

# **The Charismata**

## **Spiritual Gifts**

by

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## Spiritual Gifts

Any casual survey of Christian bookstores will tell you that the subject of the Holy Spirit, and particularly the subject of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, are "hot" items. Among spiritual gifts, the more spectacular ones usually receive the most attention, such as, tongues, prophecy, healing, miracles and so forth. (No one writes best-sellers on the gift of encouraging, for instance!) To a large degree, these works are polarized either "for" or "against" some of the gifts or all of them.

In this study we shall attempt to examine and define the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the milieu of the 1st century church as well as address some of the current tensions that have arisen over how these gifts relate to the modern church. Especially, we wish to help every church member to consider, identify and carry out the ministries in the body of Christ that are uniquely his/hers.

### By Way of Introduction

Before beginning a detailed examination of any particular passage of Scripture, it will be helpful to point out some general things that will guide us in our study.

### The Language of the New Testament

Several words in the New Testament that are translated "gift" in the English Versions and refer, at least in some instances, to spiritual gifts. The most important of these is the word *charisma* (singular) and *charismata* (plural). The root of this word is the familiar word *charis* (= grace), and the gifts of the Spirit are to be considered as grace-gifts, that is, as favors given by God to an individual or to the church (cf. Ro. 12:6; 1 Pe. 4:10). The gifts of the Spirit, then, are not merely human achievements, potentials or talents but rather expressions of divine enablement through the energy of the Holy Spirit.

### The New Testament Lists of Gifts

There are at least ten passages in the New Testament where specific spiritual gifts are mentioned. They are: Ro. 12:6-8; 1 Co. 7:7; 12:8-10, 28-30; 13:1-3, 8; 14:6, 26; Ep. 4:11; 1 Pe. 4:9-11. In view of these lists, it is well to point out that they are probably not intended to be exhaustive, only suggestive. The number of spiritual gifts cannot be neatly itemized and then closed.

## **Cautions to be Observed**

In studying the gifts of the Holy Spirit, there are several areas that need to be clarified.

### *Spiritual Gifts are not Simply Natural Talents*

Everyone possesses certain natural inclinations and abilities. These are also divine gifts in the sense of common grace. Gifts of the Holy Spirit, however, are gifts of special grace. To be sure, God may take a person's natural talent and transform it into a spiritual gift, but the two are not the same. Gifts of the Spirit are not just enhanced talents.

### *Spiritual Gifts are not Necessarily Spectacular*

Most people think of spiritual gifts as ministries that are highly conspicuous, unusual and mystical. While this may be true of some spiritual gifts, it is equally untrue of others. Spiritual gifts may be accompanied by ecstasy and emotion, but they need not. Certain of the gifts seem quite unspectacular (i.e., generosity, encouragement, showing mercy, giving assistance, remaining unmarried, etc.)

### *Spiritual Gifts are to be Distinguished from Spiritual Fruit<sup>1</sup>*

Several differences may be observed between spiritual gifts and spiritual fruit. First, spiritual gifts involve action, while spiritual fruit involves being (Ga. 5:22-23). The purpose of one is to accomplish tasks; the purpose of the other is Christian character. Second, gifts are bestowed and received without demand while fruit is expected. Nowhere does the New Testament command believers to exercise all the spiritual gifts as though they must, but everywhere the believer is commanded to show love, patience, peace, joy and so forth. Third, every believer should exhibit all spiritual fruit (notice that in Ga. 5:22 "fruit" is a singular, not "fruits"); however, the believer will not be able to exercise all gifts (1 Co. 12:29-31). Finally, spiritual fruit is for all times and places while gifts are for specific times and specific needs.

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<sup>1</sup>C. Hummel, *Fire in the Fireplace: Contemporary Charismatic Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1978) 117-118.

### *Spiritual Gifts are not a Measurement of Spiritual Maturity*

We might assume that one who is gifted by the Holy Spirit will also be a mature child of God, but this is not necessarily so. The Corinthians, who did not lack any spiritual gifts (1 Co. 1:7), were very immature (1 Co. 3:1-4). Christian maturity must be evaluated primarily in terms of spiritual fruit, not spiritual gifts. At the same time, the New Testament does not sever the connection between spiritual fruit and spiritual gifts as though one was important and the other not. Both are important in their own way for the church!

### *Spiritual Gifts Must not be Confused with Christian Roles<sup>2</sup>*

Christians may be called upon to perform in certain ways in which they are not particularly gifted by the Holy Spirit. A person, for instance, may not have the gift of celibacy, but he/she must certainly remain celibate until married. A Christian may not be gifted as an administrator, but on occasion he/she may be thrust into a role of administration. Persons have been selected to serve as pastors, for instance, who were not gifted by the Holy Spirit to be such. Spiritual gifts must not be confused with offices or roles.

## **Spiritual Gifts are Diverse Manifestations of the Sovereign God: 1 Co. 12:1-11**

### **The Basic Gift is the Holy Spirit (12:1-3)**

Paul first of all is concerned that the Corinthians do not fall into the error of thinking that only if one exhibits gifts of the Spirit does he/she have the gift of the Spirit. The primary evidence of being Spirit-filled is serving Jesus as Lord, not exhibiting spiritual gifts. Paul begins his discussion with the common phrase he uses to introduce the various answers to the questions that the Corinthians had asked (cf. 7:1, 25; 8:1). He stresses that he wants them to be accurately informed regarding spiritual gifts. The phrase, "I do not want you to be ignorant," is used elsewhere by Paul to emphasize subjects of importance or subjects which may be new or different (Ro. 1:13; 11:25; 1 Co. 10:1; 2 Co. 1:8).

It was not uncommon in many religions of antiquity that some adherents had

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<sup>2</sup>C. Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1979) 90.

special experience in trances, ecstatic speech and so forth. Such phenomena were not unique to Christianity. However, Paul makes clear that while pagan influences lead one to idolatry and to the cursing of Jesus, the Holy Spirit leads one to confess that "Jesus is Lord." In this statement, Paul affirms two important things. First, every believer who truly serves Jesus as his Lord is Spirit-filled, whether or not he/she has had an ecstatic experience. Second, because one is spiritually influenced does not necessarily mean that he/she is influenced by the Holy Spirit, for even pagans are "influenced." The primary work of the Holy Spirit is not ecstasy, but leading one to salvation in Christ (cf. Ro. 10:9; 2 Co. 4:5; Phil. 2:11).

### **Various Gifts, One Source (12:4-6)**

Paul uses three words to describe the different functions of the Holy Spirit: *gifts*, *services* or *ministries*, and *workings* or *operations*. The word "different" here carries the idea of distribution, so that Paul's intent is that while God is the source of all of them, he distributes them variously among the believers. The Holy Spirit does not confer the same gifts upon everyone. Since all gifts are from the Holy Spirit, none may be discounted as inferior or unworthy (even if they are unspectacular).

### **God's Purpose for and Sovereignty over the Gifts (12:7, 11)**

The general purpose of the gifts which God has given to the church is for the church's profit or the "common good." Paul will later elaborate on this idea at length with his extended metaphor of the body (12:12ff.). The phrase, "to each one," indicates that spiritual gifts are not given to some elite class of believers but to every believer (cf. Ro. 12:3-6). At the same time, they are not given upon the volition of the believer him/herself but by the sovereign will of the Holy Spirit (cf. He. 2:4). The gift is determined by the divine Giver, not the recipient.

### **A List of Nine Charisms (12:8-10)**

The representative list of gifts that Paul gives here probably comprises the ones that were most commonly abused in Corinth. At least we know from what Paul has said earlier that underlying the Corinthians' many problems was a strong root of spiritual pride (1 Co. 4:6b-8), and furthermore, this spiritual pride was directly exhibited in their use of spiritual gifts (12:14-31).

Various attempts have been made to categorize this list into such paradigms

as "knowing, speaking, and doing" or "the mind of God, the voice of God, and the power of God" or "gifts of revelation, gifts of inspiration, and gifts of power," and so forth. Though such categories may be helpful for study, one should bear in mind that they are superimposed on the text and do not originate with Paul. In fact, at various points certain gifts may even overlap.

It is also important to realize that in most instances the New Testament does not give a definition of the gifts. From the lists that are given, one must take care not to over-define the gifts in the face of lack of evidence nor ought the reader to define the gifts on the basis of what he/she has personally seen or experienced. Rather, one must define the gifts only so far as the Scriptures themselves give sound indications.

### *The Message (Word) of Wisdom*

First, one should note that wisdom is a key subject in the first Corinthian letter (the words "wisdom" and "wise" appear some twenty-eight times, mostly in the first three chapters). For Paul, there are two major fields of wisdom--*human* wisdom (1:16, 19, 20, 22, 26, 27; 2:1, 4-6, 13; 3:18, 19) and *divine* wisdom (1:21, 24; 2:6, 7). The contrast between them could hardly be greater! Primarily, the divine wisdom has to do with the gospel, the message of the cross (1:18), and this holds true not only in 1 Corinthians but also in Paul's other letters as well. Divine wisdom is grounded in the fact that the crucifixion of Christ was the power of God for human salvation (1:23, 24, 30; 2:6-8). Second, one should observe that a "word" or "message" of wisdom probably indicates an utterance. This reference is not to a quality of wisdom (as in common grace) nor to natural intuition or insight, but to a Spirit-given ability to expound the divine wisdom. Essentially, then, the "message of wisdom" entails the ability to proclaim the gospel and its implications with conviction and power (1 Co. 2:6-10; 2 Co. 1:12-14).

### *The Message (Word) of Knowledge*

It is not easy to differentiate between knowledge and wisdom on linguistic grounds. Paul seems to use the terms synonymously at times (cf. Ro. 12:16). As was true for the message or utterance of wisdom, the message of knowledge would seem to primarily refer to knowledge of Christ and the gospel since the noun "knowledge" and the verb "to know" are used most frequently in that way (cf. 2 Co. 11:3-6).

Apparently, the Corinthians took great pride in their knowledge (1 Co. 1:5; 2



Co. 8:7), but their gift of knowledge was worthless since it was not mixed with love (1 Co. 13:2). In fact, their "superior" knowledge became a point of spiritual pride rather than edification (1 Co. 8:1-3, 10, 11).

Some have attempted to explain the message of knowledge on the basis of Acts 5:1ff. Accordingly, they see the message of knowledge as the imparting of facts about "people, things, events or places."<sup>3</sup> Today, sensationalists call people out of audiences and purport to reveal to them personal and private information about themselves. While the miraculous revelation that Peter made about Ananias and his wife is not to be discounted, there is no necessary connection between that event and Paul's phrase "message of knowledge." Certainly, there is no warrant for any message of knowledge other than what will be up-building in the church's understanding and relationship to Jesus Christ!

### *Faith*

All believers have faith, so one must be careful to distinguish between that which is common to every Christian and that which is special to particular Christians. While the gift of faith may be understood in the sense of faithfulness (i.e., faith to undergo hardships, martyrdom, etc.), in light of 1 Co. 13:2 it seems more feasible to understand faith as the ability to trust God in the face of impossible situations. As such, the gift of faith may well overlap the gifts of healings, miracles and so forth as well as describe the ministries of Christians like George Muller, Hudson Taylor, and Adoniram Judson who undertook great enterprises in Christ's name.

### *Gifts of Healings*

It is first to be observed that this gift is pluralized in each place where it occurs (cf. 12:28, 30). Actually, in the Greek text the phrases are double plurals, i.e., *gifts of healings*. Why this is so is not immediately apparent. Suggestions have been offered that the phrase could mean: a)...that there were distinct gifts for various sorts of afflictions and diseases so that each illness required a special charisma (this seems to be a reasonable explanation), or b)...that there were healings by various means or procedures (though how to identify such different procedures is vague), or c)...that a gift of healing is what is given to the afflicted

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<sup>3</sup>W. Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979) 45.

person rather than a power which is given to an intermediary healer (the singular *allo* (= to another) seems to prohibit this interpretation unless, of course, the victim was beset with multiple afflictions).

It is significant that the Greek word *sozo* (= to save) often carries the meaning "to heal" in both the Gospels and Acts. Examples of healing in the New Testament include constitutional diseases (blindness, leprosy, paralysis, etc.), psychological disorders sometimes accompanied by demon possession, death, and spiritual sickness requiring forgiveness and freedom from guilt. Primarily, however, the gifts of healings probably refer to constitutional diseases. The earmarks of the healings in the New Testament are that they were:

- ... performed apart from the use of natural means
- ... instantaneous
- ... complete
- ... permanent
- ... verifiable
- ... performed both for those who had faith and those who did not (cf. Jn. 9:25)

### *Miraculous Powers*

Again, one may see a great deal of overlapping between miracles, healings and faith (cf. Ac.4:16, 22; 19:11-12). Miracles (lit., acts of power) are especially signs performed by the apostles (2 Co. 12:12), though not exclusively so (Ac. 6:8; 8:6, 13). As signs, miracles are mighty works which point to the presence of the new age (Mk. 16:20; Ga. 3:5; He. 2:4).

