

Spiritual Gifts

A 12-part lesson on the supernatural gifting of the Holy Spirit to build up Christ's church.

I am indebted to several authors for their excellent work on this subject. This series was taught for an adult Sunday school at Signal Mountain Bible Church in 1998. Because it was not intended as a reference work, little or no attribution was given. I am older now, and have slept since then, so it is difficult if not impossible to remember who said what and where. However, I can tell you my main sources after Scripture were D. A. Carson's truly excellent book "Showing the Spirit" and J. I. Packer's "Keep in Step with the Spirit." To ensure both sides of the continuation/cessation debate were represented, Jack Deere's "Surprised by the Power of the Spirit," and John MacArthur's "Study Guide on Spiritual Gifts" got their points across with great firmness, if not always equally great effectiveness.

1. Introduction to the Gifts

Talk about "spiritual gifts" in any congregation of believers and you will discover you are in an area of general confusion and uncertainty. Where the gifts are concerned, you may also find division and judgment, more heat with relatively little light. It is common to find that while a decent percentage of any Bible-believing congregation will have a sense as to what their spiritual gifts might be, few are prepared to say that they have a good understanding of *all* the gifts, which illustrates an obvious problem.

The Problem

On the one hand, we know something of the gifts, having experienced them, and probably through one or two sermons, or even some self-study. On the other hand, they remain somewhat elusive. There are a number of reasons for this. There are a lot of spiritual gifts named in the Scriptures, and perhaps we don't know how they relate to one another or what the difference between them may be. Some gifts are said to have passed away, while others say that all gifts remain.

On this we will probably agree: We know less about the gifts than we should. Lord willing, at the end of this study we'll be started towards a more mature understanding of the gifts and what they mean to us.

The Scope of our Study

First things first – what qualifies as a spiritual gift, and what does not? D. A. Carson, in his excellent book, "Showing the Spirit," summarizes the various lists of gifts from the Scriptures below:

1 Cor. 12:8-11	1 Cor. 12:28	Rom. 12:6-8	Eph. 4:11	1 Peter 4:11
Word of wisdom	Apostles	Prophecy	Apostles	Speaking
Word of knowledge	Prophets	Service	Prophets	Service
Faith	Teachers	Teaching	Evangelists	
Gifts of healings	Workers of miracles	Exhortation	Pastors	
Working of miracles	Helps	Giving	Teachers	
Prophecy	Administration	Leadership		
Distinguishing of spirits	Kinds of tongues	Showing of mercy		
Kinds of tongues				
Interpretation of tongues				

The number of the gifts listed above is 21 or 22, depending on what we do with Pastors and Teachers in Ephesians 4:11 (many combine these into one office, Pastor-Teacher). There are three things that we should be aware of as we begin our study.

1. I don't believe these lists were intended to be exhaustive. It is clear that there are "varieties of gifts" (1 Cor. 12:4) and none of these lists appears to be attempting to encapsulate them all. More on that in just a minute.
2. We shouldn't infer too much, or maybe anything, about a gift's particular place of order in the lists. No single gift appears in every list, and those that do appear in more than one are often in a different order (e.g. miracles, helps, service).
3. There is a real mixture of the miraculous and the mundane. "Workers of miracles" are placed right alongside "helps." The key point is Paul's in 1 Corinthians 12:1-7, it is the Holy Spirit who provides the gift – the giftee is not to be more highly esteemed because they have a gift considered "more excellent."

These gifts form the scope of our study. We will not go into extra-biblical "gifts." As I said before, the lists in Scripture are probably not exhaustive, but we can't be dogmatic either way. Some put forward gifts of music, craftsmanship, and intercession, as genuine spiritual gifts. We aren't going to go there. Those with such abilities are certainly gifted, valued, and used of God, but since they are not given out as gifts of the Spirit in Scripture, we won't spend time on them.

We also need to separate spiritual gifts from natural abilities. Being gifted in the kitchen as a cook or in the garage as a mechanic is a natural ability even though God can and will use those abilities. The spiritual gifts are something different. Some hold that spiritual gifts are wholly unrelated to natural abilities, others say that spiritual gifts are natural abilities sanctified. We'll spend some time in the following studies to explore that a bit more. For now, let's make this our basic definition of spiritual gifts:

A spiritual gift is the particular gift given by the Holy Spirit to a believer for the spiritual maturing of the body of Christ.

That last part of the definition is critical. The reason is found in Ephesians 4. Let's conclude by looking at the entire reason we have been given spiritual gifts in the first place.

The Reason for the Gifts

As the chart above shows, gifts are discussed in 4 places in Scripture – 2 are fairly lengthy treatments (1 Corinthians and Ephesians) and 2 are much more brief (Romans and 1 Peter). Let's set aside Peter for the moment, the briefest mention of all. Every time Paul writes of the gifts, he uses a metaphor to describe the church. That metaphor is that the church is the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-12, 27-28; Eph. 4:7-16).

Let's focus on Ephesians. In 4:12, Paul states the reason the gifts are given is "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up edifying of the body of Christ." God gave the gifts, in this case the gifted men of v11, to do 3 things – 1) equip the saints 2) that they may be able to do the work of the ministry, 3) in order that the body will be built up.

But if we read a bit further, we find that these 3 things are not the end in themselves, they are the means to an end. The end is in the next verse, 4:13: "until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ."

The sentence can be confusing because of the number of phrases, but if you diagram it grammatically, it becomes clearer:

Until we all attain

to the unity

of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God

to a mature man

to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.

Unity and maturity are the twin goals. Unity is described as the unity of the faith – that is, the unity we share because of our shared faith, and as the unity of the knowledge of the Son. I'd submit that Paul is not talking about facts and statistics here. When we really know someone we

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mean that we are intimately attuned to them. We know how they think and act, what they like and dislike. Paul is talking about a unity with one another that arises out of an intimate knowledge of the Lord. It is interesting to consider that in the context, we learn what the Lord is like through the ministry of his gifts, the kind of work that he did in his earthly ministry.

And just to underscore Paul's emphasis on unity, let's consider Peter now. Here is 1 Peter 4:7-11:

The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Note that Peter's context is also unity. *Every time the gifts are shown in the Scripture, they are given in the same context, the unity of the body of Christ.*

Returning to Ephesians 4, we'll close this introduction with this: For now it is enough to know that the Holy Spirit has gifted us, that these gifts will accomplish three specific results: 1) the equipping of the saints 2) for the work of service 3) that the body will be built up. And these three results have two further outcomes: 1) the attainment of unity and knowledge 2) to become mature. How mature? "to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ."

What is your reaction to that? "Amen"? Probably, "No way!!" We simply don't believe it could mean what it says. We know ourselves too well. But Paul is serious, not just using hyperbole.

The gifts therefore are critical, but they are just one element in the larger context of the Holy Spirit's ministry to the believer. I believe that to have a good understanding of the gifts, we have to see them in that larger context, and so in the next study we will talk about the what the Holy Spirit is doing in the church today, and what that means to us in practical terms.

2. The Ministry of the Spirit

Making Sense of the Gifts in the Larger Context of the Holy Spirit's Ministry

Jesus makes a rather fantastic statement in John 14:12: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father." How could our works possibly surpass his? Has anybody out there restored someone's sight lately? Healed paralytics? Raised the dead? Forgiven sin?

What's the prerequisite for these "greater works"? Jesus' going to the Father. Why would that enable us to do greater works? Reading further, we see that it is because Jesus will be granting our prayers that the Father may be glorified (v13-14) and by sending the Spirit (v16). The short

version of the answer is that we will do greater works than Jesus did because he has sent the Holy Spirit.

Hmm. That sounds like another Ephesians 4:13 to me ("until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.") One of those truths of Scripture that we should say "Amen!" to but more often comes out "No way!" How can we be doing greater works than Jesus? Do we see that lived out in our lives? We'll try to answer that in this study, if not definitively, at least practically.

The previous study touched on these main points about the gifts:

1. We know something of the gifts, but there is still a lot we do not know or are unsure about. Indeed, many of us do not feel that we can even identify our own gifts, let alone be clear about them all!
2. We are limiting the scope of our study to the spiritual gifts listed in Scripture – those found in 1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12, and 1 Pet. 4. Though these lists are not exhaustive they are our only infallible source of information about the gifts.
3. We determined from Eph. 4 that the reason the gifts are given in the first place is for the spiritual maturing of the body of Christ, to make us more like Christ. The Holy Spirit has gifted us and these gifts will accomplish three specific results (equipping the body for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ), and these 3 results have 2 further outcomes, (the unity of the faith and spiritual maturity). How mature? "to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ."

In other words, the gifts are critical to the maturing of the body. However, they are just one element in the larger context of Holy Spirit's ministry to the believer. To have a good understanding of the gifts, we have to see them in that larger context and that is the scope of this study.

The Call of the Christian Life

Whatever Jesus means about the works we do as Christians, one thing is clear: God's people are called to be like Him. We see that in Eph. 4:13, in scriptures like 2 Cor. 2:15-16, where Christians are pictured as the fragrance of Christ to the world, and in the frequent metaphor for the Church as the Body of Christ

But we have a problem in fulfilling this call to be like Christ. We can't do it! The witness of Romans 7:17-24 is that of Paul, a Christian man who knows the good but cannot do it because in his flesh he is sold to the law of sin and death:

So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good...but I see a

different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

So what are we to do? Has God left us in our flesh with no resource for living a godly life? No:

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death...And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.

These verses (Romans 7:25-8:2, 10-11) say that through Jesus there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, having been set free from control of the flesh (which is under the power of the law of sin and death, (7:23-24) by the Spirit of life (8:2) who raised Jesus from the dead and raises us from the dead as he indwells us (8:10-11)). In other words, becoming like Christ is not left up to us. If it were we all know how successful it would be. Instead, the Holy Spirit has taken up residence within the spirit of the believer, and he will complete the work of making us like Jesus!

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Now the big question: How does he do that? How does he make us like Christ? John. 16:13-14 is a critical passage to understand about the Spirit's ministry. "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you."

What does that tell you? That the Spirit doesn't speak on his own, that he speaks to glorify Jesus. The point is that the Spirit's ministry is Christ-centered. The Spirit doesn't call attention to himself, but to Jesus.

For that reason some have called the Holy Spirit the "shy sovereign" and the "silent shepherd." And if these verses were the only witness to the Spirit's ministry, I'd say we'd have to agree with those descriptions. However, if we look more broadly at the Spirit's ministry to the believer as it is presented in Scripture, I think we have to conclude that the Holy Spirit is anything ***but*** silent! This ministry is rich and varied as the Spirit works in our hearts in a number of different ways:

- ☛ ***He works salvation.*** It is the Holy Spirit who works salvation for the believer. We are "born of the Spirit." (Jn. 3:5) and saved "through the sanctifying work of the Spirit." (2 Thess. 2:13)
- ☛ ***He transforms.*** Once saved, the Spirit begins a transformation process in the believer, making him more like Christ as matures in the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18).

- ☛ ***He bears witness of our salvation.*** The Holy Spirit gives us assurance that we are saved (1 John 3:24, 4:13; Rom. 8:16).
- ☛ ***He confirms our position as sons and daughters of God.*** Since we are children (sons) of God, God gave us the Holy Spirit in order to cry to him as our "Abba, Father." (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6)
- ☛ ***He seals us in Christ.*** The Spirit within us is God's seal of guarantee that we are his (2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5; Eph. 4:30).
- ☛ ***He lives within us.*** The Holy Spirit works within the believer. No longer an external presence (Jn. 14:17), he has taken residence within the believer (Rom. 8:9).
- ☛ ***He frees us.*** The indwelling Spirit frees us from having to follow the old systems of works and death (2 Cor. 3:17; Rom. 8:2).
- ☛ ***He enables us.*** The Spirit gives us power to accomplish his purposes. (Acts 1:8; Rom. 15:19)
- ☛ ***He calls us to be holy.*** The Holy Spirit within us calls us to live a holy lifestyle, free from sexual sin (Rom. 8:5; Gal. 5:16; 1 Thess 4:3-8).
- ☛ ***He reveals God's truth to us.*** The Spirit teaches us and reveals God's truth to us (1 Cor. 2:9-13; 1 Jn. 2:20, 27).
- ☛ ***He leads us.*** The Spirit gives us guidance as God's children (Acts 13:2, 16:7; Rom. 8:14).
- ☛ ***He intercedes for us.*** The Holy Spirit, who knows us perfectly and knows the Father perfectly, prays perfectly on our behalf (Rom. 8:26)
- ☛ ***He creates fellowship.*** The Holy Spirit does not call believers to himself in isolation, but works spiritual fellowship among them as they fellowship with him (2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 2-18-22; Phil 2:1).
- ☛ ***He helps us in worship.*** Worshipping believers in the Scriptures are sometimes said to be "in the Spirit." (Eph. 6:18; Rev. 1:10)
- ☛ ***He works for unity.*** The Holy Spirit desires and works for the unity of all believers (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph 4:3).
- ☛ ***He inspired Scripture.*** He breathed out his word through the Prophets and the Apostles (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; 2 Pet. 1:21).
- ☛ ***He equips us.*** The Holy Spirit is the giver of the gifts, which are for the equipping of the Body (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4, 1 Pet. 4).

- ☛ ***He matures us.*** The Holy Spirit will bear the spiritual fruit which is characteristic of maturity in our lives (Gal. 5:22)

My reaction to such a list is to think how poor we would be without the ministry of the Spirit! As we digest this, consider how difficult it would be to say that any one of these elements captures the essence of the Spirit's ministry? I don't believe any one of them does. Some would say that the Spirit's ministry is essentially about power – the gifts are the thing. Others would say it's about performance – the fruit is the thing. A few say this:

While these ministries accurately sum up his working in believers today, none of them by themselves capture the essence of the Spirit's ministry. J. I. Packer has said that the essence of the Spirit's ministry in the believer's life is to **mediate the presence of Jesus.** There are a number of Scriptures that support this:

- ☛ The Spirit anointed and filled Jesus (Luke 4:1; Acts 10:38)
- ☛ The Spirit was sent by Jesus (Jn. 16:7, 20:22)
- ☛ the Spirit would indwell the 12 assuring them that Jesus was still with them (Jn. 14:16-21)
- ☛ The Spirit would remind the 12 of Jesus' words (Jn. 14:26)
- ☛ The Spirit bears witness of Jesus (Jn. 15:26)
- ☛ The Spirit would lead the 12 into all truth (Jn. 16:13)
- ☛ The Spirit would glorify Jesus (16:14-15)
- ☛ The Spirit is called the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7; Gal. 4:6)
- ☛ Paul equates the indwelling Spirit with Jesus (Rom. 8:9-11; 2 Cor. 3:17-18)

The Spirit's ministry of the personal presence of the Lord is clear in Scripture. And there are a couple of conclusions we can draw from it.

