited Christian doctrine of Apollos. Indeed, Paul’s provision for women praying or prophesying isn’t “Don’t do it,” but do it with head covering (1 Cor 11:5). Not to mention, such a limit would undercut the last-days prophecy that the prophetic spirit would fall on all flesh, sons and daughters (Joel 2:28–29; Acts 2:17–18). More likely, this injunction to silence is linked to Paul’s other hedges around a woman’s role, which disallow her to take authority over her husband. Perhaps this even had to do with making authoritative pronouncements with respect to charismatic utterances.

Others suggest that this silence is with respect to orderliness in service, so that questioning wives should withhold their disruptive questions until the family gets home and can discuss it to their heart’s content. I see no credibility in the suggestion that the women would have been shouting out their questions from their secluded seats in the women’s section to husbands on the main seating.

What seems to be in view here is a concern for two things: (1) A concern for maintaining order in the church. Although, two or three should speak and others should examine what was said, anything that would collapse into disorder should be avoided. (2) A concern that women remain subject to

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75. The KJV and the traditional verse numbering interprets the expression “all the congregations” in connection with God’s orderliness: “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” But the Greek text and thus most modern translations connect it to the canonical silencing of women. For example, the NIV and RSV read, “As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches” (vv. 33b–34a).

their husbands, not only in the home and on the streets, but also in church. Any questioning wives might do shouldn't imply questioning or usurping their husbands' authority—in the home or in the church. That would be shameful.

I suppose one other option is available, and that is just to say, "I just don't agree with Paul!" But then, that's no Christian option, and we won't even go there in attempting to build a biblical approach to a topic.

*Ignore anyone claiming to be a prophet who ignores these directions (1 Cor 14:36–38).* Paul forbids the Corinthians to start originating novel practices without conforming them to Scripture, which must be the judge of all of our practices. He insists that they didn't originate the Word of God, and they can't originate the *work* of God (v. 36). He says the truly spiritual one will acknowledge this as the Lord's command and not move along another line in so-called charismatic ministry (v. 37). He says that anyone who ignores the Lord's command is demonstrating that he isn't performing the Lord's wishes, and he can be safely ignored (v. 38).

Quench not the Spirit, but maintain order.

*Quench not the Spirit, but maintain order (1 Cor 14:39–40).* After the notes regulating the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, Paul reasserts freedom with order. He tells them, "be eager to prophesy," as long as "everything is done properly and in order." And given his close strictures on how tongues should function or go silent in the church, it's interesting to note that his closing statement warns, "do not forbid speaking in tongues."

## Summary & conclusions

PETER'S TWOFOLD SUMMARY of the twenty various gifts of the Spirit is comprehensive but not detailed; he lists the gifts of *speaking* and of *helping others* (1 Pet 4:11). Paul's lists unpack these two, noting ten gifts of speaking and ten for helping others (Eph 4:11; Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:8–10, 28). Of course, all of the speaking gifts are supposed to be edifying, which means helpful to others. So even the speaking gifts help others. And many of the serving gifts require speaking, whether we offer an encouraging word, speak up in roles of leadership and administration, or cry out to God in faith for healing or other miracles.

### Neglecting spiritual gifts

Quenching the Spirit is something Paul forbids (1 Thess 5:19). Experience shows two ways that can happen. *First*, the corporate body can discourage their use, whether by active or passive means. For a considerable part of

church history, the majority of Christianity was too suspicious of the so-called revelatory gifts to allow them much exercise. So the church failed to experience the full benefit of a word of wisdom or knowledge, distinguishing between spirits, and especially tongues and interpretation. Even in our own times, a considerable number of our fellow Evangelicals adopt the form of “cessationism” that insists that these *revelatory* gifts ceased operating somewhere around the end of the apostolic age. Even in charismatic and Pentecostal churches, a general suspicion that these gifts are too easy to abuse can lead to their neglect. But the proper response to that isn’t to forbid them, but to police them.

Do not neglect  
the spiritual gift  
you received.

Sometimes the neglect is more passive than active. Churches that actually believe in the gifts of the Spirit as a formal doctrine may fail to teach on the gifts of the Spirit. Perhaps an individual here and there in such a congregation will consciously function with the gift of serving or helping others, or even in giving and interpreting a message in tongues. But the broad membership of a congregation where the gifts are neglected in the pulpit will ignore the gifts of the Spirit in the pews and in general society.

*Second*, individual believers can neglect the gifts. Paul told Timothy, “Do not neglect the spiritual gift you received through the prophecy spoken over you when the elders of the church laid their hands on you” (1 Tim 4:14). Although this likely speaks of something that we would today call ordination, the principle should apply to any gift the Holy Spirit gives you.


How can we *neglect* a gift of the Spirit? Several potential patterns of neglect come to mind. You could occasionally use the gifts you have, and only in a half-hearted manner, and eventually cease using it altogether. For example, rather than speaking “as though God himself were speaking through you” (1 Pet 4:11), you could begin to rely only on human effort. You could lapse into mere professionalism as a teacher and preacher. You could depend upon your own experience and knowledge rather than offering a genuine word of wisdom or knowledge. You could rely on a critical spirit rather than the discerning power of the Holy Spirit himself when assessing other’s words and deeds. You could even become practiced in delivering something that sounds like a message in tongues or a prophecy, but is only your own habitual free-vocalizing instead of tongues or something coming from your own heart rather than from the heavenly throne room. If you have one of the other gifts, you could just weary in well-doing, rather than doing it “with all the strength and energy that God supplies” (1 Pet 4:11). You could become lazy and quit serving and helping, you could become harsh rather than mer-

ciful and encouraging, and stingy rather than generous in giving. You could opt out of roles of leadership and administration, justifying yourself with the excuse, “I think we should give someone else a chance.” You could even allow your faith to wane so that God could no longer use you to stir up the faith of others or to pray for healings and miracles that others need.

### **Coveting & exercising spiritual gifts**

For neglect attributed to any idea that the gifts have ceased, the solution is to “earnestly desire the most helpful gifts” once you’ve learned that they do indeed continue (1 Cor 12:31). For neglect rooted in apathy, the remedy is to “practice these things, immerse yourself in them” (1 Tim 4:14–15). I hope this teaching will stir up what lies dormant, neglected, or even devalued for the sake of the church’s edification.

A church that has these twenty gifts operating in its various members will thrive under the pastoral care of the Holy Spirit himself. As God himself speaks through you (1 Pet 4:11), as the God of all comfort consoles through your words and deeds, as the Lord of the church leads through your pastoral and administrative gifts, as the Great Physician offers healing through your hands, Christ is present among us.

And this brings us back to the Christ-glorifying church, edifying purpose of these gifts. All of this should be done to glorify Jesus Christ, to edify the church, and to bear witness to the lost. 

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