### *Inspired Utterances*

Yet again, one may see some overlapping between prophecy and the messages of wisdom and knowledge. Prophecy is the communication of a message from God by direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Most people assume that prophecy is primarily concerned with predicting the future, and while this is certainly a function of prophecy (cf. Ac. 11:27-28; 21:10-11), it should not be thought of as the only function or necessarily the central one.

In the Old Testament, a prophet was a spokesman for God who proclaimed God's message to his people in specific situations. Most of Old Testament

prophecy not only involved predictions but also issued forth a call to ethical action in the present. Prophecy is the most frequently mentioned gift in the New Testament and the only one that Paul specifically urges the Corinthians to eagerly desire (1 Co. 14:1, 39). Later (1 Co. 14), Paul will set forth a series of injunctions to regulate the use of prophecy in the church services. Prophecy in the New Testament can be seen in reference to several kinds of inspired utterances. These include:

... the Holy Scriptures (2 Pe. 1:20-21; Rv. 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18-19)

... Preaching (1 Co. 11:4-5; Re. 10:11; 11:3, 6).

... Prediction (Lk. 1:67-79; Ac. 11:27-28)

... Encouraging and strengthening (Ac. 15:32)

... Timothy's call and ordination to the ministry (1 Ti. 1:18; 4:14)

... General praise toward God (Ac. 19:6); here, the gift of prophecy is probably analogous to the description given of the believers at Pentecost, that is, "We hear them declaring the wonders of God" (Ac. 2:11b).

### *Discrimination Between Spirits*

There are widely separate views in modern Christianity regarding the revelatory gifts. One view is that such gifts belong exclusively to the apostolic period and are no longer for the church. The other is a wholesale acceptance of anything and everything without evaluation. It is in view of these extremes that the gift of distinguishing between spirits becomes highly significant. Often, those who reject revelatory gifts do so because of the widespread gullibility of people who cling to farcical demonstrations. On the other hand, many Charismatics and Pentecostals refuse to evaluate themselves and their peers in light of Scripture while swallowing whole every sort of manifestation or utterance.

It should be noted that the gift of discrimination between spirits is closely associated with revelatory gifts such as knowledge, wisdom, tongues, interpretation of tongues and especially prophecy (1 Co. 14:29). It was given as a safeguard for the church so as to avoid being misled by "influences" which have origins other than the Holy Spirit (cf. 12:2).

It is to be understood that when Paul speaks of "distinguishing" or "discriminating" between spirits, he is immediately assuming two things. First, he

assumes that all spiritual influences are not caused by the Holy Spirit. (Remember his earlier statement about influences and utterances in 1 Co. 12:2-3). Also, he assumes that the church must not accept charismatic manifestations uncritically. Such an admonition is strengthened by other New Testament passages as well (cf. 1 Jn. 4:1; 1 Co. 14:29; I Th. 5:19-21). It will be remembered that even miracles, such as exorcisms, were performed by persons apart from the power of God (Ac. 19:13). Also, Paul warned the Ephesians that even from within their congregation misguided leaders would arise who would harm them (Ac. 20:28-30). Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light under the guise of what may seem to be spiritual gifts and ministries (2 Co. 11:13-14).

There are those who seem to think that it is somehow sacrilegious to discriminate between spiritual manifestations, accepting some while rejecting others. Yet this is precisely what Paul calls upon the church to do! Spiritual gifts have the potential for great good or harm, and to guard against abuse, God has given a gift of testing.

When Paul refers to spirits, he is referring primarily to the motivating force behind a manifestation, just as later he refers to the "spirits of the prophets" (1 Co. 14:32). Impulses may come through the Holy Spirit, the human spirit or an evil spirit, but whatever the spiritual source, it is manifested through a person. Thus, when John says, "Do not believe every spirit," he means not to believe every (so-called) prophet who is motivated by a spiritual force (1 Jn. 4:1). To discriminate between spirits, then, is to weigh carefully the charismatic manifestations with the end in view of discerning whether they are from God or some other source.

### *Different Tongues*

What a multitude of reactions are to be found regarding this highly controversial gift of the Holy Spirit! As one picks his/her way through the current profusion of ideas, the goal not only should be to understand what the Scripture says, but also to understand the attitudes and reactions of various Christians toward speaking in tongues.

Tongues as a Language: The word *glossa* (= tongue) refers to the physical organ of the mouth as well as to language. In both the LXX and the New Testament, it is consistently used to describe known, human languages.

However, Paul also mentions "tongues of angels" (1 Co. 13:1), and this would seem to preclude the idea that the gift of tongues refers exclusively to known, human languages.<sup>4</sup> Some interpreters are very adamant that tongues must refer to known languages,<sup>5</sup> while others are equally insistent that tongues need not be forced into such strict categories.<sup>6</sup>

The debate over whether or not tongues is a known language continues onto empirical grounds. Linguistic experts have made recordings of glossalalia and analyzed them to see if they could qualify for known languages. Scientifically, the conclusion so far is that they cannot and must therefore be seen as a spiritual language having no known human counterpart.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, apparently reliable witnesses have testified to the exercise of glossalalia in known human languages that they themselves understood.<sup>8</sup>

We shall not be able to dogmatize on this point, but in view of Paul's words "languages of angels" (1 Co. 13:1), it seems feasible that the two positions are not mutually exclusive. At times tongues may indeed be human language while at other times they may not.

Tongues for Private Exercise: There are those who argue that the gift of tongues is not for private use since all the gifts are for the common good (1 Co. 12:7). To them, "common good" forbids private use. While they admit Paul's statement that he who speaks in another tongue edifies himself, they respond that self-edification is only a by-product of addressing the congregation.

There are two substantial reasons for rejecting this position. First, although

<sup>4</sup> Of course, Paul may be speaking only in hyperbole when he refers to "tongues of angels," and if so, then the notion of a "heavenly language" becomes suspect. However, in 1st century Judaism, there was a conception of angel talk in the Jewish mystical *merkavah* (= chariot) cult in which the worshiper, when reaching a peak of ecstasy, was believed to have been caught up in the fiery chariot of Elijah where he/she could associate with angels and sing with them, cf. E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 432; P. Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction," *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) I.223ff. Thus, Paul may have indeed been using hyperbole, but this does not necessarily indicate that he was referring to a nonentity.

<sup>5</sup> W. McRae, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Gifts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 75-76.

<sup>6</sup> L. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians [TNTC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 172-173.

<sup>7</sup> Hummel, *Fire*, 197-202.

<sup>8</sup> M. Hamilton, ed., *The Charismatic Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 26ff.

one must concede that the general focus of the gifts is toward the community, it is not accurate to say that they must of necessity be community-oriented. Certainly such gifts as martyrdom, celibacy and marriage are oriented to the individual. Second, Paul seems to contrast his own frequent use of tongues with what happened in public assembly (1 Co. 14:18-19), and if so, one must conclude that Paul exercised the gift of tongues primarily in private devotion.<sup>9</sup> Paul speaks both of praying in a tongue and singing in a tongue (1 Co. 14:14-15), and since such an exercise addresses God, not the congregation, there seems to be no reason why it may not be done privately as well as publicly.

Tongues for Public Exercise: Paul will later give a number of injunctions to control the public use of tongues (1 Co. 14), but at the present we shall confine ourselves only with the question as to the purpose of the public use of tongues. At least three possibilities have been suggested in this regard.

One is that tongues are to be used for evangelism. Based on Acts 2, some expositors have viewed the gift of tongues as a method of preaching the gospel to people of different language backgrounds. This explanation does not seem to square with the biblical evidence. Only in Acts 2 could such an interpretation be construed, and even there the gospel was not preached in other tongues but by Peter in a commonly understood language.

Others see tongues as primarily a counterpart to prophecy, that is, as a way to provide the congregation with a message from God for exhortation, comfort or direction. The main problem with this position is that it lacks any clear Scriptural statements. Nowhere in the New Testament does one find a believer addressing the congregation in tongues. Rather, those who speak in tongues are said to be addressing God (1 Co. 14:2). There is no description in the New Testament of what in Pentecostal-Charismatic circles is popularly called a "message in tongues." In fact, Paul specifically contrasts the use of tongues with other gifts that provide specific messages, such as knowledge, prophecy, revelation and instruction (1 Co. 14:6).

Specifically tongues were used as a form of praise to God (cf. Ac. 2:11; 10:46; 1 Co. 14:14-17). Since this is the only clearly defined public use of tongues, it would be wise to consider this definition as primary. This is not to say

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<sup>9</sup>A. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1931) IV.183.

that God could not use tongues to evangelize or to address the church, only that the clearest definition of the public use of tongues is primarily in the category of praise. Of course, public praise in other tongues requires an accompanying interpretation for the benefit of the congregation (1 Co. 14:5, 13, 18-19, 23, 27-28).

The issue of speaking with tongues has long polarized Christians. For most of this century, there were two extreme camps, and most Christians fell into one or the other of them. The negative viewpoint, shared by most evangelicals, was that speaking with tongues was largely a charism of Corinth since it is not mentioned in the other letters to the churches. In Corinth, it was an emotional, sensational experience similar to the ecstasy of pagan religions. The Corinthians had elevated it to undue proportions, and while Paul accepted it, he also wished to devalue it. After the days of the apostles, tongues ceased.

The positive viewpoint, espoused by Pentecostals and Charismatics, was that tongues were the irrevocable evidence of the baptism in the Spirit. Until one had spoken in tongues he/she was at best living at a low spiritual plateau (at worst, he/she might not even possess the gift of the Holy Spirit at all). In practice if not in theory, they tended to make tongues the supreme indication of spirituality.

In the past decade or so, some churches have worked toward finding a more balanced position that is less reactionary toward either extreme and is on a more solid footing exegetically. They do not swing to the unwarranted extremes of saying that tongues are either for every believer, a position that Paul expressly forbids (1 Co. 12:30), or that tongues are categorically forbidden, again, a position that Paul forbids (1 Co. 14:39). Rather, they are open to the value and validity of this gift in the church as one among many charisms that God has placed in the body.<sup>10</sup>

### *Interpretation of Tongues*

This gift is the only one that cannot stand alone, that is, that must be used in conjunction with another gift. It is the supernatural ability to interpret an utterance

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<sup>10</sup>A very readable, sane treatment of spiritual gifts from a mildly charismatic perspective is given by the pastor of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California: C. Smith, *Charisma vs. Charismania* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1983). From a non-charismatic perspective, an equally sound exegetical treatment is to be found in D. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987).

in other tongues for the benefit of the assembled church. Two things are important to observe regarding this gift. First, interpretation means to explain or to translate. Some have tried to make a hard and fast distinction between interpretation and translation, but while this may be possible in English, it is not so in Greek. Second, the one who speaks in tongues will probably also be the one who interprets. Thus, Paul says that anyone who speaks in tongues should pray for the interpretation (1 Co. 14:13; cf. 14:5). However, this is not exclusively so, for others may interpret as well (1 Co. 14:27, 28).

### **The Imagery of the Body (1 Co. 12:12-31a)**

Some of Paul's most striking theological statements appear as illustrations of very practical points. To illustrate humility, for instance, he gives his marvelous description of the incarnation (Phi. 2:1-11). Here, Paul uses a metaphor that is well known in his letters, the metaphor of the church as a body, and in particular, the body of Christ (cf. Ro. 12:4-5; Ep. 1:22-23; 4:4, 12, 15-16, 25; 5:23, 29-30; Col. 1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15). He already alluded to this idea earlier in the Corinthian letter (6:15; 10:17; 11:29). Now he develops this germinal concept to illustrate the diversity and unity within the church.

### **The Statement of the Metaphor (12:12)**

In his various letters, Paul uses the imagery of the body to illustrate diverse points. In this passage, he especially applies the metaphor to the discussion of spiritual gifts. The human body is a single entity even though it is made up of many different parts. The ideas of "the one" and "the many" are not mutually exclusive in the church. The church is both one and many!

It is well to note that when Paul speaks of the *one body*, he is speaking of the congregation as a local expression of the universal church. When he speaks of the *parts* of the body, he refers to the individual believers who are gifted. The "parts" do not refer to individual Christians only, but to individual Christians who have a particular ministry to offer to the community of faith. Paul never entertains the notion that a believer can be a part of the body but have no gift. If one is a member of Christ's body, he/she is expected to fulfil a task--and the enablement to do that task is his/her gift (Ep. 4:16).