1. First, as we've already said, the Spirit's ministry is Christ-centered. Things that point away from Christ, or even that exalt the Spirit over Christ are not Spirit-led. Did you get that? **Things that point away from Christ, or even that exalt the Spirit over Christ are not Spirit-led.**
2. Second, it means that while Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, the Holy Spirit manifests Jesus to the world until his return **through us!** Yikes!
3. Last, the Spirit's ministry of Jesus is not just spiritual puffery, something we can never experience or feel. It must have a practical day-to-day effect, because that is where God has placed us – in day-to-day reality! And just as we experience the practical effects of God's freeing us from sin's control through the indwelling Spirit (Romans 8), so too the

the Spirit's gifts have a practical impact in the Spirit's ministry of Jesus to us. **The gifts of the Spirit are those things that Jesus did when he walked the earth.**

How many of the fruits did Jesus manifest? All of them. How many of the gifts did Jesus have? All of them (What about apostles/evangelists/pastor-teachers? Jesus sent spiritually gifted people to represent him. What about tongues? Jesus never spoke in tongues, but he is the light to the nations (Matt. 12:18-21) and commissions believers to preach the Gospel to the nations (Matt. 24:14). And as we shall see later in 1 Cor. 14:21-22, Paul says that tongues are for a sign to unbelievers.).

And that's where our opening question comes in. Through the indwelling Spirit we will do the works Jesus did and "greater" still. Now we haven't defined "greater" and we haven't defined "works," but we will. Soon.

I believe this with all my heart - the Holy Spirit is to be all to us that Jesus was to the 12. I say that with some trepidation, because we are so easily unbalanced in our thinking. We must remember that **the ministry of the Spirit is always centered on Christ, not on himself.** The Lord is our focus, not the Spirit.

Still, the Holy Spirit is to be all to us that Jesus was to the 12. He ministers Jesus to us in his personal presence (we can be with him, hear him, and talk to him), in enabling us to act the way he did (manifesting the fruit of the Spirit) and empowering us to do the things he did (manifesting the gifts of the Spirit)! The Spirit-filled church will do all that he did, and more! Not in a salvation sense, but in the ministry/witness of his saving work.

Think about what that means in relation to our Christlikeness. **Christlikeness is not limited to personal purity and dependence upon God. It extends to being Christ in the world! Acting the way he did, doing what he did under the power and enablement of the blessed Holy Spirit.** And that is where our study fits in the larger context of the Spirit's ministry.

It is becoming more and more profound to me that the Holy Spirit lives within me in such a way that Jesus is present with me in the same way he was present to the 12. In light of that truth, how should we then live?

Say you are really pressed for time, work commitments, family commitments, kid's activities, family time. Or, you aren't sure what your gift is, or you feel it would be presumptuous of you to assume, and so...your gift remains un-exercised. What if we don't exercise our gifts? It would be like the church losing the gifts God has uniquely designed for the building up of the body.

No gifts, no Christlikeness. We have no legitimate options. We are called to be like Christ, we are given the Spirit to be with us, enable us, and empower us. **We can no more be spiritual, mature, fulfilled Christians and not minister the gifts than we can be and not manifest the fruit.** And that means that there is no such thing as the church in isolation. The church's ministry to believers, and its witness to the world, depends upon the relationship of the believers to one another. That's why the NT is filled with repeated calls for the unity of the body, and why the gifts are critical to our own maturity and Christlikeness.

3. The Offices: Apostles

Gifts Miraculous and Mundane

Do you consider yourself a charismatic Christian? The way you answer that question depends on your understanding of the gifts, but what if I told you that the only kind of Christian there is charismatic? In reality there is no such thing as a non-charismatic Christian. That's because of what the word *charismatic* means, rather than what we use it to mean. In this study we'll come to grips with the terminology behind the gifts, and we'll begin to look at the gifts themselves.

Review

Any study of the gifts has to be rooted in the larger context of the Spirit's ministry. We have seen that:

1. The gifts are given for the spiritual maturing of the body of Christ, and are critical to the maturing of the body (Eph. 4)
2. The gifts are but one part of the Spirit's larger ministry. This ministry is literally a new covenant between God and man, a covenant that is sealed by the indwelling Christ-centered reality of the Holy Spirit, whose particular ministry it is to mediate the personal presence of the Lord to the believer.
3. That ministry is not limited to personal purity and dependence upon God, but extends to being Christ in the world, ministering the gifts to one another under the enabling power of the blessed Holy Spirit!

Biblical Terminology

One of the central New Testament passages on the gifts is found in 1 Corinthians 12:1-7. Read through this and see how many different terms for spiritual gifts you find.

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

I count 5 different terms: v1 - spirituals, v4 - gifts, v5 - ministries., v6 - effects, v7 - manifestation of the Spirit. 5 different terms! That's a lot, but really there are only two we need to be aware of. The words found in v5-7 (ministries, effects, and manifestation of the Spirit) are words that describe the gifts rather than define them. There are two main words we want to focus on, found in v1 and v4, *pneumatikon and charismata*.

Both words are pretty simple and straightforward. When we split them in two like this:

pneuma/tikon charis/mata

you can tell what their emphasis is by their root words, pneuma and charis. {*pneuma* = spirit, *charis* = grace} Simply put, pneumatikon denotes something that is spiritual, of or relating to the spirit. When you read "spiritual gifts" in v1, "gifts" is not in the original. The most accurate literal translation would be "spiritual things" or "things of the Spirit." Some would simply translate it as "spirituals." I like "Now concerning things of the Spirit . . ."

Charismata on the other hand means something freely given out of grace. In other words a gift, particularly a gift graciously given without any merit on the part of the recipient. In fact, *charismata* on its own really isn't especially about spiritual gifts as we think of them. It's a broad term, so every occurrence of charismata isn't necessarily a spiritual gift. Take a quick look at some other uses of the exact same word:

- ☛ Romans 5:15-16 "But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin..."
- ☛ Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- ☛ Romans 11:29 "for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."
- ☛ 2 Cor. 1:11 "Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many."
- ☛ 1 Peter 4:10 "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

The last two passages are especially helpful. NIV's translating the word as "gracious favor" which elsewhere is translated "gift" helps to put it into perspective. So does Peter's tying the gift to the administration of God's grace. *charismata* describes a gift freely given and undeserved. That is why there are no non-charismatic Christians, we have all been given charismata. For that matter, you could just as well call yourself a pneumatic as you could a charismatic!

So you have two words that refer to gifts. *Pneumatikon*'s focus is on their relation to the Spirit, the fact that they are spiritual things. *Charismata*'s emphasis is on the gift or manifestation of the Spirit itself. Both terms are explicit in that no matter what the gift, it is of the Spirit and given out of grace, not on the basis of any merit in the recipient. No one is better than another because of their gift.

How many do I get?

Do believers get a single gift or several? Some say each believer gets only one discreet gift, others say every believer has multiple gifts. What does the Bible say?

There is plenty of textual support for a singular gift. Peter and Paul both use the singular (*the* gift) in an emphatic way in 1 Peter 4:10 and 1 Cor. 12:7-8. But look at 1 Cor. 12:31 "But earnestly desire the greater gifts..." and 14:1 "Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts..." If each believer got one and only one gift, why would Paul exhort believers to seek after them? Let's take a case study and look at Timothy.

Timothy was Paul's disciple and one of his most cherished students. Timothy was Paul's "true son in the faith" and his "beloved son," but Paul had to encourage Timothy a lot, as in 1 Tim. 4:14, "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery." Now look at 2 Tim. 1:6, "And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands." How many gifts is Paul talking about? One, *the* gift, singular.

Now let's read on, 2 Tim 2:2b, "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, ***these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.***" Timothy was to teach, so his gift must have been teaching. Now to chapter 4:2a, "preach the word," it's preaching; verse 2b, "reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction," it's exhortation; v5, "do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry," it's evangelism. Which of these, if any, was *the* gift?

Who knows? Maybe only 1 was his gift, but I think it is best to think of a "gifting" of the Holy Spirit, a singular gift that comprises multiple facets according to the place God has planned for the individual. You as a believer have a particular gifting of the Spirit, imparted at salvation by the Spirit as a gracious favor for the church's edification. This gifting can be thought of as singular but may well entail the Spirit's blessing and power in more than one area of ministry (some may have one, others several as God wills).

Further, we see from the language that describes them that the gifts are God's gracious favor to the church, not an indicator of an individual's merit or power or spirituality. Whether a person has 1 gift or several, showy gifts or subtle, all are equally valued and needed to mature the body.

Finally, your particular gift does not grant you leave to neglect ministry in ungifted areas. All are called to evangelize, not all have the gift. All are called to serve, not all have the gift. All are called to show mercy, you get my point. But as we minister our particular gifts to one another we impart some experience and knowledge about how to minister in those areas to our brothers and sisters. As we hear our pastor teach we are edified and learn better how to communicate God's truth. As someone ministers us to with the gift of service we learn better how to serve. As someone ministers us to with the gift of mercy we learn how to be merciful. And so we are edified and matured. Now let's get into the gifts themselves.

The Gifts

If we were studying Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, or 1 Peter we would work verse by verse thru these specific sections of scripture that detail the gifts. Instead, we will divide the gifts into their respective categories and draw from this scripture and anything else in the Bible that seems to apply! The 3 categories are:

- ☛ The Offices: Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastor-Teachers
- ☛ The "Sign" Gifts: Tongues, Interpretation of Tongues, Miracles, Healings, Prophecy
- ☛ The Edifying Gifts: Wisdom, Knowledge, Faith, Discernment of spirits, Helps, Administration, Service, Teaching, Exhortation, Giving, Leadership, Mercy

We'll start with the offices.

The Offices

First, we must make a bit of a distinction between the Offices and the other gifts. It isn't clear to me that the Offices themselves are necessarily a spiritual gift of themselves (such as the "gift of apostleship"). Rather the Offices themselves are the gift. God gifted his church with certain offices, which offices were then filled by certain godly men (and possibly women in the case of evangelists) with particular giftings to enable them fulfill those offices. For that reason, it may not be 100% accurate to talk about the Offices as a spiritual gift apart from the edifying gifts that may accompany the individuals in those offices. Many would disagree with me in this, and I've only come to this conclusion recently as a result of this study. But I think the text will bear me out.

Apostles, 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11

Note that in both these lists, Apostles are listed first. In Corinthians Paul even highlights that by saying God appointed "first, Apostles . . ." The origin of this office is seen in the Gospels, where they are chosen out of the group of disciples that followed Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. A good place to look is Matthew 10:1-15, especially v1, 5, 7-8. The apostles were given authority over evil spirits and disease, and were sent out to Israel to proclaim the Kingdom.

Some additional criteria is seen in Acts 1:21-26, esp. v21-22. The number of the Apostles, 12 in all, was seen by the Apostles themselves as important. Notice too that to be considered an Apostle one must have been an eyewitness of Jesus' resurrection.

And so there were a fixed number of Apostles – 12 in all. Right? Wrong. We see a 13th Apostle chosen by Jesus *after* his resurrection, Saul of Tarsus, soon to be known as Paul. In Acts 9:1-19, Paul was told he would carry Jesus' name before the Gentiles, and that he would suffer for the sake of Jesus' name. Paul's apostleship was evidently for a specific ministry, to witness to the Gentiles (Acts 22:13-18, 21; 26:15-18, Romans 1:5; Galatians 2:7-8)

And so there were a fixed number of Apostles, 12 plus Paul. Right? Wrong. We see several other men called Apostles:

- Barnabus – Acts 14:14
- Epaphroditus - Phil. 2:25
- Titus and "the brother" - 2 Cor. 8:22-23
- Andronicus and Junius - Rom. 16:7
- James (possibly) – Gal. 1:19

So, how many Apostles are there in the NT? If you take the Scripture at face value (and you should) there are not a fixed number. After all, if the number of apostles were known to be limited to the 12 plus Paul, how could there have been false apostles as in 2 Cor. 11:13?

Characteristics of the Apostolic Office

The apostolic office is characterized by 5 different traits: First, it is **foundational**, in that the church was founded on their witness and their authority (Eph. 2:20, 3:5; Rev. 21:14). Second it is **authoritative**, as we saw in the gospel account above, Jesus gave the apostles authority. Third it is primarily an office of **witness**, as in the book of Acts the Apostles preach the gospel and have their message confirmed by the work of the Spirit. In that confirmation of the Spirit we see that the apostolic office was **powerful and attested**, the Spirit confirming their words (Heb. 2:3-4, 2 Cor. 12:12; Rom. 15:19). Finally, the apostolic office was a **teaching** office, Acts 2:42, 6:2.

The Twelve Apostles, and Paul are distinguished from "other" apostles in that they founded the church, confirmed its message, gave witness to the person and resurrection of Jesus, and established the doctrine of the church. These characteristics are never seen in the "other" apostles, only the ones who were sent by Jesus himself, the Twelve and Paul.

It helps to know that the word translated Apostle is *apostolos*, which means "messenger." The Apostles were messengers of Jesus Christ to the Church and the world. Guess what these other men called apostles were? They were also messengers. Of whom? In some cases of the Apostles, in others of the churches.

What else would they call these men? It is over time and through use that new language takes on meaning, and "Apostle" became over time descriptive of the foundational, authoritative, powerful eyewitnesses. The others are merely messengers to and/or from the churches, not the Lord Jesus.

Therefore, if that is an accurate description of the office, is there an apostolic gift for today? Some say it is in the establishing churches or ministries some say it is teaching teachers. On the fringe, some say it is the same authoritative, foundation office as in NT times. To what purpose? Would you keep laying a foundation when the building is going up?

I don't believe there is an apostolic gift for today, but some of the gifts that would have accompanied the office are certainly available. Teaching, exhortation, leadership, to name a few. If you feel your gift is in that area, take heart and be busy about it. God's got great things to do through you.

In the next study, we'll look at the offices of prophets and evangelists. As we work through this, here is a little challenge for you. The whole discussion of apostles and prophets, to say nothing of tongues raises this issue:

- ☛ Either some of the gifts have ceased (but there is a problem with that view: Little or no scriptural support

or

- ☛ We have quenched the Spirit by ignoring valid gifts for today (but there is a problem with that view as well: There is much that God is accomplishing through his church

or

- ☛ We don't really understand the ministry of the 1st century church as well as we think we do.

4. The Offices: Prophets

What is prophecy? Someone stands up in a church service and describes a vision God has shown them, complete with the date a future event will occur and what God expects his people to do as a result. Is that prophecy?

What about the person who has an impassioned, almost fanatical zeal for the sanctity of life and uses every available means to convince and persuade others to fight against abortion? Is that prophecy?

What about the pastor who regularly preaches God's word so accurately and with such practical application that the entire congregation matures in Christ. Is that prophecy?

Review

Previous to this study we have seen that:

1. The gifts are given for the spiritual maturing of the body of Christ and are but one part of the Spirit's larger ministry in which the Holy Spirit indwells the believer, ministering the presence of Jesus, transforming the believer to Christlikeness.
2. The words translated "spiritual gifts" and "gifts" underscore their origin in and relation to the Spirit and their gracious, undeserved character. We saw too that it is best to think of a "gifting" of the Holy Spirit, utterly unique from believer to believer. Some may get a single gift, some multiple as God bestows what the body of Christ needs.
3. We defined 3 categories of gifts: Offices, Signs, and Edifying gifts. In relation to the Offices we said that the language of Eph. and 1 Cor. makes clear that the offices themselves are gifts. The NT doesn't name a gift of apostleship, of pastoring, or of evangelism. Rather, the gifts are the men who fill those offices, who in turn have their spiritual gifts to perform their functions.
4. We have looked at the office of Apostle and the office of Prophet. Both are foundational offices according to Eph. 2:20 and 3:5. These two offices stand apart from the rest in that sense. The Apostles were the authoritative founders of the church by being eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus and by teaching the church its doctrine. The prophets founded the church in a different sense, giving it guidance and direction in order to hand the leadership off to the last two offices, evangelists and pastor-teachers. The critical difference between the two offices is one of authority. The Apostles were authoritative, the prophets were not.

The Problem with Prophecy

Prophecy is a gift that many say has ceased. This is a historical position, going back to the end of the 2nd century. The main reason given is that the continuation of authoritative prophecy is a direct threat to the authority of Scripture. If prophets speak an authoritative word today, then in what sense could we understand God's written word to be complete? The answer is that we couldn't. Yet, the Bible is clear as to its finality and completeness (Rev. 22:19). If however there is a difference between NT prophetic authority and the authority of the OT Prophets, the Apostle's and their written word, the threat evaporates. Authentic NT prophecy poses little or no threat to the canon.

New Testament Prophets

If we look at Acts 2:17-18 and 13:1, we see that a sign of the coming of the Spirit is a vital prophetic ministry, and one that was not limited to a few people.

- *Acts 2:17-18: "And it shall be in the last days,' God says,' That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams; Even upon My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And they shall prophesy."*

Prophets were a regular, normal part of the church structure. Sometimes NT prophets predicted future events, as in Acts 11:27-30, 21:4, and 21:10-12. The predictive element does not always occur however. Sometimes they simply encourage and strengthen, as Judas and Silas did in Acts 15:32.

Acts tells us is that the NT prophetic ministry was new, that it was tied to a teaching ministry, that prophets were leaders in the church, and that sometimes they predicted, sometimes they encouraged. For a more systematic approach we can turn to 1 Cor. 12-14. Paul was writing in answer to the Corinthian's questions about several matters, one of which was evidently the relative value of tongues vs. prophecy. These chapters are the single best place to go to learn about NT prophecy. Following are some significant passages and what they tell us about prophecy:

- *1 Corinthians 13:8-9: "But where there are prophecies, they will cease . . . For we know in part and we prophesy in part..."*

From this we learn that 1) prophecy will cease and 2) prophecy is only a partial revealing of truth.

- *1 Corinthians 14:1-5: "eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy . . . everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort . . . he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy."*

From this we learn that 1) Prophecy strengthens, encourages, comforts, and edifies and 2) For this reason prophecy is more important to the congregation's well-being than tongues.

- *1 Corinthians 14:22-25: "Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers...if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"*"

From this we learn that 1) Prophecy is both edifying for believers and convicting for non-believers and 2) Prophecy can lay bare the secrets of the heart.

- *1 Corinthians 14:26-32: "When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church... Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets."*

From this we learn that 1) Prophecy is to be offered in conjunction with the other aspects of the worship and 2) Prophecy is to be controlled in that the number of speakers is limited and their words are *weighed*. The word is *diakrino*, which has the connotation of weighing something in a balance, like meat in a market. In the context it means to sift, to evaluate, to judge good from bad. Further, the Greek construction of the sentence leads us to believe that the entire congregation does this evaluation, not just the other prophets or the church leadership.

We also learn that 3) Prophecy is called revelation, that 4) prophecy instructs and encourages and 5) Prophets are controlled. Rather than mindless or ecstatic pronouncements, their prophecies are offered intelligibly and under control.

- *1 Corinthians 14:37-39 - If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored. Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.*

From this we learn that 1) Prophets are subject to Apostles and 2) Prophecy is to be desired.

- *1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 - Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.*

From this we learn that 1) Paul had to encourage the Thessalonians to hold Prophecy in esteem and 2) Prophecy is to be tested because it could be (perhaps often was) mixed in value. Finally, 3) only "good" prophecy was held. Based on all that, we can say that the following are sets of characteristics for NT Prophets:

Characteristics of the NT Prophets:

NT Prophets Were Foundational To The Church. They are classed with the Apostles (Eph. 2:20, 3:5). In addition, the prophetic gift was an essential one for the church since it was to be desired and took primacy over tongues (1 Cor. 14). NT prophets spoke revelation (1 Cor. 14:30) which was sometimes predictive (as in Acts 11:27, 21:4, 21:10), but far more often it was of an edifying character (Acts 15:32; 1 Cor. 14), and was capable of convicting unbelievers (1 Cor. 14:22-25).

Yet Not Authoritative (in the Apostolic or Old Testament Prophet sense). Neither the NT prophets nor their revelations were authoritative in the sense of the OT Prophets or the NT Apostles. The OT Prophet was to be examined at the outset of his pronouncement and if found wanting, put to death. But if he was found accurate, everything he said was to be obeyed (Dt. 18:18-22). The OT Prophet spoke God's words unmixed. NT prophecy is simply not treated in the same way. Even Paul, in the midst of his argument upholding the primacy of prophecy over tongues, goes so far as to say that prophecy is only partial knowledge, and will someday cease (1 Cor. 13:8-9).

Although the NT prophet spoke revelation, the authoritative declaration of the OT Prophet ("Thus says the Lord . . .") is virtually absent in the NT with one exception (Acts 21:11).

NT prophetic revelation was evidently uneven in quality and required evaluation (1 Cor. 14:37-39; 1 Thess. 5:20-21). Since the Holy Spirit never errs, we can only imagine that the prophetic gift did not prevent one from mixing human observation and/or interpretation with the Spirit's words and compromising them. NT prophecy should therefore not be seen as authoritative. One interesting examples of NT prophecy as a somewhat imperfect thing can be found in Acts 21:4 where some disciples were able to see what was coming to Paul but misinterpreted the application. Paul rejected it.

It is the Apostles who were authoritative in the church. Besides being subject to the congregation's examination, the prophets were subject to the Apostle's authority (1 Cor. 14:37-38). Such an examination could only have taken place by comparing the prophet's words against an authoritative source, which would have been the OT scriptures and any of the Apostle's writings a particular church may have collected. Whether the "examiners" were leadership or laity, they exercised authority over the prophet's words, giving them their congregational stamp of approval before they were accepted.

The critical point is that NT prophecy is not authoritative like OT prophecy or NT Apostolic revelation. Instead it is subject to the apostle's authority, to the congregation's examination, and sometimes was even treated with contempt (1 Thess. 5:20-21, 1 Cor. 14 vs tongues). In no way should NT prophecy be viewed in the same light as the authoritative word of the Apostles.

The primary characteristic of NT prophecy was its edifying character. Prophets were fully engaged mentally, not in a rapturous, uncontrolled, ecstatic mood. The prophet remained in control of his faculties. (1 Cor. 14:32). NT prophets spoke to:

- Encourage (Acts 15:32; 1 Cor. 14:3, 31)
- Strengthen (Acts 15:32; 1 Cor. 14:3)
- Comfort (1 Cor. 14:3)
- Edify (1 Cor. 14:4-5)
- Instruct (1 Cor. 14:31)
- Convict of sin (1 Cor. 14:22-25)

Conclusions

So then, practically speaking, what is prophecy? Can we even apply prophecy in the authentic NT sense to our experience? What about the view that prophecy ceased along with the Apostles? Let's take the last question first.

Some say that prophecy was a temporary guide for the church until the completion of the canon. However, there is little or no scripture to back that claim up. Others say the gift of prophecy was a sign gift, given to testify to the trustworthiness of the Gospel. I believe the above shows that view to be mistaken.

There is good reason for thinking the *office of Prophet* ceased. Since the Prophets were foundational to the church along with the Apostles, it is likely that the office passed along with the apostolic office. However, there is not much reason to assume the *prophetic gift* ceased. I think that if we understand its nature properly there should be little objection to the gift still functioning. That is why I now see it as an edifying gift rather than a sign gift.

Since there is a gift of prophecy separate from the office, and since the prophetic ministry was to be a hallmark of the indwelling Spirit, and since Paul is so clear that prophecy should be fairly widespread, there were obviously some with the gift but not the office. Their contribution would be a now and then thing vs. the more regular and experienced contribution of the Prophets.

What then is authentic NT prophecy? The word itself means to proclaim, usually meaning to proclaim something that is hidden. It is not foretelling the future, although we often think of it that way because OT prophecy so often did. Textbook prophecy is "receiving and transmitting revelation from God." Most non-charismatic commentators say that NT prophecy is merely practical application of God's word. The trouble with this view is that it eliminates any supernatural element to NT prophecy. From this point of view, NT prophecy is merely a matter of experience, familiarity with the Scriptures, and Godly wisdom. That isn't enough.

I believe we should see NT prophecy more as illumination and Spirit-directed insight rather than authoritative revelation. That is how the NT church evidently handled it. When someone prophesied, the church leadership and congregation decided its authority, not the prophet. And how did they evaluate it? By examining the prophecy in the light of God's word. Rather than authoritative speaking, consider NT prophecy to be Spirit-directed insight along the lines of 2 Tim. 2:7, Eph. 1:17, and Ps. 119:18.

A Fictional Description of Prophecy at Work

This fictional description of an early church service may illustrate how the gift may have worked.

You are a prophet in the church at Corinth. The earlier problems with some elevating tongues at the expense of your gift occurred several years ago, and the instructions Paul left for order in the service of worship long have since been established.

This morning as you listen to the teaching you are praying the Holy Spirit would reveal its meaning and application to you. Suddenly you have the clear sense of what needs to be said. There is a clear application of the teaching to a specific issue in the church. At the appropriate time you stand and offer your word. Then you take your seat again. At this point hands raise and several people ask to be recognized. As the men of the church speak they question and probe your words to ensure they understand them fully. They are weighing them like they were meat in the market! When all is said, your word has largely been accepted, with the exception of one or two points which were found wanting and dismissed.

You reflect on the difference in the congregation today vs. years back. Where before there was confusion and chaos, ecstatic, albeit unintelligible noise with little edifying power, there is now a double blessing. Hearing your word has edified the congregation but what is more, they and you have been edified as 1) you submit yourself to their wisdom and 2) all come to an even clearer understanding of your word and how God's word applies to the life of the local body.

I believe the gift of prophecy must include a supernatural receptivity to the Spirit's direction and leading. How would it be exercised? One who possesses the prophetic gift would naturally be constantly asking the Spirit, "What does this teaching mean? How must we act? Where does it apply to us?" If and when the Spirit gives his revelation in answer to these prayers, the prophet can confidently say "Beloved, this is what we must do!" And then let the congregation decide.

What is more, we can learn a great deal about what it means to be spiritual, to be touched by the Spirit, and to offer a word of revelation to the church by adding another element to the fiction.

Same setting, except as the teacher concludes you really don't have anything to add. No word of prophecy seems to present itself to you. But the Spirit has revealed something to the other prophets in the church and they stand to speak. The same process takes place, the prophet speaks, the congregation evaluates. Then a 2nd prophet speaks, then a 3rd.

However, during the discussion following the 3rd prophet's word, you have a profound sense of revelation from the Holy Spirit. It is a word so clear that you know without a doubt that it is from God and it is a tremendously helpful application to the body. What are you to do? Paul says to remain silent, but wouldn't the Spirit want it shared? After all, he is the one who gave you the revelation!

Sure, you can share it, but later. The Spirit's revelation to the prophets would not compel the prophet to break his peace if doing so would break the Spirit's order!

Imagine what it means to have a word from the Spirit (ala 14:30) yet be required by the Spirit to remain silent (ala 14:29)! Imagine the tension in the believer between his intellect and his spirit. There must be a constant balance of Spirit-led openness and receptivity with intellectual engagement as he listens to the teaching, to the prophecies, and to the ensuing discussion. There is at all times a certain level of control.