### **The Unity of the Body is Based Upon the Gift of the Holy Spirit (12:13)**

The unity of the universal church is to be seen in the fact that all believers are



fellow-members of the same body. This unity transcends distinctions, whether racial or cultural. Paul earlier intimated this oneness in his salutation at the beginning of the letter. He declared that the Corinthians were called to be holy "together with" everyone everywhere who serves Christ Jesus as Lord (1:2). Christ was both "their Lord and ours."

Paul's statement here parallels closely the statement in Ephesians 4:4: "There is one body and one Spirit...." Thus, in the preceding verse he speaks of the "unity of the Spirit."

### *We all*

Paul never addresses the church as though some believers were baptized in the Spirit and others were not. When one believes the gospel he/she is immediately sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ep. 1:13; Ga. 3:2). Pentecostals are incorrect in saying that one can be a believer who is serving Christ as Lord yet not be baptized in the Holy Spirit. The "we all" in the Greek text is emphatic!<sup>11</sup>

### *Baptized by (in)<sup>12</sup> One Spirit*

This is the only passage in the New Testament that speaks of the baptism in the Spirit outside of the passages describing the preaching of John the Baptist and two passages in Acts referring back to John's preaching (1:5; 11:16). Both prepositional phrases, "in one Spirit" and "into one body," relate to the verb "were baptized." Whether or not the verb "baptized" suggests water baptism is debatable, but without question, the emphasis on Christian unity is grounded in a common work of the Holy Spirit. There is not some elite group who has been baptized in the Spirit; rather, *every* believer has been baptized in the Spirit and into the body of Christ.

### *All Given the One Spirit to Drink*

Again, the word "all" is inclusive. The imagery of "drinking" the Spirit denotes the inward work of the Holy Spirit. The completed tense (Gk.. aorist) points to the accomplished fact.

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<sup>11</sup> W. Chamberlain, *An Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1941) 44.

<sup>12</sup>It is to be observed that the Greek preposition may be rendered either as "by" or "in".

Thus, the unity of the church is grounded on the fact that every believer is joined to the one body and has been baptized in the same Holy Spirit.

### **Diversity in the Body is Based Upon Spiritual Gifts (12:14-20)**

Although the body is one, the gifts and functions of the various members are many. There is no spiritual gift that is universal in the body, that is to say, there is no single gift of the Spirit that every believer possesses. Because one member of the body does not have the same gift or function as another member, he/she is in no way inferior or excluded from the body. Just as the human body is not one big hand or eye or ear or nose, the members of the church are not to be characterized by only one gift or function. Every gift and ministry is important and contributes a service to the whole body. The distribution of gifts and functions are not given at the volition of believers but out of the sovereignty of God's purpose. "God has arranged the parts....just as he wanted them to be." It is diametrically opposed to Paul's teaching for one particular gift to be emphasized as though it were for everyone, for as Paul says, "If they were all one part, where would the body be?"

### **The Serious Error of Allowing Diverse Gifts to Lead to Division (12:21-26)**

Divisiveness is not an indifferent matter! The partisanship in the Corinthian church was directly attributed to their spiritual immaturity (cf. 1:10-15; 3:1-7, 21-23; 4:6). Not only were they divided over personalities, they were divided over spiritual gifts. Apparently some members who were gifted in certain ways were fostering a superior attitude toward their brothers and sisters in Christ who were not so gifted. Paul forcefully condemns such an attitude. Furthermore, the Corinthians were evidently categorizing the gifts, some as essential and others as dispensable. Paul condemns this attitude as well. There must be no division in the body over spiritual gifts! Every member, however he/she is gifted, must show equal concern for every other member!

### **The Serious Error of Saying that All Believers Must Have the Same Gift (12:27-31)**

After Paul warns against divisions in the church over spiritual gifts, he again warns against making any particular gift supreme as though everyone should possess it (cf. 12:14-20). The church collectively is the body of Christ and each individual is a distinct and integral part of it. Every part, that is, every individual has his/her own gift and function. There is no single function that everyone has!

### *The Ranking of Gifted Individuals (12:28a)*

This verse is the only one in which individuals with particular gifts are clearly ranked in order of importance. This ranking is apostles, prophets and teachers. The gifts following these three are simply set apart collectively. Whether or not these latter gifts are to be thought of as listed in an order of rank is not clear. Some expositors think so<sup>13</sup>, but the random order in which Paul names the gifts in his various lists suggests that outside of these first three, there is no necessary hierarchy of value to the others. We agree with Orr and Walther that apart from the first three, the gifts are not "precisely locked in a pecking order."<sup>14</sup>

### *A Variant List of Gifts (12:28b)*

Obviously, the list of gifts in this verse is somewhat different than the list in 12:8-10. The first three gifts, apostles and prophets and teachers, are not in the previous list. Besides these, we may see two other gifts not previously mentioned, helps and administration. This strongly suggests that no one gift list is exhaustive (nor necessarily are all the lists exhaustive together).

*Helps, or the Ability to Help Others:* This gift is far more general and much less spectacular than the ones previously mentioned. It is mentioned only here in the New Testament, but it seems to be closely connected with gifts of service, encouragement, generosity and showing mercy, as mentioned in Romans 12:7-8. Perhaps a good example of the gift of helps is to be seen in the ministry of Stephanas' household (1 Co. 16:15-16).

*Administration:* This word, closely connected with the verb *kybernao* (= to steer), indicates the ability to govern or manage affairs for the church. In secular Greek, it referred to the management of a household.<sup>15</sup>

### *A Series of Rhetorical Questions (12:29-30)*

A rhetorical question is one which is asked for effect, and often one for which the answer is intended to be obvious. In New Testament Greek, it is

<sup>13</sup>W. Mare, "I Corinthians", *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 10.266.

<sup>14</sup>W. Orr and J. Walthers, *I Corinthians [AB]* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976) 288; see also, Hummel, 245.

<sup>15</sup>J. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930) 363.

possible to ask a question so that a negative answer is expected, and this is the case here.<sup>16</sup> As such, these questions may best be translated as follows:

All are not apostles, are they? (No!)

All are not prophets, are they? (No!)

All are not teachers, are they? (No!)

All do not have miraculous powers, do they? (No!)

All do not have gifts of cures, do they? (No!)

All do not speak with tongues, do they? (No!)

The point of these questions is that no gift is universal in the church! It would be a mistake to say that all believers must have an identical gift. They do not! Rather, they have been gifted however God has decided, and their gifts are widely varied (12:18-20). If it was demanded that every believer have the same gift, such as speaking in tongues or the ability to work miracles or some other gift, the church would immediately be divided between those who could perform such a function and those who could not. The "haves" would be super-spiritual while the "have-nots" would be inferior. Such a circumstance would quickly destroy the unity of the body and would cause the emergence of an elite power group who would dictate over their peers. Tragically, this is exactly what has happened in many Pentecostal-Charismatic circles.

### *The Greater Gifts (12:31a)*

There is some uncertainty as to how this sentence should be rendered. It is equally capable of being an imperative or an indicative construction (see NIV footnote).<sup>17</sup>

As an Imperative: "But eagerly desire the greater gifts" (that is, the

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<sup>16</sup> E. Goetchius, *The Language of the New Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1965) 229-230.

<sup>17</sup> Orr and Walther, 287-288.

statement is rendered as a command for the Corinthians to seek after those gifts that are best). The greater gifts, in this context, would refer not to any particular gift in and of itself, but to whatever gift God deemed appropriate and edifying for the church at a particular time. Most translations follow this rendering.

As an Indicative: "But you are eagerly desiring the greater gifts" (that is, you are vying with each other for the gifts that in your opinion are superior--something that you should not be doing)! This translation seems to fit the context well as a summary of what the Corinthians had been doing. This rendering is favored by some scholars.<sup>18</sup>

In either case, it is quite obvious that the Corinthians' emphasis on selected spiritual gifts was misplaced. Either Paul is encouraging them to desire gifts other than what they currently valued, or he is rebuking them for their emphasis of certain gifts over other gifts.

### **The Most Excellent Way: I Co. 12:31b--13:13**

1 Corinthians 13, often called the "love chapter," is one of the most profound statements in the New Testament on love as the central character of Christianity. Unfortunately, all too frequently it has been treated apart from its larger context in Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul is not just delivering an abstract description of love. Rather, he is vividly showing that the central quality that describes what it means to be a Christian is based on faith, hope and, above all, love instead of being based on spectacular manifestations of spiritual gifts. One can have all sorts of sensational gifts, but if these do not flow out of love, the very essence of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ has been fatally distorted. Gifts do not define Christianity; instead, faith, hope and love--the abiding graces--define Christianity.

Apparently, it was at this very point that the Corinthians were making a serious error. They were priding themselves on their manifestation of spectacular gifts (1 Co. 8:1-3), but they were filled with division and strife. All the gifts in the world could not make up for their spiritual bankruptcy in that grace which beyond

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<sup>18</sup> J. Ruff, *Paul's First Letter to Corinth* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 140-141.

all others truly defined Christianity--love!

*The Most Excellent Way (12:31b)*

Virtually all commentators acknowledge that the chapter and verse division at the end of 1 Corinthians 12 is awkward.<sup>19</sup> Most translations link the last half of 1 Co. 12:31 with the succeeding chapter.

Love is the way to reach the highest goal of Christian living. It is more excellent, certainly, than the Corinthians' vying with each other over the relative merits of their particular gifts. The way in which Paul treats love in this section indicates that it is not a gift *per se*, but rather, the character motivation that ought to underlie any manifestation of a gift. No single gift is universal in the church--but love must be universal!

*Any Gift Exercised Apart from Love is Worthless (13:1-3)*

Nothing could be clearer than the series of lucid statements in these verses. They may be paraphrased as follows:

If anyone exercises the gift of tongues due to any motivation besides love, he is only an empty noisemaker.

1. If anyone should exercise the gifts of prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, faith or miracles for any reason other than to express love, he/she is completely to be discounted.
2. If anyone should demonstrate the epitome of self-sacrifice by exercising such totally consuming gifts as voluntary poverty and martyrdom, and yet be without love, he/she has not profited by it in the least.

A problem that one sees frequently within some circles is a motivation for spiritual gifts that is self-centered and not others-centered. People are encouraged to seek certain gifts because it will make them feel good or because it will give them a sense of power or because it will assure them of God's presence. All these motivations are wrong because all of them are self-seeking.

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<sup>19</sup> The chapter and verse divisions, of course, are not part of the original text of the Bible. They were developed over periods of time and were not finalized until the 1500s, cf. N. Geisler and W. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1968) 229-233.

*The Nature of Love (13:4-7)*

Nothing can be added to Paul's sublime description of Christian love. To better understand his words, it is helpful to notice that love is defined by action and attitude--either in terms of what one does and shows or in terms of what one refuses to do and show. If the Corinthians would have tested their use of spiritual gifts by the character of love, they would not have strayed so far from Christian priorities!

*The Permanence of Love and the Impermanence of Spiritual Gifts (13:8-12)*

This paragraph is one of the most controversial of all Paul's statements with regard to the gifts. As the various ideas are sifted, it will become clear that a good deal of tolerance and kindness must be shown to the various sides of the issue. How ironic that in the midst of Paul's most profound statement about love there arises the most unloving contentions between fellow-believers over the interpretation of a single point! The very last thing in the Apostle Paul's mind was that Christians should sacrifice their unity because they disagreed over the meaning of his words.

The Central Point: Virtually everyone agrees on Paul's central point, that is, that love is permanent (i.e., it "never fails"), while spiritual gifts (i.e., prophecy, tongues, knowledge) are impermanent. That much is clear. Furthermore, it is quite apparent that the reason spiritual gifts are not permanent is because they are "imperfect" or "in part."

The phrase *ek menous* (= imperfect) appears four times in 1 Co. 13:9-12. Primarily, it means "part" as opposed to "whole", and it is the same phrase Paul uses in 12:27 when he says that believers are the body of Christ and each believer is "a part" of it. Just as no individual can claim to be more than a "part" of the body of Christ, and thus can be no more than an imperfect expression of it, so also no gift can claim to be more than a "part" of God's self-revelation, and therefore, no more than an imperfect expression of it. All gifts are imperfect and incomplete reflections of God, and hence Paul's use of the analogy of the mirror in 13:12. Ancient polished, metal mirrors gave only an imperfect reflection of the one looking into them. In like manner, spiritual gifts give only an imperfect knowledge of God. Spiritual gifts are like children, Paul says. Children exhibit immaturity in speaking and understanding. Full maturity and adulthood, however, demand that child-like ways cease.

The Controversial Point: The disagreement among Christians over this passage involves two closely related questions: 1) Which gifts are impermanent (i.e., do some gifts cease before others), and 2) When do the gifts cease (i.e., does Paul refer to a point in time that is for us past or future)?

In a larger sense, all spiritual gifts will doubtless cease when the world ends, but there are some who contend that Paul sets apart certain gifts in such a way as to indicate that they would cease at the end of the apostolic age. In this understanding, the three gifts mentioned in 13:8 are interpreted to be a sort of surrogate for Scripture until the completion of the New Testament canon.<sup>20</sup> While the New Testament was still in the process of being written, the church needed guidance and direction, and this was supplied through these so-called "revelatory" gifts. However, the later one moves into the New Testament writings, the less he/she finds mention of revelatory gifts. The New Testament books that mention tongues, for instance, are Acts and 1 Corinthians, both early. Later New Testament writings, such as Paul's other epistles and the letters of Peter, John, Jude, etc., do not mention tongues. By the end of the first century, it is contended that the revelatory gifts ceased to serve their purpose because the church now had a full New Testament canon.<sup>21</sup>

Sometimes this viewpoint is tied to a related idea that certain gifts were "sign gifts" that were especially for the apostles (these would include miracles, healings, tongues and interpretation). Such gifts were primarily given to establish Christianity and to vindicate the authority of the apostles (2 Co. 12:12; Ro. 15:18-19; He. 2:3-4). After the church had been established and the apostles had died, such gifts had run their course.<sup>22</sup> They ceased.

In fairness, it must be pointed out that those who hold such views are not necessarily saying that God cannot do miracles or perform healings today. They are only saying that God does not give continuing and settled gifts upon people so that they can perform miracles at will.

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<sup>20</sup> M. Unger, *The Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody, 1974) 138-142.

<sup>21</sup> J. MacArthur, *The Charismatics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 163-171; A. Hoekema, *Tongues and Spirit-Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 103-123; Unger, 138-145.

<sup>22</sup> Unger, 138-140



Although the above view became very popular among American fundamentalists, there are weaknesses in it, as noted by various evangelical scholars. First, when Paul speaks of "imperfection" versus "perfection," "childhood" versus "manhood," and uses the words "now" (*arti*) as opposed to "then" (*tote*), he is almost certainly speaking of the second coming of Christ, not the completion of the New Testament canon.<sup>23</sup> Second, it seems tenuous to maintain that certain gifts were used as surrogates for Scripture. To the contrary, the apostles continually based their authority for directing and guiding the church on the Old Testament and on their election by Jesus Christ to apostleship. Nowhere does the New Testament clearly depict the gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge as the authority for the faith of the church. Third, it is doubtlessly correct that God used certain gifts as signs to establish the church and that these gifts were especially demonstrated by the apostles. However, there is no clear indication in the New Testament that such gifts were to be exclusively for the apostles or only for the apostolic period. This idea is an assumption, not a given.

The history of the Christian church is often called upon to buttress the idea that tongues and related gifts have ceased. It is often asserted that after the end of the first century, revelatory gifts and sign gifts were nowhere to be found. However, while it must be conceded that there is a gradual decline in such manifestations in the early centuries of Christianity, it is not accurate to say that the end of the first century was an abrupt cut-off point. Various gifts, including tongues, are mentioned in a favorable way by Irenaeus (2nd century), Tertullian (2nd century) and Cyril of Jerusalem (4th century).<sup>24</sup> By the close of the 4th century, Chrysostom and Augustine both observe that tongues-speaking had ceased.<sup>25</sup> In the Middle Ages, glossalalia appears only infrequently and was inhibited by the belief that it indicated demon possession.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, some of the people practicing tongues-speaking had strikes against them for other reasons. The Montanists in the early centuries of the church (the largest tongues-speaking group) prophesied that the world would end in their own time and that

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<sup>23</sup>See the commentaries on 1 Corinthians (loc cit) by F. Bruce, F. Grosheide, R. Lenski, W. Mare (ed. Frank Gaebelin) and L. Morris. Mare, particularly, points out the weakness of saying that "perfection" refers to the NT canon.

<sup>24</sup>Hoekema, 10-24; Hummel, 192-193.

<sup>25</sup>Hoekema, 16-17.

<sup>26</sup>Hummel, 192-193.

the New Jerusalem would be established in Pepuza, Phrygia, something that obviously did not happen.<sup>27</sup> The Shakers in Troy, New York, followers of Mother Ann Lee (1736-84), practiced whirling in the Spirit while speaking in tongues along with a variety of other emotionally excessive worship forms.<sup>28</sup>

From the record of church history, two things should be clarified. First, it is inaccurate for those opposed to tongues and related gifts to say that such gifts are not to be found after the 1st century. However, it is equally unwise for those in favor of tongues and related gifts to claim as a precedent all the occasions of tongues-speaking within church history.

It appears that both sides of the issue, those advocating tongues and those forbidding them, have over-reacted to each other. Each has tried to build an impregnable case, on the one hand that tongues and related gifts are indications of superior spirituality and are for everyone, and on the other hand that they are obsolete and are for no one. Paul is apparently somewhere in the middle when he makes clear that not every believer speaks in tongues (1 Co. 12:30), and further, that no one should be forbidden to speak in tongues (1 Co. 14:39). Is it possible that the central priority of Christian love can yet break down the judgmentalism and over-reaction of both factions--that tolerance and understanding can replace harshness and accusations? Cannot the church be in unity on the common ground of its faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and give liberty to each other on this debatable matter?

### *The Three Abiding Graces (13:13)*

In concluding his appeal for Christian love to prevail, Paul calls attention to the three abiding graces, faith, hope and love. These three graces are the center of Christian experience. The triad is familiar ground for Paul, who mentions them in various of his writings as he describes the character of authentic Christianity (Ro. 5:1-5; Col. 1:3-5; 1 The. 1:3; etc.). Faith is the means of justification, hope is the assurance of eternal life in Christ, and love is the central quality of Christian character.

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<sup>27</sup>J. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970) I.144-146.

<sup>28</sup>E. Andrews, *The People Called Shakers* (New York: Dover, 1963). John MacArthur even accuses them of dancing in the nude while speaking in tongues so as to learn self-control, though he is so polemical that his objectivity is unclear, 170.

## **The Cruciality of Intelligibility in Christian Worship: 1 Co. 14:1-25**

In the ancient world, one of the primary differences between popular, pagan worship and Christian worship was that while pagan worship had a strong emphasis on magic, mystery, esoteric teaching and ecstatic experience, Christianity emphasized a clear, intelligible message open to all. The ancient pagan religions, called "mystery cults," appealed especially to the common people. They provided an emotional outlet for those who were repelled by the coldness of highbrow philosophy.<sup>29</sup> Their meetings were characterized by enthusiasm, ecstasy and dancing. They felt themselves to be united with the god or gods, and they expressed this union in uncontrolled ecstasy and speaking in tongues.<sup>30</sup> Christians, on the other hand, had renounced such mysteries. In contrast, they set forth the gospel in clear and unmistakable language (2 Co. 4:2). The apostles were concerned to keep Christian worship forms on an understandable level. It is with this concern in mind that Paul addresses the Corinthians in Chapter 14.

### **The Importance of Intelligible Gifts which Build Up the Church (14:1-5)**

After his stress on the nature of Christian love, Paul makes a practical application. "Make love your aim," he says (Moffat). It is appropriate to desire spiritual gifts, but especially it is appropriate to desire to prophesy. Paul's preference is based on the fact that prophecy is intelligible to the congregation. The one who speaks in tongues is neither addressing the congregation nor speaking intelligibly. Therefore, there is no way that his/her tongues-speaking can edify the church. He/she may be edifying him/herself, but self-seeking is not the way of love (1 Co. 13:5). Only by speaking in an understandable language can one strengthen, encourage and comfort God's people. Consequently, the only time tongues can be considered edifying to the assembly (and as such, the only time it is on a level with prophecy) is if it is interpreted (14:5).

The first sentence in 14:5 has been championed by many Pentecostal-Charismatics as the basis for encouraging and sometimes demanding that all believers seek the gift of tongues. This presses Paul's language to an unwarranted extreme. Paul's statement here is analogous to one he makes in 1 Co. 7:7: "I wish

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<sup>29</sup>M. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 20.

<sup>30</sup>Green, 22; MacArthur, 161.

that all men were as I am (that is, unmarried). But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that." In like manner, Paul here asserts that it would be good if all believers were gifted to speak in tongues. However, the very way the statement is phrased indicates that all believers are not so gifted (cf. 1 Co. 12:30). It would be even better if all believers could prophesy, but this, too, is idealistic, not realistic (cf. 1 Co. 12:29).

### **Building Up Must be Defined by Intelligibility (14:6-12)**

Paul now continues his emphasis on intelligible gifts. He makes it very clear that speaking in tongues, in and of itself, is of no value to the congregation. Revelation, knowledge, prophecy and instruction, on the other hand, are valuable because they are understandable. What is "good" and "edifying" must be defined as what can be comprehended by the people within the congregation. The building up of the church can only be attained by something that can be objectively understood, not intuited by subjective responses, feelings or experiences. Just because tongues-speaking is spectacular or even miraculous does not qualify it to be edifying.

By way of illustration, Paul appeals to musical instruments. Even here, it is not the noise of the instrument but the systematic distinctions in pitch, tone and time that make a melody comprehensible. Similarly, in battle the war trumpet must give a clear call, one easily comprehended by all the soldiers, if mass confusion is to be avoided.

"So it is with you, " Paul says. Intelligibility is absolutely required in the church's worship. Language only has meaning for the person who understands it. Speaking out in tongues without an interpretation puts the congregation in the position of foreigners. They cannot be built up by listening to such a gift.

### **The Public Use of Tongues Requires Interpretation (14:13-19)**

Therefore, if one wishes to speak in tongues in a worship service, it is incumbent upon him/her to pray for the interpretation. If he/she nor anyone else can interpret, then the speaker must remain silent (1 Co. 14:28)

Paul uses the phrases "praying in a tongue" or "praising God in a tongue" as synonyms for praying or praising God from the subjective recesses of the human spirit. The difference between praying or praising God "with my spirit" and praying or praising "with my mind" is a matter of intelligibility. The person who prays "with his spirit" (i.e., in other tongues) does not intellectually comprehend

what he/she is saying. The one who so prays simply enjoys a subjective experience. The one who prays or praises "with his mind," however, clearly understands what he/she is saying. Paul says that he himself prayed both ways-- *but he did not pray both ways in public!* As long as he was worshipping with the congregation, he spoke only in intelligible words. Five intelligible words of instruction were worth far more than a multitude of words in other tongues. If one prays or praises God in other tongues at a public meeting, it is impossible for the congregation to be edified. In short, then, Paul says that no believer should exercise the gift of tongues in public unless it is to be interpreted.

### **How the Church May Show that "God is Among Us" (14:20-25)**

It is clear from the context of chapter 14 that the Corinthians highly valued the gift of tongues. They were eagerly desiring spiritual gifts (14:12), and the one they desired more than any other was tongues-speaking. It seems likely that the reason they did so was because they considered the gift of tongues to be a sign of God's working among them or even of God's approval of them. Later, when Paul makes the quote, "God is really among you," he seems to be voicing what the Corinthians themselves desired (14:25). They desired to have a sign which would point to God's presence.

*Do tongues necessarily indicate God's approval (14:20-22a)?*

Paul saw a problem in the Corinthians' eagerness to speak in tongues and their inclination to see tongues-speaking as a sign of God's approval. He considered their emphasis to be a mark of childishness, and he wished for them to mature in their thinking. To show that tongues-speaking was not necessarily a sign of God's approval, he cited an example from the Old Testament.<sup>31</sup>

The point Paul makes is that tongues in this Old Testament instance, far from

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<sup>31</sup>Paul uses the expression "in the law" to refer to the whole O.T. He quotes a passage from Isaiah 28:11-12 and possibly alludes to Dt. 28:49. Both passages have the same import, that is, that since the people of Israel would not hear the clearly enunciated warnings of the prophets, Yahweh would send upon them a foreign enemy of different language--in this case, the Assyrian invaders. The Israelites had mocked Isaiah's preaching by mimicking him with baby talk (see NIV footnote for Isa. 28:10), cf. F. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 132. The Hebrew words *sav lasav sav lasav/kav lakav kav lakav* were probably the repetitive chanting of teachers trying to drill the children in learning their alphabet, R. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 228. "Very well," Yahweh said, "since you will not listen to a plainly spoken word from my prophet, I will speak to you with the foreign tongues of the coming invaders!" Tongues, in this case, indicated disaster.

being a sign of God's approval, was a sign of his judgement--the terrible consequences of a foreign invasion. For Israel, foreign languages were not indicative of God's blessing on those who believed; they were a sign of his judgment on those who were apostate. This is not to say, of course, that the Corinthians themselves were apostate or that tongues were for them a sign of God's displeasure. Nevertheless, Paul's example effectively points out that speaking in tongues is not necessarily a sign for the good. The Corinthians' viewpoint of tongues-speaking as a necessary sign of God's approval was unwise.