I can think of no clearer illustration of the lack of authority in NT prophecy than Paul's directions to the Corinthian church in 1 Cor. 14:26-33. Even the speaking out of a Spirit-given revelation was subject to the orderly worship of God. If it is not authoritative, it poses no threat to the canon. Rather it is regulated by the canon, but properly exercised and applied it is highly edifying.

NT prophecy requires a dual responsibility 1) of the congregation to weigh the prophet's words and 2) of the prophet to subject his words to such examination.

Is There A Prophet In The House?

To finish off the previous study, many have expressed that you are struggling with the question of how the Spirit's revelation to the NT prophets might not be authoritative and not be 100% accurate?

I think the answer lies in our definition of the word "revelation." When we say revelation today we mean God's word, the Bible, holy, authoritative, and true. When we see the word in the Bible we understand it to mean our theological definition, which is sometimes mistaken depending on the context. The word "revelation" in the Bible is a much broader term, meaning simply to reveal something that is hidden. Often "revelation" does refer to authoritative truth and is used in our theological sense (Gal. 1:11-12). Often it is used of the revealing of the glory of Jesus at the 2nd coming (1 Pet. 1:13). Sometimes it is used of spiritual insight (Eph. 1:17).

And that last one is how we should see NT prophecy. As Spirit-directed illumination and insight rather than authoritative revelation. That is how the NT church handled it. When someone prophesied, the leadership and congregation decided its authority, not the prophet. And how did they evaluate it? By examining the prophecy in the light of God's word. Rather than authoritative speaking, I think that NT prophecy was Spirit-directed insight along these lines:

- "Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this." (2 Tim. 2:7)
- "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." (Eph. 1:17)
- "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law." (Ps. 119:18)

We'll close with one example of NT prophecy at work and then consider again some applications. Look at Acts 19:21. This is Paul's 3rd missionary journey, and Luke records that he "purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome.'"

Note that Luke is clear, it was Paul's decision to go to Jerusalem and then Rome. Now look at Acts 20:22-23. Paul is back in Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem and is saying goodbye to the church elders. Note how the language is different – rather than saying it was his intention, Paul says he is compelled and warned by the Spirit. Now go to Acts 21:4. Still on his way to Jerusalem, Paul lands in Tyre, and what do the disciples tell him? "They kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem."

Note, they tell him not to go, and it is the Spirit who is their authority for this warning. How could the Spirit be authoritative about what awaited Paul and yet not be authoritative about Paul's going? (Paul thru the spirit says yes, others thru the spirit say no.) Because the disciples were perceiving correctly (had a revelation?) from the Spirit that Paul was about to suffer but they misinterpreted the correct reaction to it and counseled Paul not to go, advice which Paul rejected.

How do we apply what we've learned about prophecy today? We said last time that the early church made a huge time commitment to Lord's Day worship in order to have adequate fellowship and to exhaustively examine teaching and application (6-7 hours). I suggested that such an approach might not work here.

Does that mean we've lost the prophetic gift? Where are our prophets? Sitting right in the pews of our churches, at least some of them. *If* the gift still functions then some of you have Spirit-given insight into living out the Word that strengthens, encourages, comforts, and edifies. Exercise your gift.

But if you do, be very aware that NT prophecy requires a dual responsibility. There is the responsibility of the congregation to weigh the prophet's words and the responsibility of the prophet to subject his words to such examination. As a teacher I can't imagine a more stressful time to look forward to!

For the rest of us, we must earnestly desire to prophesy. Those of us who teach must avoid the trap of focusing on exposition only, leaving the application to the Holy Spirit. Those of us who hear must avoid the trap of settling for exposition only and not giving adequate attention to application. Like many Bible churches, those traps are especially ones we need to be aware of at SMBC.

5. The Offices: Evangelists

Review

Previous to this study we have seen that:

1. The gifts are given for the spiritual maturing of the body of Christ and are but one part of the Spirit's larger ministry in which the Holy Spirit indwells the believer, ministering the presence of Jesus, transforming the believer to Christlikeness. The words translated "spiritual gifts" and "gifts" underscore their origin in and relation to the Spirit and their gracious, undeserved character. We saw too that it is best to think of a "gifting" of the

Holy Spirit, utterly unique from believer to believer. Some may get a single gift, some multiple as God bestows what the body of Christ needs.

2. We defined 3 categories of gifts: Offices, Signs, and Edifying gifts. We are working through the Office gifts of Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, and Pastor-Teacher. These offices themselves are gifts. The NT doesn't name a gift of apostleship, of pastoring, or of evangelism. Rather, the gifts are the men who fill those offices, who in turn have their spiritual gifts to perform their functions.
3. We have looked at the office of Apostle and the office of Prophet. Both are foundational offices according to Eph. 2:20 and 3:5. The key characteristic of Apostleship is its authority. The Apostles were the authoritative founders of the church who were eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus and who taught the church its doctrine. We said in our long and fevered discussion last week that the prophets were foundational in a different sense. Rather than being authoritative in the same way as the Apostles, theirs was a ministry primarily of edification, giving the church Spirit-led insight and direction to encourage the church. The critical difference between the two offices is one of authority. The Apostles were authoritative, the prophets were not, and we said that was clear in the evaluation of prophecy that Paul commands in 1 Cor. 14 and 1 Thess. 5.

Evangelists

The office of evangelist is only listed in Eph. 4, not in the Corinthian passage. The word only shows up two other times in the NT, both in connection with men who were evangelists, Philip (Acts 21:8) and Timothy (2 Tim. 4:5). There is very little we can conclude from Scripture about this office except to consider a couple of observations.

First, in the gospel-preaching ministry, evangelists are the successors to the Apostles. If one characteristic of the apostolic office was to preach the gospel as an eyewitness to the resurrected Christ, so too the evangelist, although he is not a physical eyewitness.

Second, there is not a separate "gift of evangelism" listed. Does that mean one doesn't exist? Not necessarily. Do any of you feel that you know someone with that particular gift? I know a medical doctor who is an evangelist if ever there was one. If there is a gift of evangelism, he's got it. However, we need to be careful about creating gifts based on experience rather than on scripture. It could be that there is an accompanying gift of evangelism, which gives the evangelist greater effectiveness in bringing people to Christ, ala Billy Graham. Or it could simply be that those who fill the evangelistic office have whatever mix of gifts God wills just like the rest of us, along with an acute sense of compassion and a burden for the lost to hear the gospel.

Either way, I think that if we remember that Paul is talking about the gift of an evangelistic office to the church, filled by people gifted specifically to fill that role, it only makes sense that God would bless their Spirit-led ministry as they function in obedience.

Some Biblical Evangelists

- ☛ Philip (Acts 8, 21:8)

- ☛ Timothy (2 Tim. 4:5)
- ☛ Titus? (Titus 1:5)
- ☛ Barnabus? (Acts 13-15)
- ☛ Aquila and Priscilla? (Acts 18:2, 18, 26)
- ☛ Some of Paul's traveling companions? Aristartchus? Tychicus? Epaphras? Who knows?

What did they do? They founded the churches. And in some cases pastored them (Timothy and Titus). If the evangelists focused on preaching the gospel, then when the church reached a certain level of maturity it would be time for a pastor-teacher to come, and the evangelist would move on. Look at Acts 11:19-26 and you'll see that happen when Barnabus comes to Antioch first, then goes to fetch Paul from Tarsus to help.

As we'll see in just a moment there is a real difference between the functions of an evangelist and the functions of a pastor-teacher. This doesn't mean that an evangelist does nothing but preach the gospel. If Timothy was an evangelist he was also a teacher, an exhorter, a church planter, a pastor, and I don't know what all (1 Tim. 1:3, 4:13, 2 Tim. 2:2, 4:2).

One thing is true, and that is there are few that fill a specific "office of evangelist" in the local churches today. So where are the evangelists today? Some are highly visible like Billy Graham and Luis Palau. Some aren't, like the anonymous missionaries in the Nigerian bush and the inner cities of America. Some are lay people like my medical doctor friend. Maybe we should consider that the gift belongs to the church as a whole. After all, what Christian is not called to preach the gospel?

6. The Offices: Pastor-Teachers

Review

Previous to this study we have seen:

1. The offices of Apostle and Prophet, both foundational offices (Eph. 2:20, 3:5). key characteristic of Apostleship is authority. They were the authoritative founders of the church, eyewitnesses to the resurrection, taught the church its doctrine. The key characteristic of the Prophetic Office was its edifying power, giving the church Spirit-led insight and direction to encourage and strengthen it.
2. The office of Evangelist. We said that no "gift of evangelism" is found in Scripture, but many postulate a gift of evangelism which gives effectiveness in bringing people to Christ. Those who fill the evangelistic office have whatever mix of gifts God wills along with an acute sense of compassion and a burden for the lost to hear the gospel. And when people are ministering their gifts in the place God has called them, it makes sense that he would bless their Spirit-led ministry as they function in obedience. We are all responsible for sharing the gospel.

Pastors and Teachers

The Office

This is the last office, and first thing we have to qualify the description found in Eph. 4:11. "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers." The groupings are set off by the word "some." There are 3 groupings of men, not 4. For this reason it is best to see this as a single office with a dual responsibility, 1) to pastor and 2) to teach. Some call this office "pastor-teachers," some "teaching pastors." We'll just assume the teaching role and shorten the office to "pastor."

What does the pastor do? We can start by understanding the other word for a pastor in the Bible, shepherd. These leaders of the local church were called pastors because they were to function much like a shepherd would. The tasks of a shepherd were:

- to feed the sheep (1 Chronicles 4:39-41, Psalm 23:2)
- to watch for enemies trying to attack the sheep (Luke 2:8)
- to defend the sheep from attackers (1 Samuel 17:34-36, Amos 3:12)
- to care for the wounded and sick sheep (Ezekiel 34:16)
- to find and save lost or trapped sheep (Ezekiel 34:12, Luke 15:4-5)

That is, he loves the people, feeding, protecting, defending, and caring for them, sharing their lives and earning their trust.

What should a shepherd never be?

Israel was cursed with godless rulers, whom both Jeremiah and Ezekiel name "shepherds." Listen to their words and see if they are applicable in the church today.

Ezekiel 34:1-6: Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord God,' Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? 'You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. 'Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. "And they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. "My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill, and My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth; and there was no one to search or seek for them.'"

Do they apply? How sad that they do, and not just in the high profile, televangelist scandals, but in the local churches. But fierce wrath will come upon such shepherds. Ezekiel goes on to say God is against them in v7-10, and Jeremiah gives a vivid description of God's judgment:

Jeremiah 25:34-38: "Wail, you shepherds, and cry; And wallow in ashes, you masters of the flock; For the days of your slaughter and your dispersions have come, And you shall fall like a choice vessel. "Flight shall perish from the shepherds, And escape from the masters of the flock. "Hear the sound of the cry of the shepherds, And the wailing of the masters of the flock! For the Lord is destroying their pasture, "And the peaceful folds are made silent Because of the fierce anger of the Lord. "He has left His hiding place like the lion; For their land has become a horror Because of the fierceness of the oppressing sword, And because of His fierce anger."

I can't help but think of James 3:1 here: "let not many of you be teachers for we shall incur a stricter judgment"

What are pastors to be?

So much for the negative example. It's enough to empty the pulpits (or the pews) of America. But what should a pastor be? What is the positive example? Here are three brief New Testament passages that deal with pastors:

- ☛ **John 21:15-17** - Jesus to Peter – 3 times, "Do you love me? Then feed and tend my sheep." The highest expression of love for Jesus is the care of his flock. **Did Peter learn the lesson?**
- ☛ **1 Peter 5:2-4** – Peter to the elders: "shepherd the flock, exercise oversight, not for gain, not lording it, be examples, as responsible to the Chief Shepherd." **Peter learned the lesson!**
- ☛ **Acts 20:28-35** – Paul to the elders: "guard against savage wolves, within and without." **Pastoring won't be easy!**

The Pastoral Role

There is certainly more to pastoring than just teaching, isn't there? Yet we don't give it nearly as much attention. The pastor must be a protector as well as a teacher. How long would a flock last if the shepherd fed it but didn't offer it any protection? In the same way pastors must do more than simply feed. It is tempting to give oneself wholly to teaching, or wholly to administration or whatever, but doing so to the detriment of pastoral care is a real mistake.

Pastors have a unique role. Their office is an open invitation from God into your life. Pastors may witness the full scope of life from birth, growth, illness, marriage, death, job struggles, joys, triumphs, grief's.

The role includes a set of incredible blessings and responsibilities:

- ☛ the **public proclamation** of God's word to people we love

- ☛ **counseling** for spiritual healing and sometimes problem resolution
- ☛ **vision** to lead the congregation, communicating its mission and desires for ministry
- ☛ **sacramental** blessing in administering baptism, communion, baby dedications, marriages, funerals.
- ☛ They get a bird's eye view of God's **grace at work** as people grow in Christ.

What an incredible and intimidating job description! Someone has called the pastorate an impossible, unbearable job accompanied by an improbable, inexplicable strength. No wonder Paul could say "Woe is me if I don't preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16) and "Who is equal to such a task?" (2 Cor. 2:16)

Your Pastors

So who am I, or who is Gary, to hold this office, to teach God's word or God's people? The reality is that it is God that brings you to this office, not man. Not me, not Gary, not the elders. That is the first point I want to emphasize. **The pastorate is not a career choice.** **God** calls his pastors to the office, and God's call is not the same thing as a career choice.

Second, the pastor had best not think himself capable for the job. It may be a comfort to you to know that as Gary and I discussed this lesson yesterday we both agreed that neither of us measures up. We can't do it, and we know we can't do it, without God's strength. Can anyone carry a cross professionally?

Third, the pastor may well hold down outside employment to enable his ministry. The pastor is called to serve Christ by serving his body. That is his vocation. His occupation, how we put bread on the table, may be different, as mine was for years. Vocation and occupation are not necessarily the same, but happy is he whose vocation and occupation match! "Bivocational" pastors are very common in small churches.

Gary is a paid preacher, but he is not paid to preach. Rather he is given an allowance so that he can preach more freely. Gary's emphasis is on teaching, but he fulfills other pastoral responsibilities as well, as any of you who have been ill or needed counseling knows.