*The presence and working of God must be demonstrated in an intelligible way (14:22b-25).*

In contrast to tongues-speaking, which is not a clear indication of God's presence and does not lead anyone to faith, prophecy does lead to faith because it is intelligible. If the Corinthians wished to show that God's presence was among them, prophecy served this end best. Prophecy was for believers, that is, it was for believers in the sense that it produced believers.<sup>32</sup> The outsider would not come to faith in Christ merely because he/she heard tongues-speaking. The outsider would be more apt to conclude that Christians were lunatics. However, if he/she heard a clearly intelligible word from God (i.e., prophecy), such an utterance could lead to faith.

### *Summary*

It will be well to summarize the main points in the above discussion of intelligible Christian worship services.

1. Any utterance in a worship service must be understood if it is to be of value. In short, if one can't understand it, one can't be edified by it.
2. Tongues-speaking without an interpretation is restricted in public worship.
3. If one wishes to speak in tongues in a public service, he/she should expect the utterance to be interpreted, either by him/herself or by someone else.
4. Tongues-speaking is not necessarily a sign of God's approval.
5. Prophecy (i.e., intelligible words), not tongues (i.e., unintelligible words),

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<sup>32</sup>F. Bruce, 133.

will lead unbelievers to Christ.

## **The Importance of Order in Worship: 1 Corinthians 14:26-40**

If intelligibility is crucial to edification, order in worship is no less crucial. However, as someone has aptly stated, order in worship need not be patterned after the order of a graveyard. When Paul says, "God is not a God of disorder but of peace" (14:33), and later, "Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (14:40), he gives the basic principles upon which his argument stands. Before examining the whole passage, it will be well to examine these two verses, since they serve as a precis of Paul's argument.

Paul uses four expressions to describe what true worship ought to be like:<sup>33</sup>

*ou akatastasias* (= not of disorder): This expression indicates disturbance, disorder or unruliness.

*alla eirenes* (= but of peace): Here, the expression depicts harmony and order as opposed to disorder. Peace in the New Testament primarily concerns relationships between individuals or between an individual and God.

*euschemonos* (= fitting): This word describes what is becoming, decent, proper or respectable. It is akin to expressing good manners.

*kata taxin* (= according to order): This expression means orderliness or in an orderly way, often in the sense of succession, i.e., one after the other.

Thus, Paul's emphasis was that worship in the congregation should have a certain amount of structural form as opposed to being haphazard. At the same time, it is clear by the rest of the passage that he was not forbidding spontaneity or demanding strict formalism. Rather, he was concerned with self-control and good manners.

In the passage, Paul deals with order in Christian worship along four lines: the variety in worship forms, the order for tongues-speaking, the order for prophesying, and the order for women's behavior in the congregation.

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<sup>33</sup>BAG (1979) loc. cit.; J. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930) loc. cit.

*The Variety of Worship Forms (14:26)*

Worship forms are many, and here Paul lists several. It should be born in mind that Paul's lists, regardless of subject, are suggestive rather than exhaustive, so one ought not to restrict expressions of worship only to what can be found here. Furthermore, it is probably not wise to see Corinthian worship as a mirror image of the worship in all of the other Christian congregations of the first century. Nevertheless, this list is representative of what was occurring in at least the Corinthian worship services.

When Paul says "everyone," it need not be supposed that every church member was obligated to make a contribution at every meeting. However, it does mean that any of them might do so and were privileged to do so.<sup>34</sup> This suggests that the church in Corinth was not dominated by a professional ministry, though we may assume that, as he customarily did, Paul had appointed elders for the church (Ac. 14:23; 20:17). If a member had a contribution to make to the body, no ecclesiastical rules should stifle it. As William Barclay has well said: "It is a mistake to think that only the professional ministry can ever bring God's truth to men."<sup>35</sup>

In Paul's list, he mentions five worship forms and concludes, as before, that their fundamental purpose is to strengthen the church. They are:

*Psalm* (= hymn, psalm):<sup>36</sup> The word here is actually "psalm," such as an Old Testament psalm, and usually this word refers to a sacred song sung to musical accompaniment. In the present context, inasmuch as it is listed with other spiritual gifts, it may be that what Paul has in mind is not so much a Psalm from the Old Testament, though that is possible, but an original composition after the pattern of the Old Testament.

*Didache* (= word of instruction, a teaching):<sup>37</sup> Paul has in mind a Christian lesson, presumably something within the Christian tradition as handed down by Christ or the apostles.

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<sup>34</sup>L. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* [TNTC] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 199.

<sup>35</sup>W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 134.

<sup>36</sup>R. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 47; W. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (McClean, VA: McDonald, n.d.) 911; Morris, 199.

<sup>37</sup>K. Rengstorf, *TDNT* (1964) II.163-165.



Apokalypsin (= revelation): This gift may be linked closely to the office of an apostle and/or a prophet. Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul uses the word to describe the things that Christ had shown to him through the Holy Spirit (1 Co. 14:6; 2 Co. 12:1-7; Ga. 1:12; Ep. 3:3).

Glossan (= tongue): This, of course, refers to an utterance in another language through the enablement of the Holy Spirit. If such an utterance followed the normal New Testament description, it would be a statement of praise to God and would be followed by an interpretation (Ac. 2:11; 10:46; 1 Co. 14:13-17, 27-28).

Ermeneian (= interpretation): This gift works in direct harmony with the gift of tongues.

### **The Order for Tongues-Speaking (14:27-28)**

Paul seems concerned that tongues-speaking did not become dominant over the other worship forms. Here he gives two firm limitations to be obeyed with regard to tongues.

No given service should ever have more than three occasions of tongues-speaking. In fact, from the way Paul phrases it, it would appear that two occasions were generally considered to be plenty while three was the absolute extreme. Some have suggested that Paul's injunction only means two or three "at a time" before there is an interpretation,<sup>38</sup> but this interpretation is not generally followed. Most scholars concur that Paul indicates the number of occasions tongues may be used in a given service. Although Paul does not specifically say so, he seems to assume that tongues-speaking is something that can be controlled by the one who is gifted with it. If Paul sets a limit on how many occasions of tongues-speaking may occur at a given time, then obviously tongues-speaking is not an uncontrollable phenomenon that seizes the worshipper so that he/she cannot control the utterance. It would be futile for Paul to command silence if such were impossible (cf. 14:28).

Paul is equally concerned that if a person speaks in tongues in a public meeting, it must be made intelligible. This is only consistent with what he has

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<sup>38</sup>G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 691.

already said (14:2-25). The clause rendered "someone must interpret" has two features worthy of notation. First, the word "one" is general enough to refer to either the tongues-speaker him/herself or someone else. Second, the verb is an imperative, that is, it is a statement of command, not a suggestion or an option. In fact, Paul says that if there is no interpreter, the one gifted in tongues-speaking is obligated to remain silent. This instruction apparently puts the burden of responsibility on the tongues-speaker to ascertain ahead of time if an interpreter is present, or if not, to be ready to interpret his/her own tongues-speaking (cf. 14:13). If neither of these are possible, the tongues-speaker must be quiet and speak "to himself and to God," which may mean to speak quietly under his/her breath, but more likely means to save tongues-speaking for private devotions. Barclay's translation captures the sense of Paul's meaning: "If there is no interpreter present, let him who has the gift of tongues keep silent in the congregation, and let him speak to God when he is by himself."<sup>39</sup>

### **The Order for Prophecy (14:29-33a)**

Paul not only limits tongues-speaking, he does the same to prophecy. As before, only two or three prophets are to speak in a given meeting. While they are speaking, the "others" (possibly the other prophets, but more likely the hearers in general<sup>40</sup>) should exercise the gift of discernment and weigh what the speakers are saying. The word *diakrinetosan*, rendered "weigh carefully," is the verbal counterpart to the noun Paul uses when he describes the gift of discernment (cf. 12:10). This verb is also an imperative, so evaluation of a prophetic message is expected. Paul was certainly favorable toward prophecy, but he was equally firm that prophetic utterances not be accepted uncritically.

In the event that a revelation should come to a prophet while another was speaking, it was imperative that they both did not speak simultaneously. The first speaker should humbly give preference to the other brother or sister, and eventually, all who had messages would be able to deliver them one at a time (providing, of course, that there were no more than three total).

As in tongues-speaking, the prophetic spirit was under the control of the one exercising it. If there was disorder, no one would be able to blame God by saying,

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<sup>39</sup>Barclay, 133.

<sup>40</sup>F. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 134.

"But the Spirit was so strong, I just couldn't help myself!" God does not create such confusion; only misled believers do!

### **The Order for Women's Behavior in the Service (14:33b-36)**

The last of Paul's injunctions regarding order has given rise to a controversial and heated discussion considerably beyond the exercise of spiritual gifts. What does Paul mean when he says, "Women should keep silent in the church?" If many interpreters seem strangely ambivalent about the subject, they are only so because Paul himself seems to be ambivalent.

#### *Paul's Ambivalence*

To adequately grasp why this passage is so controversial, one must observe some other things that Paul said about the same subject. On the one hand, he champions an ethic of freedom. Believers all stand on equal footing in Christ. All levels of dominant-submissive categories have been cancelled when one has been baptized into Christ (Ga. 3:26-27). Maleness and femaleness can no longer be used to differentiate between the value of individuals (Ga. 3:28). Although for the sake of cultural expectations, Paul requires women to be veiled if they speak publicly in the service, he nevertheless is apparently quite open to having women prophesy and pray in the congregation (1 Co. 11:5, 13). Of the long list of friends, co-workers and leaders in the church at Rome, many are women (Ro. 16). Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, is a fellow-worker who had been instrumental in the conversion of Apollos (Ro. 16:3; Ac. 18:18; 24-26).<sup>41</sup> Junias is an outstanding apostle who became a convert to Christianity even before Paul, prior to about AD 33 (Ro. 16:7). Though debatable, it is possible that women held the office of deacons in the early church (Ro. 16:1; 1 Tim. 3:11, cf. NIV footnotes for both passages). Certainly some women were gifted as prophets (Ac. 21:9).

Against this rather strong array of women's functional roles in the early church stand two statements that seem to say the very opposite (1 Co. 14:34-35; 1 Ti. 2:11-12). How are these various statements to be understood?

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<sup>41</sup>It has been suggested that Priscilla may have co-authored Hebrews, but this hypothesis is very difficult, cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1970), p. 696, 697.

### *Possible Approaches*

A gamut of possibilities have been presented regarding 1 Co. 14:34ff. which we shall only briefly list with their difficulties. Some would have it that Paul simply contradicts himself. For one who holds to the infallibility of Scripture, this solution is unacceptable. Equally unacceptable is the suggestion that this is a non-Pauline interpolation, since there is an absence of any clear manuscript evidence.<sup>42</sup> Others suggest that Paul forbids only the ordination of women. This position gives rise to even greater ambivalence in the modern church, where women may not be ordained, but they are allowed to teach Sunday School, give "sermonettes," conduct seminars, perform counseling, and go to the foreign missions fields. To the contrary, if 1 Co. 14:34 is to be taken at face value, it cannot be restricted to ordination or just certain kinds of leadership roles. Still others say that Paul forbids women to participate in the vocal gifts. This position faces the difficulty that Paul seems to endorse women who publicly prophesy (1 Co. 11). Could Paul only be forbidding women to speak in tongues? This approach must answer the difficulty that the immediately preceding verses address prophecy, not tongues. Such an interpretation is based on a misplaced antecedent.

Finally, it may be that Paul is dealing with only a local situation. Here the fact that Paul uses the plural term "in all the congregations" (*ekklēsiai*) seems to indicate a broader application than just to a single city.

### **Interpreting 1 Co. 14:33b-36**

The following approach is not without its difficulties also, but it seems to do justice to the text better than the other solutions. It may be that Paul here refers to a different level of discourse than in 1 Co. 11. There is good reason to take the word *gynaike*s as "wives" rather than simply as "women."<sup>43</sup> If this is so (and 14:35 fits well with such a translation), then Paul is not forbidding women *per se* to speak, but rather, he is forbidding wives to interrupt the worship service with irrelevant or disorderly questions. If they do not understand what is happening (and since women in the ancient world were usually not favored with the education of men, which no doubt contributed to their chances of

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<sup>42</sup>J. Reuf, *Paul's First Letter to Corinth* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 154-155.