Fourth, the functions of the pastorate may be split among several in order to get the job done. I am a paid administrative pastor, but that is not the only thing I do. I also minister in the word, in counseling, in visitation, and I serve as the head janitor too. So where does **that** fit in the pastoral role?

The reality of pastoring in a small church is that you do lots of little things, including all sorts of administrivia. We may tend to think of admin. as less than critical (and compared to caring for God's hurt sheep, it is). But think of church administration as household chores. Taking out the trash is not the most important job around the house, but if you didn't do it the place would sure stink. Thus, my role. As we continue to grow from good sized small church to a mid-sized

church of 200 souls, There is a fair amount of administration to take care of. Doing it as unto the Lord is part of the ministry to which God has called me. If my particular gifts allow me to fill an administrative role well, then Gary, whose gifts are more in the care and feeding area, can minister more effectively.

What are the gifts that enable one to fulfill this incredible office? They are as varied as the men who fill them and the people they serve. Some administration, some teaching, some exhortation. Hopefully mercy, and who knows what else. One thing is clear, what you lack in spirit-giftedness you'd better be prepared to learn from others. I don't feel particularly gifted in the "mercy" area, but heaven help the unmerciful pastor. Gary isn't particularly gifted in administration, but he can't ignore it.

The people's responsibility: If the pastor is a shepherd then the people are. . .? Sheep. There must be an attitude of submission and willingness to be led, balanced by a prayerful and sincere concern to hold the shepherd to accountability. Don't fight him, unless on scriptural grounds he needs to be fought.

The pastor's responsibility: To remember with Peter that we are all accountable to the Chief Shepherd. And how did the Chief Shepherd describe himself? Let's close with that. Look at John 10:14-15: "The Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep."

7. The Signs and Cessation

We have seen the Office gifts, and we turn now to the Sign gifts. As we do, we must first deal with the highly charged issue of "cessation." That is, the understanding that some of the gifts have ceased. The main argument for cessation is founded on this fact: The Apostolic and Prophetic offices were unique to the founding of the church and have passed away.

That this is true is witnessed in Scripture in the unique qualifications of the Apostles (Acts 1:21-22). Both of these offices are called the "foundation" of the church (Eph. 2:20, 3:5) The same Ephesians verses refers to apostles and prophets as eyewitnesses to the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ and their role of mediating revelation to the rest of the church concerning their relationship to Christ. They provide a stable foundation for the building. All other believers are related to Christ because of the apostles and prophets. The aspect of being physical witnesses of Christ combined with the metaphor of a foundation suggests that the apostles and foundational prophets have a temporal limitation and, therefore, the apostles and prophets have passed away from the scene.

That this is true is also witnessed in history. Before the end of the 1st century it was acknowledged that Apostles and the Prophets had passed away.

Question - What implications are there for the rest of the gifts if the Apostolic and Prophetic offices have passed away? *If those gifts passed, there may be reason to ask if any others have also passed.*

And that brings us to the single biggest issue in the entire discussion of spiritual gifts today. Are they all still available? Have some ceased to function? If so, does that mean there's a big chunk of Scripture with no relevance for us today? Do millions of Christians around the world sincerely practice something that other millions say is invalid and has ceased? This question really focuses on the gifts we call "sign" gifts.

The Sign Gifts

The sign gifts are: tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles, healings (many include prophecy).

Their Purpose - The attestation of the Apostles' message (Acts 2:43, 5:12; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4)

As stated above, the big question is, "If the sign gifts are truly for the purpose of attesting the Apostles' message, and the Apostles have passed, then isn't it possible the sign gifts have also passed?" There are three answers to that question:

Cessation

The sign gifts passed with the Apostles and the completion of the canon of Scripture.

Continuation

Cessationists are nuts. All gifts continue through the ages, waxing and waning depending on the church's faith and the Spirit's outpouring.

Restoration

Cessationists aren't nuts, just misguided. The sign gifts did cease, but in these last days there is a fresh outpouring of the Spirit and all His gifts.

Which is right? And how do we know? Does it matter? Yes, it does, and the reason why it matters is nothing less than **the authority of Scripture.**

The Heart Of The Matter

The authority of Scripture is at the heart of the argument for cessation. If there is authoritative revelation being given today, whether in the OT style of prophecy, the NT style of Apostolic revelation, or in authoritative messages from God via tongues, then Scripture is less than complete and less than authoritative.

Let's look briefly at the case for each of these 3 viewpoints, then discuss some considerations about the entire argument.

Cessation

The passing of the Apostles and Prophets (See lessons [3](#) and [4](#) on [Apostles](#) and [Prophets](#)). Continuationists and Restorationists dispute this conclusion. They argue that just because they were foundational does not mean that their ministries are temporary. They argue that, like the founder of a company who subsequently retires, the succeeding directors perform the same functions as the founder. However, they hold that it was what they did, not what they were, that was foundational. They hold a "gift of apostleship," something not found in Scripture. Cessationists hold that the foundation was not simply their ministry or function; it was the men themselves (the ones who will fill the 12 thrones for the Apostles in Revelation). If the foundation is complete then the apostolic line has ceased.

The witness of 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 (Tongues will be stilled). Paul is clear in 1 Corinthians 13 that love is permanent, not the gifts. Specifically, he names 3 gifts, prophecies, tongues, and knowledge. Cessationists argue that the Greek construction of the word translated "stilled" in the NIV means to stop in and of itself, indicating that tongues will stop of itself. This is a very big deal in this argument. Paul is saying that at some point, tongues will cease in and of themselves. When? V10, when the "perfect" comes. What is the "perfect"? Cessationists argue that it is Scripture

Although this view is held strongly by some very big evangelical names, there are 2 real problems here. First, the Greek argument is false. It simply doesn't hold water. To illustrate, turn to Luke 8:24. Same Greek word, same tense, same case, same everything. It can't possibly mean cease in and of itself here, can it? So we really can't read too much into Paul's use of the language in 1 Cor, except to say that at some point, tongues will cease.

The perfect. What about the identification of "the perfect" in v10 with the completion of Scripture? Paul says in v11-12 that when the perfect comes: 1) we'll be mature 2) we'll see clearly, face to face, rather than now as in a mirror dimly and 3) we'll know fully as we are fully known. He is obviously talking about God. Are these things true today? I don't think so. We can barely fathom this book, getting glimpses of God through it, but certainly not the kind of face to face, deep knowledge Paul refers to.

The far likelier perfect thing is the return of Jesus to take his children to glory. It is both the Second Coming and the state of affairs the Second Coming will inaugurate. If the perfect is the Second Coming, then on this basis which gifts can we say have ceased? *None of them*. That is not to say that all contemporary claims are true, only that there is no Scriptural shelter for cessationists.

Finally, this viewpoint assumes that Paul is talking about prophecy, tongues, and knowledge *only* as shorthand for the sign gifts. It is far likelier that he is using these as shorthand for *all* the gifts. His point being that love is the thing, not the gifts.

Continuation

Remnant of faithful through history. Continuationists point to movements, especially involving tongues, that appear sporadically through history as evidence that the gifts have continued right along depending on the church's faithfulness and openness. Up until the 20th century however, these groups have been 1) largely heretical, 2) rejected by the truly orthodox church and 3) practicing "sign" gifts that don't appear to match up well with the Bible's description.

And early church history isn't kind to their argument. The church fathers don't make a strong case for continuation. Justin Martyr, writing at the turn of the 2nd century, on the very heels of the Apostles, talks only about prophecy and healing as supernatural gifts. No tongues, no miracles. Origen, about 100 years later says explicitly the miraculous gifts passed away. John Chrysostom and Augustine, both 4th century, say the same.

Within a few years of the Apostles, the church fathers said the gifts weren't around like they used to be. Continuationists lay that to the unfaithfulness and pharasaical attitude of the church, but it is difficult to lump the entire orthodox church into that category, leaving only the heretics to be called faithful.

Restoration

Fresh outpouring in the latter days Joel 2:28, 23 (after Hosea, before Amos). Restorationists agree with cessationists that the sign gifts ceased with the Apostles, but say further that they have been poured out again because we are now in the last days. The main scriptural support for this point of view is Joel 2, esp. v23 and the former and latter rains. Peter quoted from this passage at Pentecost. Therefore the former rain is the first outpouring at Pentecost, the latter rain is the current outpouring.

But this is taking Joel's prophecy too far. 1) The former and latter rain is merely the spring and autumn rains needed for a good harvest. 2) Such a view trivializes the Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost. The outpouring of the Spirit is literally an eschatological earthquake, a dividing line between the church age and the age previous. The Spirit characterizes the church age continuously, not as a sometime thing. 3) We have been in the last days since Pentecost (Acts 2:17)

There is little to commend this viewpoint other than to note that there is a lot of holy rollin' going on these days.

Considerations

Which of these 3 arguments is clearly right? Can we choose one point of view? None of them seem to have indisputable clear cut evidence. We can't choose all 3 because they are mutually exclusive.

I certainly lean toward cessation, but at best, the Scripture is limited in its evidence. We can infer that some of the gifts *may* have passed with the Apostles (although that is only an inference, the Bible doesn't say it). We can more explicitly say that some or all of the gifts *will* cease, but that

appears to be a future event. Although the cessationist's argument from the passing of the Apostles seems firm, there is little else solid enough to go on.

But, in spite of the weakness of the cessationist argument, there is still less to commend the other two views.

Do we have to choose one at all? Maybe our emphasis in having to figure it out says that our hearts are in the wrong place. Whatever position may be right, if the Bible is so ambiguous about it, then it may be wrong for us to put our focus there. None of these positions is important compared to the need to be ministering the gifts biblically.

Much is made of the abuses of the charismatic movement. People slain in the Spirit, rolling on the floor, barking like dogs, laughing uncontrollably. We look at that and say there is no way in the world that is God's work . . . But if you have ever studied Samson in the book of Judges, you know what a tragically flawed and fleshy man he was! And yet God empowered him with his Spirit and used him just the same.

Is God doing something different in a charismatic's life than he is in a non-charismatic's? Doesn't he want to make them more Christ-like too? God will transform and use his children in spite of our outrageous behavior on the one hand and in spite of our dried-up, overly inhibited spirits on the other.

We need to close with 1 Cor. 13 in our brains. The gifts are not the thing. Figuring out the mechanics of what gift, when, and for how long is not the thing. **Ministering the gifts biblically and in love is the thing.**

We have been given everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Rather than focusing on what stopped and what didn't, the better question might be, does our practice align with the biblical model?

8. The Sign Gifts: Tongues

Review

We saw last time that there are three views on the Sign Gifts: Cessation, Continuation, and Restoration. Restoration has the least Scriptural support, but none have an irrefutable argument. Best you can say is that Scripture infers cessation (from the passing of the Apostles) and teaches cessation (1 Cor. 13), but at a time ambiguous, although probably tied to the Second Coming or the Eternal State, that is, future.

This question is the biggest issue in the discussion of spiritual gifts today. Having considered the question, my view is that while I lean toward cessation, I don't think the question can be answered definitively. More important, I don't believe we should try. **God could have made the answer crystal clear if he wanted to** and he didn't. I don't believe we need to fill in all the blanks. It is good to consider the question, but if we concentrate our firepower on answering it

when there is so little Biblical data, I believe we will be as unbalanced as the Corinthians were, elevating our understanding of Scripture over love.

The Gift of Division?

Tongues is by far the most divisive and difficult gift to cover. In fact, there is no doubt that some reading this disagree firmly. We'll consider the issues in as much depth as we can in this space, but it won't be a surprise if we don't answer the questions of the ages in a few web documents.

Question: What is it that makes tongues such a tough issue? I think there are three things:

1. Non-charismatics see rampant abuses of the gift in some charismatics practice
2. Charismatics sometimes assign the gift top priority as evidence of the Spirit's baptism or an indicator of spirituality
3. Non-charismatics tend to assign tongues a very low priority, even making it the least of the gifts.

Question – Is there anything inherent in this gift that enables such divisiveness? I think that tongues, more than the other gifts, is one that has obviously supernatural manifestations, yet appears to reside "in" the believer. In other words, it's not clear that the other sign gifts, miracles and healings, were at the gifted believer's beck and call, to be dispensed as he willed. Rather, the healer probably would touch and pray (ala James 5), but he wasn't necessarily credited with the healing. However, in Corinth and most everywhere else tongues occurs, the gifted one has seemed to come up with some credit for the gift.

Consider the volatile nature of the discussion here, and expect disagreement. I disagree with those who say there can be no unity in the Body as long as Charismatics and non-Charismatics do not agree. Rather, I think we need to understand what Scripture says about the gift and consider in some depth the issues surrounding it. Expecting disagreement on some of the points, we can (in 1 Corinthians 13 style love), choose to accept one another, warts (or tongues) and all.

Two Questions

There are two foundation questions we need to consider: 1) What is the biblical gift of tongues? and 2) How does the Bible say it is to be practiced?

Again, I'm not interested in refuting tongues by examining abuses, or supporting tongues by looking at the good people who believe in them. I want instead to focus on the **biblical data.**

The Gift in 1 Corinthians 12

Tongues is found in the gift lists of 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28, 30, but not in the other lists. Some conclude that its absence from Romans and Peter (books written after 1 Corinthians) indicate the gift's early passing. That's saying too much since all agree that none of these are exhaustive lists. However, it is tough to support a claim that tongues are critical or even primary for all Christians if they aren't discussed outside of Corinthians.

The Gift in Acts

The gift of tongues is *always* tied to the coming of the Holy Spirit. There are five recorded instances of the Holy Spirit coming:

Pentecost (2:1-11). Let's detail what occurs here. What happens? {noise *like* violent wind (v2), tongues *as of* fire (v3), filled with Holy Spirit and speaking with other "tongues," which were known, human languages (v8-10), declaring the wonders of God (v11)}

This must have been something else! Imagine a tornado approaching, hearing the noise as it gets closer and closer. The walls are shaking and bits are coming off the ceiling, and just as the noise reaches its peak, filling the whole house so that you think its got to collapse or explode, all of a sudden some sort of flaming tongues appear out of nowhere and head straight for you. They come to rest right on you, but instead of burning, all of a sudden you begin to speak, but not in a language you have ever spoken before. And you keep on speaking while a huge crowd comes running to see what's up.