<sup>43</sup>W. Orr and J. Walther, *I Corinthians [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976) 312-313.

misunderstanding), they must not break in upon the speaker to ask questions and so disrupt the service. They should be in submission to their husbands. In fact, it has been suggested that they may have been publicly contradicting or arguing with their husbands in the service.<sup>44</sup>

The fact that it was disgraceful for a woman to speak publicly was a common cultural standard in both Jewish and Greek societies.<sup>45</sup> Even though Paul permitted women to exercise their charismatic gifts, he realized the social stigma that would arise over women participating in open discussions. Having said all this, the remaining question still must be addressed as to whether or not Paul's injunctions are temporary, that is, for a particular culture in a particular era, or timeless, that is, for all cultures of all ages. This question may be answered by juxtaposing Paul's statements about women with his injunctions regarding slavery and the Jewish-Gentile problem.

It seems that Paul's ambivalent treatment of slaves and the Jewish-Gentile cultural distinctions parallel closely his ambivalent treatment of women. Paul's ethic of freedom extended to the slave-master relationship. He clearly declares that slave and free categories do not exist in Christ Jesus (Ga. 3:28). He counsels Philemon to receive his slave Onesimus as a brother in Christ (8-16). At the same time, he enjoins slaves to submit to their masters and commands masters to treat their slaves fairly (Ep. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22--4:1; 1 Ti. 6:1-2; Tit. 2:9-10). He counsels slaves not to fret over their slavery, but if they have the opportunity to gain freedom, they should do so (1 Co. 7:21). Does this mean that Paul endorsed slavery as a moral social institution? No necessarily! Yet for the time being, in order not to reduce the gospel to a catalyst for social upheaval, Paul gives regulations for master-slave relationships. His fundamental principle, however, is that in Christ these categories do not exist.

Paul espouses a similar ethic with respect to Jewish-Gentile cultures. Here again Paul seems ambivalent. He maintains that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek (Ga. 3:28). He boldly stands against the idea that his Gentile converts must be circumcised (Ac. 15:1-2; Ga. 2:3-5). Yet to pacify the Jews, Paul had Timothy circumcised and on another occasion he himself joined in Jewish purification rites (Ac. 16:3; 21:20-24, 26).

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<sup>44</sup>Orr and Walther, 313.

<sup>45</sup>Barclay, 136.

In all three of the dominant-submissive categories that Paul mentions in Ga. 3:28, Paul seems to be ambivalent. On one occasion he goes one way and on another occasion he goes the opposite. Is there a harmonizing principle that can explain this curious behavior? The best explanation is found in 1 Co. 9:19-23. "Paul's behavior is rescued from being unprincipled by one thing alone: his goal."<sup>46</sup> Paul is guided by the all-encompassing principle that he will not allow secondary issues to cloud the primary issue--the preaching of the gospel. Paul willingly accommodates himself to the mores of society as far as necessary "for the sake of the gospel." If the questions of slavery, cultural practices and women's rights obscure the good news about Jesus, Paul is willing to forego addressing these issues in preference for the primary cause, the gospel. This does not mean that Paul had nothing to say to these issues. To the contrary, he unequivocally declares his position of freedom and equality in Ga. 3:28. Nevertheless, in practical circumstances Paul was flexible enough to forego his convictions for the present time.

In light of this discussion, Paul's statements in 1 Co. 14:34-36 are culturally accommodated to the first century. They are not a rule for all time.

### **Concluding Remarks (14:37-40)**

Paul's concluding remarks stress the importance of following the injunctions he has given. Spiritual gifts in no way permitted one to ignore apostolic authority. Spiritual gifts are open to evaluation and discrimination, while apostolic authority is not! Paul wishes not to stifle anyone's gift, yet he holds firm the need for orderliness and propriety.

### **The Nature of Spiritual Worship: Romans 12:1-21**

The word "spiritual" receives a lot of press among Christians without much uniform understanding of the word. It may mean anything from mystical to devotional to enthusiastic. A "spiritual church" is sometimes directly equated with a particular set of worship forms or a worship style. What exactly does it mean to participate in spiritual worship?

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<sup>46</sup>P. Richardson, *Paul's Ethic of Freedom* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979) 87.

### **The Basic Meaning of Spiritual Worship (12:1-2)**

The words translated "spiritual worship" (NIV, RSV, NASB, etc.), are worthy of special comment. In the classical period of the language, *latreia* (= worship) meant:<sup>47</sup>

*...the state of a hired laborer (as opposed to a slave)*

*...divine worship or service to the gods*

*...service to the gods with prayers and/or sacrifices*

In the LXX, the word is used of Israel's worship. In the New Testament period, it means adoration and/or worship.<sup>48</sup> Thus, in the Bible it is used to indicate service or worship to God.

*Logikos* (= spiritual) has reference to that which belongs to the mind rather than the senses.<sup>49</sup> It is that which belongs to reason. Thus, the word as used here carries overtones of both "spiritual" and "rational."<sup>50</sup>

Spiritual worship has little to do with style, enthusiasm or mystical, other-worldly worship forms. It has primarily to do with service to God that makes good, practical sense. This is why modern English versions give renderings such as:

*...this is the worship due from you as rational creatures* (Knox)

*...as an act of intelligent worship* (Phillips)

Notice how closely Paul's teaching here corresponds to his instructions regarding the intelligibility of Christian worship in 1 Corinthians 14. True spiritual worship involves the commitment of oneself to the service of God. It means the refusal to be molded by one's worldly environment and the active transformation of oneself into the pattern God has ordained.

<sup>47</sup>H. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: University Press, 1968) 1032.

<sup>48</sup>Moulton and Milligan, 371.

<sup>49</sup>G. Kittel, *TDNT* (1967) IV.142-143.

<sup>50</sup>C. Brown, *NIDNTT* (1978) III.1118-1119.

### **A Proper Perspective Toward one's Gifts (12:3)**

In one sense, the will of God is the same for all believers--total commitment (12:1-2). Yet in another sense, the will of God is diverse for all believers in that all believers are not gifted identically. All believers may be gifted, but all do not have the same gifts. Using the gifts God has given in an attitude of humility is very important. The elevation of some gifts over others, which was the severe problem in the Corinthian congregation, is addressed here as well. To avoid such pride, Paul reminds the Romans of two things. First, their attitudes toward gifts must be in accord with how well each of them grasped the nature of their gift and how well they exercised it. The phrase "measure of faith" in this verse parallels the phrase "proportion of faith" in 12:6. This is not saving faith, but faith for serving. Essentially, Paul is saying, "Know yourself and the limits of your gifts." If God has not given someone a gift that others have, he/she need not fret nor attempt to force the issue. Second, the measure of faith to exercise spiritual gifts is not self-generated. It is the gift of God which is given according to his sovereign purpose. The idea that one can choose his/her gifts, like filling in a blank check, is directly against the clear teaching of Scripture (cf. 1 Co. 12:11, 18; He. 2:4). Recognizing that spiritual gifts are indeed gifts helps one to guard against pride.

### **The Metaphor of the Body (12:4-5)**

As in the First Corinthian letter (1 Co. 12:12-27), Paul describes the members of the church as a body. The gifts of each member are functions of the various parts of the body. The parts of the body are diverse, but each contributes a different function or gift for the good of the whole. Every member may not have the same function or gift, but in another sense, every individual's function or gift belongs to every other member, since the body is a unified organism.

### **A List of Seven Charisms (12:6-8)**

Paul says that since spiritual abilities are given through the unmerited favor of God, Christians should exercise these abilities as God enables them. As in 1 Corinthians, Paul proceeds to give a list of spiritual gifts. However, it is instructive to notice that this gift-list differs considerably from the one in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. In 1 Corinthians, Paul was directly addressing a problem concerning certain kinds of gifts which the Corinthians were abusing. Paul had never seen the Romans (Ro. 15:23-24), however, and since he was not addressing



an abuse of certain gifts, he lists the sort of gifts which are more general and probably which were more common among the early churches, gifts with which the Romans would no doubt be familiar. If any gift-list in the New Testament deserves to be taken as general and/or as normative for the church, this list is the best candidate.

Since the gift of prophecy and the gifts of teaching are discussed elsewhere, here we shall concentrate on the remaining five.<sup>51</sup>

### *Serving*

The word *diakonia* (= service) is a broad term that can describe ministries as widely diverse as the function of an apostle (1 Ti. 1:12) or the giving of food to the poor (Ac. 6:1). Here, Paul is probably not thinking in narrow terms but in the general perspective of practical Christianity. However the act of serving is to be understood theoretically, it always has a very practical connotation.

### *Encouraging*

The word *parakaleo* normally carries the ideas of encouragement, exhortation or consolation. Quite literally, it means to "call to one's side," but it takes on the above deeper meaning in normal usage.

### *Contributing with Simplicity*

This gift describes spontaneous, private benevolence. The word translated "generously" means simply, free of mixed motives and without regret.<sup>52</sup>

### *Leadership/Administration*

*Proistemi* means to manage, conduct, govern or be at the head.<sup>53</sup> Paul is aware that a person in a position of leadership is tempted to enjoy the office rather than use it as an avenue of service. Hence, he says that those gifted with leadership ability should exercise their gift with diligence.

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<sup>51</sup>Prophecy is discussed in the comments on 1 Co. 12:8-10, and the offices of prophets and teachers will be handled in the context of Ep. 4:11.

<sup>52</sup>E. Harrison, *Romans [EBC]*, ed. Frank Gabelein Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 131.

<sup>53</sup>BAG (1979) 707.

### *Showing Mercy*

This expression often has to do with ministering to the sick and needy.<sup>54</sup> The point, of course, is that such mercy is to be shown with cheerfulness so as not to encourage the sufferer to indulge in self-pity or negativism.

### **The Character of Christian Love (12:9-21)**

Just how closely these verses are to be connected with the preceding charisms is difficult to determine. Nevertheless, if Paul makes a direct connection in the First Corinthian letter between gifts and love, it seems reasonable to assume that here he also assumes that Christian character that should underlie the gifts he has just mentioned. It is worth noting that in this section Paul's description of Christian love moves well beyond the conventional boundaries of the Christian fellowship and into the world of the unbeliever. Following are some of the key words that highlight this section:<sup>55</sup>

**12:9** Sincere (*anypokritos*) = unassuming, without hypocrisy

**12:10** Be devoted (*philostorgoi*) = loving warmly as members of one family

Brotherly love (*philadelphia*) = love to those who are of common descent

Above yourselves (*proegoumenoi*) = first of all, above all

**12:11** Zeal (*spoude*) = eagerness, diligence, earnestness, attentiveness

Spiritual fervor (*pneumati zeontes*) = lit., burning, boiling, seething in Spirit; "be aglow with the Spirit" (RSV)

Serving (*douleuonter*) = to perform the duties of a slave, or to perform loving service

**12:12** Be joyful (*chairontes*) = rejoicing, being glad

Patient (*hypomenontes*) = showing endurance (from the Greek words "to stay" and "under")

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<sup>54</sup>Harrison, 131.

<sup>55</sup>Sources in addition to those cited are the commentaries on Romans by William Barclay, Matthew Black, F. F. Bruce and John Murray.

Faithful (*proskarterountes*) = continuing steadfastly, persevering

**12:13** Share (*koinonountes*) = give, contribute a share

Practice (*diokontes*) = to pursue

Hospitality (philozenian) = hospitality, love of strangers

**12:14** Bless (*eulogeite*) = to invoke God's blessing upon someone

**12:15** Here the idea is empathy and sympathy (i.e., do not rebuke one who is grieving as though Christians ought never to grieve; instead, share in his/her grief)

**12:16** Live in harmony (*to auto phonountes*) = not necessarily seeing eye to eye, but rather, exhibiting respect and concord as opposed to discord and contention

Willing to associate with (*synapagomenoi*) = to be carried away or led off enthusiastically

People of low position (*tois tapeinois*) = this could refer either to people or things (the Greek text is not definite); thus, it means either persons in humble circumstances or else lowly tasks

Conceited (*phronimoi par heautois*) = literally wise with yourselves, that is, opinionated with no regard for the judgments of others

**12:17** Do what is right (*pronooumevoi kala*) = lit., providing good things; "let your aim be such as all men count honorable" (NEB)

**12:18** The phrase "if it is possible" is directly parallel to the phrase "as far as it depends on you" so that the two phrases explain each other

**12:19** Leave room (*dote topon*) = to give place to (it may be observed that the word "God" is not in the text, but it is implied)

**12:20** The phrase "heap burning coals on his head" is taken from Pro. 25:21-22. It may mean to treat your enemy kindly, thus increasing his shame and encouraging him toward repentance (cf. 1 Sa. 24:1ff. and 26:1ff.), or it might even refer to an ancient custom in which a man publicly showed his repentance by carrying a pan of burning charcoal on his head (Bruce). In either case, the object is not vengeance but repentance and change.

**12:21** Overcome (*niko*) = to conquer, as in a battle or an athletic contest

## **The Gifts of Leadership and Proclamation: Ephesians 4:7-16**

In Ephesians 4, there is a final, extended Pauline passage that treats spiritual gifts.<sup>56</sup> The familiar themes and metaphors that have already surfaced in 1 Corinthians 12-14 and Romans 12 are to be found here as well, that is, God's sovereignty over the gifts, a selective gift-list, the imagery of the body, and the underlying motive of love.

### **God's Sovereignty Over Spiritual Gifts (Ep. 4:7-10)**

Paul here emphasizes two very important aspects of spiritual gifts that have been emphasized before. First, spiritual gifts are given through the volition of God, not through the volition of the one who receives them. Notice the parallelism between the following statements:

- ♦ "to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it" (Ep. 4:7)
- ♦ "think....in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you" (Ro. 12:3)
- ♦ "the same God works all of them in all men" (1 Co. 12:6)
- ♦ "God has arranged the parts in the body....just as he wanted them to be" (1 Co. 12:18)
- ♦ "God has appointed...." (1 Co. 12:28)
- ♦ "God testified by....gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will" (He. 2:4)

The second emphasis is that every believer is gifted in some way! The construction here in Ep. 4:7 is very emphatic. *Heni de ekasto hemon* (lit., "but to each one of us") is a strong statement and has the force of saying "every individual among us." Compare the consistency of this idea with other passages:

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<sup>56</sup>It may be remembered that Paul also briefly mentions gifts in 1 Co. 1:5; 7:7; 2 Co. 8:7; however, these references are merely passing.

- ♦ "to each one of us grace has been given...." (Ep. 4:7)
- ♦ "I say to every one of you....think....in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you" (Ro. 12:3)
- ♦ "to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given...." (1 Co. 12:7)
- ♦ "God has arranged the parts....every one of them...." (1 Co. 12:18)
- ♦ "you are the body....each one of you is a part of it" (1 Co. 12:27)

Paul does not use the familiar word *charismata* in this passage, but he does use the word *charis* (= grace), which is the root of the former and should be understood as meaning the same thing.<sup>57</sup> All gifts are grace-gifts; they flow out of God's gracious purposes.

Paul alludes in verse 8 to Ps. 68:18, which in turn describes a victory procession after a successful battle. God has won the victory, he has received tribute from his conquered foes, and he has shared the booty of his victory with his people.<sup>58</sup> No citizen of the Roman world would be ignorant of such an idea, for the triumphant processions of the Roman generals were well-known in which hundreds of war prisoners would be paraded in public shame through the streets behind the returning generals. The victory of Christ, then, refers to his triumph over the powers of evil on the cross (cf. Col. 2:15). The benefits of his victory are the spiritual gifts which he graciously bestows on believers.

There is little question that Paul uses the phrase "he ascended" to refer to Christ's ascension into the heavens after his resurrection. However, the phrase "he descended to the lower, earthly regions" is capable of two interpretations. First, it could refer to the incarnation. This seems to be a natural interpretation, since it would clearly contrast with Christ's ascension into the heavens. As such, the "lower, earthly regions" would refer simply to the earth itself as the sphere that is under the heavens. In this interpretation, Christ's descent is his incarnation into the world of humans. Other interpreters, including many of the Ante-Nicene fathers, understand the "lower, earthly regions" to refer to Hades, the abode of the

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<sup>57</sup>F. Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians [TNTC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) 14; J. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979) 155.

<sup>58</sup>D. Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973) 242.

dead, and call upon several other passages to support this view (e.g., Ac. 2:27; Ro. 10:6-7; 1 Pe. 3:19; 4:6). It will not be germane to the subject of spiritual gifts to explore these two options. Either are possible, and evangelicals have taken the reference in both ways.

#### **Four Charisms of Leadership and Proclamation (Ep. 4:11)**

Once more Paul gives a selective list of spiritual gifts, this time all oriented toward leadership and proclamation.

##### *Apostles*

The word "apostle" generally describes a messenger, an ambassador or an envoy in both classical and koine Greek.<sup>59</sup> It is formed from two words, *stello* (= I send) and *apo* (= from), and means "one sent forth." In the New Testament, the word apostle is capable of more than one nuance of meaning. In the widest sense, it may simply refer to any individual Christian (cf. Jn. 13:16). In one passage, it refers specifically to Jesus Christ (He. 3:1). However, usually it is used in two other special ways.

One is of the twelve apostles. Jesus chose from among his disciples twelve representatives which in a special way symbolized a new Israel and the new community of faith just as the twelve sons of Jacob represented the old Israel (Mt. 10:2; Lk. 6:13; Ac. 1:2; etc.).<sup>60</sup> These twelve men were especially gifted to perform miracles, healings and exorcisms, and they were especially commissioned to proclaim the good news about the kingdom of God (Mt. 10:7, 8; Lk. 9:1-2; 2 Co. 12:12; He. 2:3-4). Furthermore, they were marked by the unique qualifications of having personally been with Jesus in his earthly ministry (Mk. 3:14; Ac. 1:21-22a; Jn. 15:17) and by having been eyewitnesses of his resurrection (Ac. 1:22b; 2:32; 3:15; 10:39-40; 13:30-31). They were assured that the Holy Spirit would enable them to clearly remember the deeds and words of Jesus so as to give an authoritative witness to all future believers (Jn. 14:26; 17:6-8, 14, 18.). In this sense, the office of apostleship is nonrecurring. There are twelve apostles in this definition and only twelve (Re. 21:14).

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<sup>59</sup>Liddell and Scott; Moulton and Milligan.

<sup>60</sup>G. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 352-353; W. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 132-133.

The word apostle is also used of missionaries and church leaders. Besides the very narrow group of twelve apostles, there is a broader understanding of the word in the New Testament. A number of leaders in the early church were designated as apostles besides those whom Jesus chose in his earthly ministry (Ac. 14:4, 14; Ro. 16:7; 2 Co. 8:23; Ga. 1:19; Phil. 2:25; 1 Th. 1:1, 7). Some of these persons undoubtedly had seen Jesus during his earthly life, but others probably had not. Paul, of course, had a special personal encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road (Ac. 9:3-5; 1 Co. 9:1; 15:8), and James the Just, the brother of the Lord, surely knew Jesus even though he was not a believer until after Christ's death (Jn. 7:3-5). Barnabas' personal knowledge of Jesus is unknown, while Andronicus and Junias are less likely to have been personally acquainted with Jesus than those mentioned in 2 Co. 8:23. It is a certainty that Epaphroditus, a gentile convert from Philippi, had no personal knowledge of Jesus. This looser use of the word apostle comes close to our modern terms "messenger" and "missionary". Paul, for instance, frequently describes his apostleship in terms of his missionary task (Ro. 1:1; Ga. 1:15-17; 1 Ti. 2:7, etc.), and on one occasion he declared that even if no one else recognized him as an apostle, he should be so recognized by those with whom he had shared the gospel (1 Co. 9:2). However, it should also be noted that some of these Christians were regarded as authoritative leaders among the churches beyond the sense of being missionaries or messengers (Ac. 15:13; 21:18; Ga. 2:9; 2 Co. 11:5; 12:11).

Unless there is a specific reason to think otherwise, it is probable that when Paul uses the term apostle without designating particular names, he is referring to those whose authoritative leadership was recognized by all the churches (Ep. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11). These apostolic offices were prioritized as the most important of the spiritual gifts (1 Co. 12:28).

Of course, the question arises as to whether there may be apostles today. Obviously, by very definition, no more can be added to the original twelve. In the broader sense of missionaries and leaders the term apostle may fit, but if it is to be used at all it must be used with extreme care so as not to invest a modern figure with the authority of the original apostles who are foundational to the church (Ep. 2:20). It would probably be best to avoid the term altogether and forestall any confusion.

### *Prophets*

The word "prophet" in classical Greek indicates primarily a proclaimer and/or an interpreter of divine oracles, and this definition holds true for the Koine Period

as well.<sup>61</sup> In the Old Testament the prophet was first of all a person of the Word, that is, one who communicated God's Word to his/her fellow humans. He/she was both a seer into the future as well as a preacher regarding the sins of his/her own generation.

There is a continuity to be seen between the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament prophets. The Old Testament prophetic line culminated in John the Baptist (as opposed to Malachi, Mt. 11:13), and examples of Old Testament prophecy are to be seen in the events surrounding the birth of Jesus by Mary, Zechariah, Simeon and Anna (Lk. 1:46-55, 67-79; 2:26-38). Jesus himself claimed to be a prophet (Mt. 13:57), and the apostles came to realize that he was the great fulfillment of Moses' prediction, the eschatological prophet *par excellence* (Dt. 18:15ff; Ac. 3:22ff.).

Christ promised that he would yet send more prophets who would be martyred (Mt. 23:34). The persecutions of Stephen, James and Paul seem very apt fulfillments of this prediction (Ac. 7:54ff.; 12:2; 2 Co. 11:23-28). The prediction of Joel that prophetic gifts would be abundantly given in the latter days is understood to be fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Jl. 2:28-29; Ac. 2:17-18).

It is uncertain how much of a distinction may be drawn between prophecy as a function and the prophetic office as a position. Obviously, certain people in the apostolic era were clearly regarded as prophets (Ac. 11:27-28); however, it is unclear whether everyone who prophesied was also considered to be a prophet (e.g., Ac. 2:17-18; 19:6; etc.). For our purposes, we will treat these categories separately while bearing in mind the need to avoid severing the connection between them.

### *Prophecy as a Functional Gift*

In the Old Testament, the idea of prophecy was sufficiently broad enough to include:

- ♦ Prediction (common in the classical prophets)

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<sup>61</sup>Liddell and Scott; Moulton and Milligan.



- ♦ Ethical preaching (common in the classical prophets)
- ♦ Praise and worship (e.g., Nu. 11:25-29; 1 Sa. 10:5-6, 10-13; 1 Chr. 25:1-3)
- ♦ Reiteration of truths already given in scripture (e.g., the 8th century prophets recalled Israel to her covenant obligations)

In the New Testament, the concept of prophecy is equally broad and includes: Revelation (1 Co. 14:30-31)

- ♦ Proclamation (1 Co. 14:22)
- ♦ Prediction (Ac. 11:27-28)
- ♦ Encouragement and building up the congregation (Ac. 15:32; 1 Co. 14:3)
- ♦ Praise and worship (Ac. 2:11, 17-18; 19:6)

It seems feasible to see the prophetic gift at work in many areas where the word prophecy is itself not used, such as, in the phrases "preaching," "teaching," "declaring," "testifying," "proclaiming" and "warning" (Ac. 20:20-31). It is instructive to briefly list some of the characteristics and controls which the New Testament puts on prophecy as a functional gift:

- ♦ Prophetic gifts are given without sexual discrimination (Ac. 2:17-18; 21:9; 1 Co. 11:5).
- ♦ They are imperfect (1 Co. 13:9).
- ♦ They are temporary, that is, they shall cease to be functional when Christ returns (1 Co. 13:8-10).
- ♦ They are under the control of the one exercising them (1 Co. 14:30-33).
- ♦ They are subject to control by apostolic authority, i.e., by Scripture (1 Co. 14:37-38).
- ♦ They are not to be received without serious evaluation (Mt. 7:15-23; 24:11, 24; 1 Co. 12:29; 1 Th. 5:20-21; 2 Pe. 2:1; 1 Jn. 4:1-3).

### *Prophethood as a Positional Gift*

The office of prophethood must in some sense be distinguished from the

functional gift of prophecy. The gift of prophecy is potentially available to all believers (Ac. 2:17-18; 1 Co. 14:1, 5), while the office of prophethood is not (Ep. 2:20; 3:5). Prophethood as a positional gift is prioritized by Paul as being second only to that of apostles (1 Co. 12:28).