Samaritan Converts (8:14-17). The Holy Spirit comes on these Samaritan believers, but tongues don't.

Paul (9:17-19). Again, the Holy Spirit comes, no tongues.

Initial Gentile Converts (10:44-46). This is some years after Acts 2. What happens? {speaking in tongues and praising God}.

John's Disciples (19:1-7). Still more years have passed. Some would call these disciples the last of the OT saints. Perhaps. What happens? {Paul layed hands on them, the Holy Spirit came, and they prophesied}.

So in the 5 times the book of Acts depicts the coming of the Spirit, tongues are manifested three times (2:4, 10:44, 19:6), twice they are not (8:17, 9:17).

Common Threads

What things are common to these occurrences?

1. When tongues are present, God is magnified (Greek *megaleios* - 2:11), (*megaluno* - 10:46, 19:17).
2. Tongues are always accompanied by filling of the Spirit, but not the other way around.
3. In Acts, tongues are human languages, spoken in public, by groups of people, no interpreters are said to be present, and they always magnify God or God's works.

Consider: How does that compare with your understanding of tongues today?

That was tongues in the book of Acts, what about in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, where much is said about the gift?

The Gift in 1 Corinthians 13

Love is Forever, Tongues Are Not. Without love, tongues are just noise (13:1). By "tongues of men and of angels" does Paul mean there is a heavenly language? We really can't answer that. While there isn't much in the way of evidence to support a "heavenly language" there also isn't much to dispute it. Either way, tongues are specifically stated to be a temporary thing. Tongues will be stilled when "that which is perfect" comes (13:8, 10).

The Gift in 1 Corinthians 14

Some Basics (14:1-13). One who speaks in tongues: Speaks to God (v2), Edifies himself (v4), Is doing a good thing (v5). ***But:*** Uninterpreted tongues are inferior to prophecy (v5), therefore, tongues must be interpreted to be meaningful (v6-13)

Illustration (14:14-18). Unintelligible speech, prayer, singing, or praise confuses outsiders and doesn't edify.

Basic Principle (14:19). Intelligible speech, that which is understood by all, is absolutely superior over unintelligible (uninterpreted tongues) for edification. Uninterpreted tongues may benefit the spirit, but they do not benefit the mind or edify others.

Moving to Maturity (14:20-25).

☛ ***The Law's Perspective (14:20-21).*** Paul goes on to quote the Old Testament that God judges with people of other tongues (Dt. 28:49; Is. 28:11). Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11, which is itself rooted in Dt. 28:49: "The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand." God promised Israel that if they disobeyed him, he would bring judgment on them from foreign nations. Isaiah applies that promise specifically to the coming of the Assyrians, people of another tongue who will nevertheless speak judgment to Israel.

☛ ***Tongues a sign for unbelievers (14:22-25).*** Just as God's judgment was shown by people of a foreign tongue, the gift of tongues is for a sign to unbelievers. Some take Paul to mean that tongues are primarily for evangelism. But if that is the case it is difficult to reconcile the reaction of unbelievers to the uninterpreted tongues in v23. Rather, tongues is a sign of judgment. It may be that to the unbeliever, the impact of the gift is in its "sign"-nifying power, not the specific words being said. The point is that without interpretation you will just appear nuts, not powerful.

Some get so specific as to say they are a sign to unbelieving Israel only, not Gentiles, and that v22 shows what happens when *Gentile* visitors happen on a church that is mistakenly practicing a gift intended only for *Jewish* unbelievers. That is going too far with the text. Paul is simply using the OT text to illustrate his point, not to limit the effectiveness of tongues as a sign to the nation of Israel only.

To strengthen the body, there is to be order in the use of the gift (14:26-28). Paul gives some pretty concrete guidelines for the use of the gift. He says "if anyone speaks in a tongue..." Note that he does not say "when anyone speaks..." Tongues were not assumed, even in the 1st century church.

If anyone speaks, there should be only two who speak in tongues, at the most three, and then one at a time. Clearly the amount of tongues Paul allowed in a worship service was limited. And then, he makes it clear it is not the speaking in tongues that is the important part, but the interpretation of those tongues. ***Interpretation is not optional***, if no interpreter was present, silence is required.

In other words, Scripture makes clear there was both corporate and individual control in the use of the gift. The speaker is not out of his mind, nor is there a lack of control in the church.

The gift of tongues as shown in 1 Corinthians differs only slightly from that of Acts, in that the language is not specified, they require interpretation to be understood, they are spoken primarily by individuals, in public and in private, and are always to edify other Christians based on the principle of edification (v26).

Are We Talking About the Same Thing?

Acts	1 Corinthians
Known languages	Not specified
No interpretation	Requires interpretation
Always a group experience	Individual and group experience
Always public	Public and private
Speech only	Speech, prayer, song
Magnifies God	Edifies other Christians, a sign for unbelievers

There are obvious differences between the gift in these two books. The question is whether or not they are significant. I think the differences about interpretation, public/private use, and its signification for unbelievers are pretty significant. Either Acts doesn't tell us everything there is to know, or the time difference of 30 years between the 2 books means that we have to ask if the gifts as practiced in Acts might have changed somewhat in the later years of the church.

Charismatics and non-Charismatics alike tend to make 2 equal mistakes. Non-Charismatics tend to say that Acts is a book of transition and Corinthians is a book of correction. Tongues were nothing more than a sign to confirm the Apostles, a 1st century sign to unbelieving Israel that has passed away. The Corinthians perverted its right use (illustrated in Acts) to the non-edifying private prayer language that Paul must regulate. I think that is saying too much.

Charismatics tend to say that Acts is forever and Corinthians proves it! Tongues are a sign of the filling of the Spirit, the language of the angels, and to be used for prayer. I don't think that is saying enough.

Considerations

1. Whatever you believe about tongues today **it is absolutely true that in the vast majority of cases**, they are not known human languages. Does that fact say anything about their legitimacy? From Acts you would expect tongues to be recognizable language. There is nothing in 1 Corinthians that would explicitly challenge that. Since 1 Corinthians was written about 10 years **before** Acts it's difficult for me to accept that Paul is describing something different than Luke is in Acts.
2. Do abuses of the gift necessarily mean the gift is false? When tongues is practiced in revival these days, it is often not done according to 1 Corinthians 14. **Not necessarily**. I'll address that issue in the next study.
3. If we accept that there are spiritual gifts not named in Scripture, isn't it possible that one or more named gifts might be manifested in a way not seen in Scripture? What if the gift of tongues could be both known language and ecstatic speech? What if known language were for attestation and when interpreted, for edification? What if there were a private prayer language, edifying to the believer's spirit, that remains?
4. What is the purpose of tongues? In Acts, to magnify God. In Corinthians, a sign for unbelievers. How would you choose between those two? How would you determine a controlling purpose for the gift? Is it possible that tongues might serve more than a single purpose? To magnify God, to edify others (when interpreted), and for private worship? This makes the most sense of the biblical data.
5. If interpretation of tongues is a spiritual gift, can a German-speaking non-Christian rightly interpret a believer who is speaking German through the Spirit? *Hmmm*.

9. The Sign Gifts: Healing

Review

We've spent the last 3 studies on the "sign gifts," those gifts that are commonly thought to have been primarily, but not solely, for the attestation of the Apostles and the Gospel. This study will finish off the sign gifts by looking at healing.

Consider the biblical models that come to mind when we talk about the gift of healing. Who are the ones who consistently healed in the New Testament, who evidently had a supernatural, spiritual gift of healing? Jesus and the Apostles. The Apostle's healing ministry was in fact based on Jesus' healing ministry. For all intents and purposes, the two were just about identical, as the following will show.

The Healing Ministry of Jesus and the Apostles

Both Jesus and the Apostles healed:

- ☛ By Word (Mt 8:5-13, 9:6-7; Jn 4:46-53; Acts 9:34)
- ☛ By Touch (Mk 1:41; 5:25-34; Acts 28:8)

- ☛ Instantaneous (Mt 8:13; Mk 5:29; Lu 6:10; 17:14; Jn 5:9; Acts 3:7)
- ☛ Physical restoration (Acts 3:2-10; Lu 6:8-10; Jn 9)
- ☛ Raised the dead (Lu 7:11-15; 8:49-55; Jn 11:1-44; Acts 9:36-41)
- ☛ Multitudes (Lu 4:40; 7:21; Mt 4:23-24; Acts 5:12-16; 28:19)
- ☛ No record of failure (except Mk 9:17-29, where the failure was evidently allowed to make a point)
- ☛ No record of relapse

When we talk about the gift of healing, this is the biblical pattern. And when we see or read of contemporary healing ministries, we need to consider this: do they fit the biblical description? Much (though I would not say all) charismatic healing today is far from this description. Like tongues, the biblical model of healing seems to be absent today.

Does this mean that Jesus and the Apostles emptied the hospitals of Palestine? Was hanging out with an Apostle a guarantee of freedom from medical bills? I don't think so, because there is a significant record of apostolic illness:

- ☛ Paul (Gal 4:13-14; 2 Cor 12:7-10)
- ☛ Timothy (1 Tim 5:23)
- ☛ Trophimus (2 Tim 4:20)
- ☛ Epaphroditus (Phil 2:27)

If biblical healing is always instantaneous and complete (as above), why are these men sick? There is more to healing than what we see in the Gospels and Acts. But is the gift as seen in the Gospels and Acts the same gift that Paul describes in Corinthians? What is "the gift of healing?" Let's start by looking again at 1 Corinthians.

Read 1 Cor 12:9, 28, 30. Paul's choice of words here is important. Notice that in none of these verses does he talk about the gift of healing. That would be an inaccurate paraphrase of Corinthians. In fact, in all 3 occurrences he uses plurals - "gifts of healings."

Many continue to talk about the gift of healing. Some detach it from any supernatural element by saying the gift of healing was simply practical wisdom in treating illness. Other's say it was the supernatural instantaneous healing of the Gospels. But where in the Bible do you find the gift of healing? You don't. You find it in books on spiritual gifts. If we define the gift of healing as the ability to heal as Jesus did, it doesn't exist in the Scriptures.

What Paul is describing is not a permanent gift, where a person has authority over all illness. D. A. Carson calls the occurrence of plurals here "remarkable plurals," pointing to different gifts of healings. That is, *each occurrence of healing was in itself a gift from the Holy Spirit, both to the one healed and to the one through whose hands healing came.*

Paul is clear here that the Holy Spirit's gift of healing to a sick believer is administered through another believer. That should say two things to us. One, when sick, what do we need to do? **Ask for healing.** Two, we need to go to someone for a physical manifestation of the request (see James 5:14-16). The most common sense reading I have of 1 Corinthians is not so much that there was a known healer, though that is not impossible. Rather, when the believers were ill they were to go to the elders for anointing and prayer for healing. Each occurrence of healing was a gift of the Spirit at the hands of the elders.

An interesting exercise in any of our Bible-believing, non-Charismatic churches is to ask these questions:

1. How many of you believe God **can** heal miraculously?
2. How many of you believe God **does** heal miraculously?
3. How many of you regularly **ask** for miraculous healing?

If there is a disparity in our answers to these questions, consider why? Possible answers are that we are taught that God doesn't heal anymore, or that we do not want to ask the impossible, that we fear failure, or fear an association with some of the excesses of the Charismatic movement.

Read James 4:2. This is in a different context, but one can still apply the principle. Could it be that we might see more occurrences of miraculous healing if we asked for it more often?

Why does God heal?

Scripture presents four reasons that God heals:

- ☛ To Attest the Gospel and the Apostles (Acts 3:15-16; 4:10; 14:3)
- ☛ Out of compassion (Mt 20:34; Mk 1:41-42; 9:22; Lu 7:11-17)
- ☛ To glorify Himself (Mt 15:30-31; Lu 17:17-18; Jn 11:4, 40)
- ☛ In response to faith (Mt 9:2, 22; 15:28)

What has changed between NT times and now? Do any of these reasons still exist today? Except for attesting Apostles, all do.

Does God want everybody well?

Read Is. 53:4 and Mt. 8:16-17. Some say all illness and suffering are directly attributable to Satan and his works. Since Christ defeated Satan on the Cross he has given us power to

overcome him. Therefore, healing from all sickness and suffering is the birthright of all Christians, and if a believer calls on the Lord in genuine faith, he will be healed. Look at these quotes:

- ☛ "Deliverance from sickness is provided in the atonement, and is the privilege of all believers" (Declaration of Faith of the Assemblies of God)
- ☛ "Divine healing is provided for all in the atonement" (Declaration of Faith of the Church of God [Cleveland])

Now, what if he isn't healed? Where is the fault? In the believer. He must be in sin, or not have enough faith, or whatever. The toll this teaching causes in broken hearts, lives, and false guilt is immense. After all, some illness is directly related to sin (John 5:14; 1 Corinthians 11:30; James 5:15) but by no means all.

Opposite the error that says we have the right to claim healing is an equal mistake, that there is no healing in the atonement. In this view, Isaiah 53:4 is speaking only of spiritual sickness, sin. Both views are extreme, and both are wrong. The question is not whether or not there is healing in the atonement, but what blessings can we expect right now, today? What blessings will come about only in glory? And what blessings might we get a little taste of here but not fully possess until the Kingdom?

In other words, we'd better understand there is a place for suffering in our lives, along with the promise and possibility of healing. Paul didn't seem to have any guilt about his illness in either Galatians or Corinthians. In fact it was his illness that brought him to Galatia in the first place, and his thorn in the flesh that made him strong. Paul was sorrowful that Epaphroditus was ill, and fearful he might die. He left Trophimus at Troas so that he might recuperate from his illness, and suggested a little medicinal to settle Timothy's stomach.

If we are convinced that God means for us to be well and happy all the time we are going to be frustrated and immature people. God's purposes for us may include suffering. They may include healing. How do we know when to ask and when not?