The question is debated as to whether or not there are prophets for the modern church. Generally, the argument against recognizing prophets today is built upon the assumption that prophethood carries with it the automatic privilege of speaking on a level with Scripture. However, this assumption is highly questionable. We agree with the conclusion of J. P. Baker:

*All may agree that there is no new revelation to be expected concerning God in Christ, the way of salvation, the principles of the Christian life, etc. But there appears to be no good reason why the living God, who both speaks and acts (in contrast to the dead idols), cannot use the gift of prophecy to give particular local guidance to a church, nation or individual, or to warn or encourage by way of prediction as well as by reminders, in full accord with the written word of Scripture, by which all such utterances must be tested. Certainly the NT does not see it as the job of the prophet to be a doctrinal innovator, but to deliver the word the Spirit gives him in line with the truth once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3), to challenge and encourage our faith.<sup>62</sup>*

### *Evangelists*

The word *euangelistes*, translated "evangelist," is a cognate of *euangelion* (= good news or gospel) and *euangelizo* (= to announce good news). In classical Greek, it was used as a title for Hermes, the spokesman for Zeus.<sup>63</sup> In the New Testament, it appears three times as a description of one who preaches the gospel (cf. Ac. 21:8; 2 Ti. 4:5; Ep. 4:11). The word may describe a traveling missionary or anyone who shares the good news about Jesus, and the verbal form is used frequently in the Book of Acts in this way. It may also be used of someone in a

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<sup>62</sup>J. Baker, "Prophecy, Prophets," *NBD* (1982) 985.

<sup>63</sup>Liddell and Scott, loc. cit.

pastoral and local role, as in the case of Timothy who is exhorted to do evangelistic work. (2 Ti. 4:5).

### *Pastors-Teachers*

While there is a distinction to be made between pastors and teachers (i.e., all teachers may not necessarily be pastors), it is important to notice that Paul treats them here in a nexus. In New Testament Greek grammar, it is generally recognized that if two nouns are connected with and preceded by only one article, then both nouns refer to the same thing.<sup>64</sup> As such, one should think of the phrase "pastors and teachers" as akin to an English hyphenation, i.e., "pastors-teachers."

The word pastor (*poimen*) quite literally means "sheep-herder." It is used, for instance, of the shepherds who visited the manger in Bethlehem (Lk. 3:8ff.) and in Jesus' parable of the good shepherd (Jn. 10:2ff.). The Greek usage of the word for a leader in a community goes all the way back to Homer, and in the LXX it was occasionally used of the leaders of Israel (e.g., Jer. 2:8).<sup>65</sup> In the New Testament it only appears one time in reference to a congregational leader, although several times there appear the corollary ideas of Christian leaders feeding the congregation like sheep (Jn. 21:16; Ac. 20:28; 1 Co. 9:7; 1 Pe. 5:2) and of the congregation being like a flock (Ac. 20:28-29; 1 Pe. 5:2-3). Much more commonly used in the New Testament are the words *presbyteros* (usually translated "elder") and *episkopos* (usually rendered "overseer" or "bishop"). That these three words approximate the same office seems clear in the way that they are used. Both the words "oversee" and "elder" are co-joined with the idea of shepherding (Ac. 20:28; 1 Pe. 5:1-2), and the word "elder" is used interchangeably with the word "overseer" (Ac. 20:17, 28). Therefore it seems best to avoid any hierarchical or functional difference between pastors, elders and overseers. They are rough synonyms for each other as leaders in the church.

The idea of shepherding in the New Testament is primarily concerned with feeding and/or caring for the church (Jn. 21:16; Ac. 20:28; 1 Co. 9:7; 1 Pe. 5:2). Such a metaphor includes the role of guarding against those who would destroy the unity and faith of the congregation (Ac. 20:28-31) as well as the role of providing sound teaching (1 Co. 3:2; 1 Ti. 3:2; Tit. 1:9; He. 5:12-13; 1 Pe. 2:2).

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<sup>64</sup>Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1957) 146-149.

<sup>65</sup>Liddell and Scott, loc. cit.

Sound teaching, of course, must be built upon a proper interpretation of Scripture (1 Ti. 1:3-11). The concept of a single pastor who dictates to a docile and slightly stupid congregation is unbiblical. The model of the New Testament congregation is neither a pyramid (with the pastor as the capstone) or a bus (with the passengers leaving all the driving to one person). Rather, it is a body with multiple leadership and an arena in which every believer is a priest!<sup>66</sup>

### **The Function and Purpose of the Gifts of Leadership and Proclamation (Ep. 4:12-16)**

One of the most unfortunate ideas that still plagues the church is that the leadership in the church is supposed to do all the ministering. Admittedly, the leadership itself has sometimes been a primary dispenser of this unbiblical idea, whether intentional or not. Also, the misleading KJV translation in Ephesians 4:12 is partly at fault. Instead, the primary goal of leadership in the church is to help each member toward maturity so that each member may discover and use whatever gifts God has given him/her. It is not the leadership alone who should be doing "works of service," but all of God's people. Leadership is given to aid the members of the congregation in discovering how they can serve, and then giving them the opportunity to do so! It is the church itself--every member fulfilling his/her own particular function--that causes growth, builds maturity and exercises ministry.

The richness with which Paul describes this picture of the church is to be seen in several key ideas. The phrase "prepare God's people" uses the word *katartismos*, which means to equip through training and discipline.<sup>67</sup> It was used in secular Greek to refer to "the things for the furnishing of the guest chamber."<sup>68</sup> Thus, all believers are to be equipped or prepared to serve! Several phrases express the idea of maturity, and to appreciate their full impact it is helpful to see them together:

... *so that the body of Christ may be built up*

... *until we....become mature*

<sup>66</sup>Stott, 167.

<sup>67</sup>BAG (1979) loc. cit.

<sup>68</sup>Moulton and Milligan, loc. cit.

... *attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*

... *we will no longer be infants*

... *we will in all things grow up into him*

... *the whole body....grows and builds itself up*

Maturity, as described here, means a full-rounded Christian life, which includes unity in the faith and unity in the knowledge of God's Son. Earlier, Paul spoke of unity as an established fact (Ep. 2:14-18). Later he describes unity as something that must be maintained (Ep. 4:3). Here, he speaks of unity as a goal. Unity (which is not to be confused with uniformity or conformity) is a mark of maturity. Disunity, jealousy, partyism, and so forth, are clear evidences of immaturity (cf. 1 Co. 3:1ff.). Unity in the faith means the oneness which believers experience in their common bond of faith in Christ's person and work. Unity in the knowledge of God's Son refers to the common understanding of the central truths of Christian teaching and the refusal to divide from each other over debatable or unclear issues. Paul described the central truths of the Christian faith as the believer's hope, as the power of God who raised Christ from the dead, and as the headship of Christ over the church and the universe (Ep. 1:17-23). The words of the pseudonymous Rupertus Meldeniensis bear repeating:<sup>69</sup>

*In Essentials Unity,*

*In Doubtful Matters Liberty,*

*In All Things Charity.*

Maturity must be measured against the character of Jesus Christ. Christ is the model! Believers are to "grow up into him." Maturity produces stability because the mature person has sufficient knowledge so as not to be swayed by every unfounded opinion. The mature person is able to evaluate and sift the evidence. He/she is not impressed by bombast (cf. He. 5:14). There is a difference between refusing to give ground on critical issues and refusing to be swayed because of stubbornness or naivete. The one is born of maturity, the other of intellectual

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<sup>69</sup>M. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) 184.

dullness.

As always, the motivation behind Christian growth and service is love. The believer is to "speak the truth in love," that is, he/she should be interested not only in the content of truth, but also in the manner in which truth is to be conveyed. The growth of the body is motivated by the mutual love of its members.

In a manner similar to the passage in 1 Co. 12:12ff, Paul describes the principle of mutuality in the church. Every member of the body is connected with every other member by "every supporting ligament." The idea here is mutual support and coordination. Every spiritual gift and function is interrelated and important for the working of the whole organism. Every member contributes. Every member should give support to every other member. In this way, the body fosters its own growth.

## **Discovering Your Gift**

In concluding this study of spiritual gifts, perhaps the most difficult task of all may be a practical one, that is, the task of finding a way to help believers analyze themselves so as to discover how they fit into the body. How convenient it would be to just turn to a certain passage in one of Paul's letters and read: "Here is how you can know what your spiritual functions in the church are...." Such is not possible, for no New Testament passage addresses this question in this way. We are largely left on our own to discover and implement the Spirit-given functions and abilities with which God has gifted us.

## **Basic Principles**

A summary of some fundamental truths about spiritual gifts is in order.

- ♦ Every believer is Spirit-filled.
- ♦ Every believer is spiritually gifted.
- ♦ Spiritual gifts are not merited or earned--they are freely given according to God's choice.
- ♦ All gifts are important, even if all are not spectacular.
- ♦ Spiritual gifts are not a measurement of Christian maturity.
- ♦ No spiritual gift is universal within the body of believers.

- ♦ All gifts, as imperfect and incomplete reflections of God, shall ultimately cease.
- ♦ Only love will last forever.

Every believer should recognize the extent and limits of his/her gifts. The primary purpose of gifts are not for the benefit of the individual but for the benefit of the body of believers, even though some gifts also bring personal edification.

### **The Idea of Discovery**

Some may question the legitimacy of the idea of "discovering" one's spiritual gifts, but this sort of serendipity seems to be implied if not stated in the New Testament. If all believers are gifted by God (and they are), and if the New Testament does not give precise instructions for identifying within oneself any particular gift (and it does not), then "discovery" seems to be the only alternative left. To possess a gift but not to use it, because one does not know he/she has it, can hardly be held up as the New Testament ideal. To the contrary, Paul urges the Christian believer to use his/her gifts in proportion to faith (Ro. 12:6).

For lack of a better term, we may say that an important step toward discovering one's gift(s) is to analyze his/her inclinations. An inclination toward a particular thing may not necessarily mean that this is the area in which God wishes that person to function. However, Paul says such things as, "...eagerly desire spiritual gifts..." (1 Co. 14:1) and "...if anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted..." (1 Co. 14:37) and "...if anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task..." (1 Ti. 3:1). Such language seems to legitimize the idea of taking one's inclinations as a starting point. As such, some Christians have put together guides intended to help the believer work through this area in a practical and logical way.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>One such example is T. Blanchard, *A Practical Guide to Finding and Using Your Spiritual Gifts* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1983). This guide takes the reader through a battery of questions so as to take inventory of inclinations and abilities. Its major weakness (some would consider this to be an advantage) is that since it has a non-charismatic orientation, no questions are posed or inventory taken toward any of the gifts that are favored by Charismatics (i.e., tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing and miracles). The gift of prophecy is addressed only under the rubric of preaching. Still, the guide may be helpful in the areas of the other gifts. Some churches may even wish to develop their own questionnaires. One such effort, under the direction of Kerwin Stover, was produced by the congregation of Faith Lutheran Church in Troy, Michigan with a battery of over one hundred questions and a response form for church members who completed the questionnaire. Other similar works are the "Modified Houts

Dr. C. Peter Wagner has offered a set of prerequisites and steps which may be of help to some:<sup>71</sup>

*Prerequisites to Discovering a Spiritual Gift:*

First, one must be a believer. All spiritual gifts are resident in the Holy Spirit which God gives to those who put their faith in Christ Jesus as Lord.

Second, one must believe in spiritual gifts. In fact, one must acknowledge that God has already given to him/her a spiritual function(s) within the church.

Third, one has to be willing to serve. God has equipped all believers to serve, but they must be serious about serving. Apathy is deadly!

Fourth, one must pray. Reliance upon God's direction and the active seeking of his direction is imperative.

*Steps to Discovering a Spiritual Gift*

The following steps are not some sort of infallible guide. They are merely suggestions to aid one who is seeking.

Explore the Possibilities: Primarily, this foregoing study on spiritual gifts has been an exploration of what the New Testament said about spiritual gifts. Become familiar with the gifts which are described in the New Testament!

Experiment: Obviously some gifts do not lend themselves very easily to experimentation (e.g., martyrdom, etc.). However, many if not most of the gifts mentioned in the New Testament do lend themselves to experimentation (e.g., serving, encouraging, generosity, showing mercy, assistance, administration, teaching, hospitality, and so forth).

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Questionnaire" with a Leader's Guide and Workbook, available from Fuller Evangelistic Association, Box 989, Pasadena, CA 91102; "Spiritual Gifts Inventory" by Gordon McMinn with computer scoring, available from Western Baptist Seminary Bookstore, 5511 S. E. Hawthorne Blvd., Portland, OR 97215; "Nexus," a game intended to help discover spiritual gifts, available from The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 127 Ninth Ave. North, Nashville, TN 37234.

<sup>71</sup>C. Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1979) 113ff.



Examine Your Feelings: While granting the subjectivity of this effort, it is reasonable to assume that there will be a spiritual self-fulfillment in whatever function that God wishes a person to perform.

Evaluate Your Effectiveness: Spiritual gifts are not products of wishful thinking but functions that work! If you try a particular gift-task and cannot do it, chances are that such a function is not your place in the body.

Expect Confirmation from the Church: If someone thinks he/she is gifted in a particular way, but no other believers seem to think so, then he/she probably is not. This step gives balance to the personal feelings a person may have which, while important, are not infallible.