What to do with healing

Why does God allow illness and suffering? Illness is a very useful thing for God's purposes. It can, and maybe it is supposed to, rob us of our notions of strength, of control, of independence. When God allows illness or suffering, he does it to a purpose, which is to bring us into closer dependence on him.

If God healed in the past for the reasons given above, is there any reason to believe he wouldn't heal today for the same reasons? Scripture is clear that God loves us, cares for us, has compassion for us, and wants to glorify himself. Scripture is clear that when we are sick we are to ask him to heal us of our illness. He may answer by healing, he may answer by settling in our spirits that he won't heal (as in Paul's thorn), or he may answer in silence.

First and obviously, I'm not looking for a healer, one with "the gift of healing." At the same time, though there is a lot of fakery in some healing services, I don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Just because there are abuses in healing services doesn't mean there is **no** legitimate healing going on. I like J. I. Packer's perspective: "At some moments and in some respects charismatic healers are enabled to perform like the gifted healers of NT times. Every such occasion confirms that God's touch still has its ancient power."

What about here at SMBC? Do we believe that God's touch still has its ancient power? We had the privilege of praying for and anointing Annelle a few weeks ago, but in my memory that is the only time any have approached the elders to ask for such a ministry. I believe we could be more faithful to James 5, don't you?

If we are afraid to ask for healing, what does that say about our belief in God? Are we afraid he won't heal? He might not. That is his prerogative, and only he knows his purposes for you. Are we afraid that if we aren't healed it will say something about our faith or something about God? Like, he must not exist? Or, if he exists, he must not care? Does James 5 require the healing to be instantaneous? I don't think so.

If we think that God doesn't want us to ask for healing, what does that say about our belief in God? Have we fallen for the myth of the strong, silent types, suffering stoically for the Lord? Is he looking for strong vessels or weak?

Consider these things. Talk about them with your friends and family. If you are sick or suffering, the elders stand ready to pray for you. Who knows what God will do?

10. The Edifying Gifts

Should a Christian expect the miraculous out of the exercise of the gifts? God can and does work miraculously, and he also works through what we perceive as more normal means. What about in the more mundane areas of life? Is it miraculous when someone offers help to you at the time it is most needed? When a teacher makes a point that goes right to your heart and begins to change you? When someone comes to see you in hospital and cheers you when you've been ill?

Perhaps we should separate the two. The exercise of the gifts and their ministry to our hearts is always supernatural, sometimes miraculous.

The question has a big bearing on the last major section of our study. We've looked at the reason the church was given the gifts, sought to understand the gifts in the larger context of the Spirit's ministry to the Body, and then looked at the Office gifts (Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor-Teacher) and the Sign gifts (Tongues, Healings, Miracles). Today we are going to turn to what some call the Edifying gifts.

The Edifying Gifts

The remaining gifts will be dealt with pretty quickly, especially compared to the length which we've treated the others. There is a reason for this. These gifts are more readily

understood, plus we've thought deeply about the definition and purpose of the most controversial gifts. Now it's time to think practically. We need to turn our emphasis from mostly "what" the gifts are to mostly "how" we are to use them.

Before we get to them, here are a couple of points to keep in mind. The edifying gifts can be grouped into 2 broad categories of speaking and service, based on 1 Peter 4:11: "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ." Further, 6 different gifts can be combined into 3 because of their similarity: Service and Helps, Leadership and Administration, Exhortation and Encouragement.

Questions for today

1. Can you develop your gift? If you have the spiritual gift of teaching, can you improve?
2. What's the difference between helps and serving? Between administration and leading? Between teaching and exhortation? There is some overlap between these gifts.
3. What is the distinction between purely natural abilities and Spirit-given abilities?
4. What is the distinction between purely natural performance and Spirit-blessed results?

The SMBC Spiritual Gifts Inventory

When we began this study our adult Sunday school filled out a very short and unscientific questionnaire. The first of these questions was "What is your spiritual gift or gifts?" Here are our answers:

Inventory chart

1. Significantly larger number of people with service/helps and exhortation/encouragement, teaching
2. Fairly even distribution
3. Not all gifts were represented:
 - ☞ No "sign" gifts at all (tongues, healing, miracles)
 - ☞ No "word of wisdom" or "knowledge"

Issues

- ☞ To whom does the ministry belong? Is it of the people, or the paid staff? (from Stedman)
- ☞ Gift assessments and questionnaires
- ☞ What if you don't know your gifts? Bible's emphasis is on doing your gift, our emphasis tends to put priority on knowing your gift.

Speaking Gifts

1 Peter 4:11 "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God . . . so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ."

Word of Wisdom & Word of Knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8)

The emphasis for both of these gifts is on the word or the message, ***not*** the wisdom/knowledge. In other words, the gift is the ***message*** resulting from wisdom or knowledge. There are essentially 3 views of these 2 gifts.

First, some say there is nothing miraculous in view here. Wisdom is essentially practical truth, knowledge is essentially doctrinal truth. The messages of wisdom and of knowledge result from the Spirit's blessing conferred on one who is speaking practical or doctrinal truth.

Second, some say this is revelatory knowledge, inspiration on the same order as the Scriptures. They would say that Paul refers to a special "message of wisdom" given only to certain individuals within the early church. The gift served a revelatory purpose by enabling a few specially chosen individuals to receive the "hidden and secret wisdom of God" (I Corinthians 2:4-13; 4:1; II Peter 3:15-16).

Third, some say (me included) that this spiritual gift would have very close kinship with prophecy as we outlined it earlier in our study. That is, it is Spirit-led illumination, not revelation. It is applicational truth that is likely to be practical but may be doctrinal as well (the distinction between wisdom as purely practical and knowledge as purely doctrinal is non-existent in Corinthians. Wisdom is doctrine in chapter 2, while knowledge is pretty practical in 8:10-11).

Faith (1 Cor. 12:9)

How do we distinguish faith which all Christians are to have--trust, reliance, and dependence upon God--from the "gift of faith," in I Corinthians 12:9? This supernaturally endowed faith is a gift from God. In Paul's hyperbole of Chapter 13, such faith enables God's people to tap the tremendous resources of power that can *"move mountains!"*

The "gift of faith" was a special endowment from God that enabled some believers to manifest a quality of faith in God to bring about certain results for which he cannot claim some divine promise recorded in Scripture. D. A. Carson has held up George Mueller as a relatively modern-day example of such faith.

Discerning Spirits (1 Cor. 12:10)

How do you tell demonic forces from the Holy Spirit when Satan masquerades as an angel of light? (2 Cor. 11:14). In all of the lists of spiritual gifts, this gift appears only once, in I Corinthians 12:7-10. In **Unwrap Your Spiritual Gifts**, Kenneth Gangel points out that there are three categories of discernment:

1. There is "natural discernment" which is available for every person--Christian or not. Sometimes we call it good judgment or "horse sense." It is the ability to make wise decisions by observing and understanding. Some people have more of this than others, but it can be learned.
2. There is "spiritual discernment" which comes to a believer as he/she grows in Christ (Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:14-15; Hebrews 5:13-14). It is connected to a great extent with knowledge of the Bible, and with personal spiritual growth. It comes with a maturing sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.
3. Finally there is "gifted discernment" which the Holy Spirit has given to some believers as a special gift, enabling them to serve the church as watchmen and to identify by supernatural insight what is not truth.

The gift of "distinguishing between spirits" was the supernatural ability to accurately assess and judge inner motives, hidden errors, or corrupting doctrines. Good spirits and evil spirits were supernaturally discerned by those who had this gift. Certainly, during the infancy of the church when the completed written Word as we have it today was not available there was special concern about false teaching and evil tendencies that would have corrupting influences (I Timothy 4:1-5; I John 4:1-3). How were early Christians to distinguish between truth and error? The bestowal of this gift would have been extremely valuable to such a community of early believers.

This gift is illustrated in Acts 5:1-4 and Acts 13:6-10. Imagine the reaction if one of us stood up and said, "You must listen to me! God has given me the gift of discernment!" Today, the word of God is the primary means by which we discern good from evil, like the Bereans (Acts 17:11). At the same time we must listen carefully to the warnings and admonitions of Christians among us who are wise, knowledgeable, and discerning; however, we heed their messages and respond to their call only to the extent that they direct us in a way that accords with the teaching of God's Word!

Teaching (1 Cor. 12:28; Rom. 12:7)

It is evident from Paul's question in I Corinthians 12:29, "*Are all teachers?*" that not all Christians had the "gift of teaching" even though all Christians should endeavor to teach in some manner.

The "gift of teaching" enables one to instruct, guide, and nurture Christians in the Word of God. Gifted teachers have a special ability to share God's Word in a way that can be understood and applied to life.

1. In James 3:1, there is a strong warning: "*Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.*" This warning seems to indicate that before one pursues a "teaching ministry" as a primary focus, he/she should be aware of being called to it. To recognize the presence of this gift should cause one to feel a keen sense of responsibility to exercise it.

2. The gift of teaching in 1 Cor. 12:29 and Rom. 12 is distinct from the office of Pastor-Teacher in Ephesians 4:11. The many who are called to teach yet are not called to pastor are exercising their gift in filling Sunday school rooms, classrooms, and mission fields.
3. In **Unwrap Your Spiritual Gift**, Kenneth Gangel points out: "It would seem that the major difference between the gift of teaching in the first century and the gift of teaching today is that the teacher today has the completed canon of Scripture and almost twenty centuries of church history to shed light on his/her hermeneutical task. There is a clear implication of study, mental, and verbal skills, and reliance on the Holy Spirit in the ministry of teaching."

Exhortation or Encouraging (Rom. 12:8)

The Greek word "parakalon" translated "encouragement" in Romans 12:8 refers to the actions of one who "comes alongside" to offer comfort, counsel, exhortation, and help. It is a different form of the same word which describes the Holy Spirit's comforting ministry.

1. This gift may be said to be one that finds ways to bring out the best in others. Barnabas clearly had the "gift of encouragement" (Acts 4:36; 9:26-30; 15:36-41).
2. "Encouragement" is described in I Thessalonians 2:11-12.

The presence of this gift would enable one to work effectively in the area of counseling.

Serving Gifts

1 Peter 4:11b "If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ."

Administration & Leadership (1 Cor. 12:28; Rom. 12:8)

For the purposes of our study, these two gifts are being studied under the same heading. The Greek word for "administration" (kubernesis) means "piloting or steering." The "kubernetes" was the navigator or helmsman whose chief task was to keep his ship on course. The original word for "leadership" (prohistemi) conveys the picture of someone "presiding over others" (I Thessalonians 5:12; I Timothy 3:4-5, 12; 5:17).

1. The "kubernetes" is always at the helm steering his vessel away from dangerous rocks that are above and beneath the surface. He maps the direction of the craft, knows its limits and capabilities as well as the skill and experience of the crew.
2. Jethro provides a good illustration of effective administration in Exodus 18:7-27.

Helps & Serving (1 Cor. 12:28; Rom. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:11)

Again, two gifts are being combined under one heading. "Diakonia" is the Greek word for "serving" as in Romans 12:7 (diakonia is the same word from which we get "deacon.") "Antilempsis" is the word translated "helping" as in I Corinthians 12:28. The verb form of this word means, "to take a burden upon oneself." This gift is broad in scope and has numerous

subheadings. The gift of "serving" or "helping" enables one to work behind the scenes in very practical ways to meet needs, relieve suffering, and serve the Body of Christ in any number of ways.

1. Works of service are to be done by all Christians, yet some have a special gift from God in being able to take burdens upon themselves with a spirit of love and cheerfulness.
2. Kenneth Gangel writes: "Those who possess this gift tend to be marked by a less-talk-more-action style of service."
3. Tabitha is one of several strong illustration of the "gift of helping or serving" (Acts 9:36-39).
4. William McRae writes: "A person with this gift will loathe the limelight but be the backbone of an effective church. Many unseen tasks that cause the ministry of the Word to be performed smoothly are effectively done by these persons. They prepare Sunday school materials for the teachers, care for the maintenance of the building and property, work in the tape ministry, do secretarial work, arrange transportation, set up chairs, assume responsibility for a radio program, provide nursery facilities, etc. How invaluable are the men and women who do this kind of work joyfully and faithfully. It is a magnificent gift".

Hospitality

Actually, hospitality doesn't show up in the gift lists. It is commanded in Rom. 12:13 and 1 Pet. 4:9. It is best to think of hospitality as a subheading of the gifts of helps and serving. Because so many of us identify with it, we will examine it along with the others. The Greek word for "hospitality" (philoxenia) means "love of strangers." It is the ability and willingness to be hospitable, to provide an open house, and to provide food and lodging for others.

1. Though all Christians need to be kind and hospitable, some demonstrate a special ability in this area of Christian ministry.
2. Several New Testament characters and principles illustrate hospitality --Romans 12:13; I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 13:2. Aquila and Priscilla clearly demonstrated hospitality since their home was consistently used as a meeting place for the church (Acts 18:1-3; 24-26; Romans 16:3-5).
3. One whose gift of helps and service works itself out in hospitality will maintain a good spirit in the process (I Peter 4:9). If hospitality is "stranger love," is it hospitality to have your friends over all the time?

Mercy (Rom. 12:8)

The Greek word for "mercy" (eleos) means "to show compassion," or "feel sympathy of heart." The gift enables one to empathize--to get inside the skin of another and suffer alongside of those who experience grievous affliction.

1. All believers are to be merciful (James 2:15-16). Yet, there are some believers who have a special gift in being able to serve in the presence of human misery such as is so often seen among the poor, the sad, the afflicted, and the widows and orphans.
2. This gift leads believers to devote time to relieving the needy, visiting the sick, encouraging the aged, and supporting the handicapped, imprisoned, bereaved, and lonely.

Giving (Rom. 12:8)

The Greek word for "giving" (metadidomi) means "to share," "to impart," or "to bestow." This gift provides a special readiness and ability to give of material goods and financial resources for the sake of the Body without motives for self-benefit.

1. This gift, like all others, is to be exercised "for the common good" (I Corinthians 12:7). To give in such a manner so as to draw attention to yourself is not the work of the Holy Spirit within you (Mt. 6:1-4).
2. This is not a gift for the wealthy. The poor can exercise this gift (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). Barnabas again demonstrates this gift demonstrated (Acts 4:36-37), as did the widow in Luke 21:1-4. Is it exercising the gift of giving to give something that costs you nothing?
3. Of course, all Christians are responsible for giving, yet some have a special gift in this area.

Identifying Your Gifts

That is the survey of what the gifts are. But truthfully, knowing what they are is one thing, knowing what yours are is another. And one of the most often heard comments regarding the gifts is something like "I don't know what my gift is." The next study will focus on that issue, identifying your gifts. How do those who are wondering what our gifts are figure it out? What survey is best? What methodology should be used? How can I obey the Lord in ministering my gifts if I don't know what they are?

11. Ministering Your Gifts

Review

As we've said, our emphasis has shifted from what the gifts are to how we use them. Many are unsure of what their gifts are. One thing that is true of a lot of Christians is that a significant number are unsure of their gifts. Here at SMBC that number is roughly 1/3. Based on that we suggested a set of principles to help seek out our gifting:

1. As we evaluate our giftedness we need the proper mindset from Rom. 12:3-5,: sober judgment, in faith, remembering we are one body
2. There are four activities which will help us evaluate our gifts: 1) Pray for God's direction and help; 2) Spend time studying God's word; 3) Monitor the creative restlessness within you; 4) Look for and meet needs. The Biblical emphasis of gifts is in ministering, not discovering.

3. There five signs to confirm our gifts: 1) Listen to God's people; 2) Look for fruit; 3) Look for joy; 4) Look for naturalness; 5) Look for perseverance.
4. Many know what their gifts are but don't know where or how to best minister them. Finally, there are four principles to minister by: 1) In faithfulness; 2) With discipline; 3) Out of love; 4) To glorify God.

So now what?

What if you've spent some time in prayer, you've studied the Bible, monitored your inner restlessness and identified needs and began ministering in one or more areas. What would you expect to be the result of such a process? What should happen next? There should be some evidence of fruit, of the body being built up, some confirmation of your gifts either positively or negatively.

At first blush we might be tempted to say that confirmation of our gifts is not real important. After all, if it's the Spirit's gift what does it matter what others say? Is there more confirmation available than to wait and see if people grow? How do we confirm our gift? I think there are a number of ways God works to confirm our gifts, and we can be actively involved in the process.

Confirming Your Gift

1. Listen to God's People

I spent years in management for IBM and Blue Cross, and one of the toughest parts of the job was in evaluating staff. It was hard for both sides. Some people are simply difficult to evaluate and most people don't like being evaluated. So what I would have really loved was if everybody could just review themselves! Fill out a form, tell the boss how you're doing and where you need to improve and how much of a raise you should get!

But how effective would any company be that relies on people to monitor themselves? What is the likely result if I evaluate myself and set my own raises? Great raises!

It would be like the animals running the zoo. In our church circles we would call it lack of accountability. We are *not* the best people to judge our own faithfulness, are we? It is all but impossible for us to evaluate ourselves rightly. We need input from those around us to help guide us in effective ministry, and we need input from those around us to help confirm our gifts.

- *Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.* Proverbs 27:6
- *As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.* Proverbs 27:17
- *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.* Hebrews 10:24

How many of us are afraid to ask the simple question "So, how'm I doing?" for fear of the answer? Yet we need to be asking it, and we need to have someone we can ask it of. We need to

ask others who are spiritually mature if they see evidence of the presence of the gift. God will use other Christians to help us find our place in the Body.

Listen when people say, "You do that real well..." or "You seem to be able to..." Such comments can be extremely helpful. An accountability group who will lovingly work with you according to Scripture is an invaluable means of confirmation. Obviously, in order for a group to function effectively, there must be an atmosphere of openness, honesty, and trust.

Such giving, receiving, sharing, caring, and helping each other become what God desires for us to be is an integral part of building the body. On the other hand, we deceive and dishonor one another when we do otherwise. Accountability and responsibility in the use of spiritual gifts will build up the body.

1. **Look for Fruit**

We were made to bear fruit: "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." (John 15:2) "And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God." (Col. 1:10)

It is fair to expect that in many cases there will be some degree of success when we use the gifts with which God has endowed us. Does the ministry of your gift build up the body? Are people being impacted by what you do? Are people being changed? If not, go back to step one. If doors are being opened, individuals are being blessed, and the body is being edified, you are probably in the right place.

Two cautions here. First, fruit doesn't always come in visible form. Like the seed planted or the yeast working in a batch of dough, what God is doing in people's lives as a result of our ministry may not always be immediately seen.

Second, fruit doesn't always come in the shape we expect. You might call this the kiwi principle. If you're expecting all fruit to come in apple and banana shapes, you won't see the kiwi as fruit. It just doesn't look like something made for my mouth. Don't have preconceived notions of what fruit God will bring.

2. **Look for Joy**

There should be a strong sense of willingness and joy in the ministry of our gifts. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and should characterize our lives in general. Joy is seen as a key characteristic of believers 60+ times in the NT. Lack of joy in a Christian's life is a sign of deeper problems. A Christian ministering in the area God has called him to should have a sense of joy in that ministry.

As Paul encouraged in Romans 12:8, the gifts are to be exercised generously, diligently, and cheerfully. "if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of

others, let him give ***generously***; if it is leadership, let him govern ***diligently***; if it is showing mercy, let him do it ***cheerfully***." If there is no sense of joy in your life or ministry, there are some tough questions you need to be asking, and they all go deeper than just "Am I ministering in the right area?"

3. ***Look for Some Measure of Naturalness***

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." (Ecclesiastes 9:10). When you are gifted by God in a certain area of ministry you should develop some measure of naturalness when exercising that particular gift. Not that there won't be sweaty palms and roiling stomachs, but over time there should be a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment even though you are still inexperienced and need much improvement.

Even when supernaturally gifted by God, there can be improvement in ministering in following an old non-Biblical adage, practice makes perfect.. This is from Wayne Jones:

We become better at what we do, and we enjoy doing it more and more. The usefulness or joy of our ministry is not based on our first attempts. But God leads us and strengthens us, and we become more and more blessed and fulfilled in the work, {and more able to build up the body}. There are times, however, when a lack of developing skill and results can be God's way of saying, "Not this one--there's a better way for you to travel." God never closes the door because He doesn't love us, but because He wishes to use us in a different way.

If you are in an area of ministry that you don't feel gifted for, you aren't comfortable in it, and people aren't being blessed. Does it mean you should bail? It all depends. That question goes back to the priority of need over strength. Sometimes it seems when the kitchen needs cleaning there is a profound lack of gifted people.

4. ***Look for Perseverance (2 Peter 1:6)***

When serving in areas where they are gifted, individuals should demonstrate a greater degree of perseverance over the long haul. A lack of giftedness may explain why some Christians soon grow weary in certain areas of ministry and desire to quit, while others press on and demonstrate great patience even in the midst of difficult circumstances. A sense of giftedness inspires one to keep on growing and persevering!

Principles to minister by

Having confirmed your gift, how then do you minister your gift? What should be the mindset of the one who serves?

1. ***Faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:2)***

"Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." We are called to faithfulness in all things, including the use of our gifts. Our gifts are a trust from

the Lord. If we are not ministering, we have something to answer for. To borrow from a parable, how will you answer when the Judge asks you if you put his gifts to work? Will his response to your answer be "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Mt. 25:21)?

2. **Discipline (2 Tim. 1:6-7; 1 Peter 4:7)**

Don't you hate that word? Who loves discipline? Yet we are called to it. I think of young Timothy a lot in this regard. Sometimes Paul's letters to him read like correspondence between a father and a son struggling to make it on his own. Look at 2 Tim. 1:6-7: "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

Ministering Timothy's gift required the exercise of self-discipline. Note what Paul says about that discipline. Who has it? All of us have been given a spirit of power of love and of self-discipline!

Peter says something similar in 1 Peter 4:7: "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray." We are commanded to be clear of mind and self-controlled.

3. **Love each other deeply (1 Peter 4:8-10)**

The context of Peter's clear minded and self-controlled prayer is in the ministry of the gifts to the body: "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

When Peter says "love covers over a multitude of sins" he is saying with Paul that love "Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." We do whatever it is that the body of Christ needs, and we do it out of love, not merely obligation.

I think too that Peter makes clear we are called to minister to the whole body, not simply our friends, or those we agree with, or those whom we are not mad at. Sometimes *this* is tough love (for us). But such love allows us to minister without grumbling. Whatever your gift is, serve others with it.

4. **Glorify God (1 Peter 4:11)**

"If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever.

Amen." The ultimate goal is that God be glorified. Appropriately ministering the gifts points away from us, even away from those we minister to, and points to God.

Finally

What would a church full of people who practice this look like? What would characterize its fellowship? How about maturity, love, support, intimacy, bearing one another's burdens, and deep spiritual relationships? Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Does this describe your church? Does it describe you as a ministering believer?

What happens if you don't exercise your gifts? Will the body still be built up? Christ will continue to do his work in the universal Body, but when individuals and individual churches forsake biblical ministry for other things, they lose the blessing of obedience and their own building up. The Body will be built, but individual Christians who are not ministering as they were designed will not.

To the degree that the list above *doesn't* characterize your church, what do we need to do to change? Are there specific things we can do as a body to look more like our list? It all comes down to two areas, the leadership and the people.

Leaders

To whom does the ministry belong? The church . . . how many believers is that? All of them. If nothing else, we've seen that the gifting of his church with his gifts clearly shows that the ministry belongs to the people. *Specifically, it does not belong to the pastors and paid staff.*

Read Eph. 4:11-13. What is the responsibility of the pastor-teachers? To prepare God's people for service. What does this say about the responsibility to do the works of service? Nothing.

What is specifically *not* the function of the paid staff with reference to the church's gifts is to own the ministry. Pastor's gifts are to be ministered in preparing God's people for service, but all members of the body of Christ carry the *responsibility* to minister.

I believe the job of a pastor is first and foremost to teach God's word in its fullness. Following that, it is to lead by 1) being aware of our needs and our people, and 2) by encouraging and if need be, challenging specific individuals to undertake needed ministries (where little is asked, little is usually given) and 3) helping to provide the structure for ministry.

People

What is your job? Read Eph. 4:14-16. Surprise! It's to do your job - to minister your gifts. In other words, it is to move from being passive "church-goers" to a people excited about being active "ministers" for Christ in keeping with our gifts. Our expectations for personal commitment to and involvement in Body life must be raised! Look at this quote from the 18th century English evangelist George Whitefield:

"My brethren . . . let us plainly and freely tell one another what God has done for our souls. To this end you would do well, as others have done, to form yourselves into little companies of four or five each, and meet once a week to tell each other what is in your hearts; that you may then also pray for and comfort each other as need shall require. None but those who have experienced it can tell the unspeakable advantages of such a union and communion of souls . . . None I think that truly loves his own soul and his brethren as himself, will be shy of opening his heart, in order to have their advice, reproof, admonition and prayers, as occasions require. A sincere person will esteem it one of the greatest blessings."

I think Whitefield is describing the best possible environment for the ministry of spiritual gifts. What does that sound like to you? Here at SMBC we have a small group ministry we call Growth Groups. The church was created to be a koinonia, a fellowship that brings added strength and encouragement to serve in ways we could not serve if in isolation. We were created to need each other! As we have said so many times, they are the heartbeat of our church, the place where the primary nurturing, encouragement, and ministry of believers takes place. If you are not in a Group, whether by choice or it is simply not possible, you need some consistent forum where you can share your needs and meet others needs. Sunday morning church is primarily a worship and equipping time. You need more.

We also need accountability. Without lording it over one another, we can and should encourage, exhort, and even rebuke one another when spiritual gifts are being neglected or misused. In Romans 12:5 Paul says, *"So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."* The goal is not to create a police-state environment, but a family where members feel a genuine concern and responsibility for each other.

Putting your gifts into practice at SMBC (or wherever you are)

How many of you know what your church mission statement is? How many of our churches even have one? Here is SMBC's:

"The mission of SMBC is to equip believers through the teaching of the Word of God (Eph 4:11-16) to engage in:

1. The ***upward*** ministry of worship through prayer (Acts 2:42), singing (Col 3:16), remembering the Lord in communion (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 11:23-26), and studying Scripture (2 Tim 2:2,15).
2. The ***inward*** ministry of building the body of Christ (Eph 4:12,16) through application of Scripture to our Christian responsibilities: encouragement, prayer, accountability, discipline, benevolence, hospitality.
3. The ***outward*** ministry of fulfilling Jesus' great commission to "make disciples" (Mt 28:19-20) through evangelism (Eph 4:7, 2 Cor 5:18).

"Our goal is to know Jesus Christ (Phil 3:10) and to make Jesus Christ known (2 Cor 5:18)."

In the light of our mission statement, we can consider which needs are our greatest needs (not our strengths, but our needs), and ask how God has gifted us to meet them? For example, strictly

withing our church context, here are some needs in our own church that are probably generic to most churches. These are areas of constant need. Think how many more examples there are in each individual's world?

Upward Ministry of Worship

Needs here include soloists (instrumental and voice), people to sing in the choir, Scripture readers, and using drama to emphasize Bible truth.

Inward Ministry of Building the Body

Children's ministry (Sunday school, nursery, Sunday/Wednesday evening programs), Youth ministry (Middle and High School), small groups and small group leaders, prayer, discipleship and accountability, taking meals to needy or sick, visitation, caring for the church facility.

Outward Ministry of Making Disciples

Personal evangelism, neighborhood or some kind of program evangelism, convalescent home ministry, community helps and service.

Enough of Words

One of our men remarked a while back that the world doesn't need any more commercials. They've heard enough, now they just need to see Christians put their words into action. Words... words... words! The world is weary of our words! The world today says to us in a loud voice, "Don't just tell me--show me!" The great need today is for Christians who have heard the call to discipleship and are ready to exercise their spiritual gifts in Christian ministry on a daily basis! How will you respond? Freely, we have received! Freely, we must give!