

SPIRITUAL

pastor apostle evangelism
miracles exhortation
prophecy giving administration **Gifts** faith mercy
service wisdom knowledge leadership hospitality
tongues teaching discernment healing
helps administration

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Spiritual Gifts

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

One of the most interesting subjects in the New Testament is that of spiritual gifts, and yet it is often one of the most misunderstood. The purpose of this book is to study in depth and context what God says about spiritual gifts and how they are to be used in the Body of Christ.

The most detailed discussion on spiritual gifts in the New Testament is found in 1 Corinthians, chapters 12–14. Other passages that pertain to spiritual gifts are Romans 12:3–8; Ephesians 4:1–16; and 1 Peter 4:10–11.

Spiritual Gifts

Diversity but not Division

Any time divisions are a result of exercising spiritual gifts, it is an indication that these gifts are not being used as God intended. The variety of gifts is parallel to the parts of the human body, and Paul uses this analogy in 1 Corinthians 12:4–17. “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:4). “And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord” (1 Cor. 12:5). “There are varieties of effects, but the same God” (1 Cor. 12:6).

Then Paul compares the variety of gifts to the human body and its various and necessary parts, “For even as the body is one and yet has many members” (1 Cor. 12:12). “If the foot says, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,’ it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body” (1 Cor. 12:15). “If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?” (1 Cor. 12:17).

Basic Unity in the Body of Believers Is Jesus Christ

Believers are either being led according to God, or contrary to God, and the true test revolves around what a person says about the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ must be recognized as being the Son of God who died on the cross for the sins of mankind, arose bodily from the grave, and is coming again to establish His kingdom. The person and work of Jesus Christ, then, is the foundation upon which all other Scripture is based. Unity is based upon a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. True unity is found only among a special group of people—born-again Christians!

Idols Are Dumb (Speechless) But Have Demonic Spirit Forces Behind Them

Paul states very clearly that when the Corinthians were unbelievers, they were being led and controlled by other persons (false teachers) and other spirit beings (demonic forces behind false teachers). “You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the dumb (speechless) idols, however you were led” (1 Cor. 12:2).

The Old Testament makes mockery of idols¹ and deals harshly with false teachers and/or prophets.²

The Spirit Is the Giver of the Spiritual Gifts—(Source)

The word charismatic scares a lot of people, but it simply means gifts of grace. (Charis is the Greek word “grace.”) Since every believer is endowed with one or more gifts, every believer is charismatic. “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7; emphasis mine).

All believers will not have the same gift, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:4).

Christ Is the Director of the Spiritual Gifts— (Administration)

There are different ways of serving the Body of Christ, but the same Lord directs the entire operation into unity and harmony that brings glory to God. “And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord (to direct)” (1 Cor. 12:5).

1. “Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field are they (false gods), and they cannot speak; they must be carried, because they cannot walk! Do not fear them, for they can do no harm, nor can they do any good” (Jeremiah 10:5). “What profit is the idol when its maker has carved it, or an image, a teacher of falsehood? For its maker trusts in his own handiwork when he fashions speechless idols” (Habakkuk 2:18). “Woe to him who says to a piece of wood, ‘Awake,’ or to a dumb stone, ‘Arise!’ And that is your teacher? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all inside it” (Habakkuk 2:19).

2. A false prophet was to be put to death for leading people astray (Deuteronomy 13:5).

God Is the Enabler of the Spiritual Gifts— (Operations)

When believers are exercising their gifts, even the same gift, the results will not be the same because God the Father is working to accomplish His purposes in and through each individual person. “I (Paul) planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6). It is God who brings about the results, so it is God who is really accomplishing the work through the activity of the person with his special gift. It is “God who works all things in all persons” (1 Cor. 12:6).

Three Basic Facts about Spiritual Gifts

1. Spiritual gifts are freely and graciously given. Gifts of grace cannot be earned, for you cannot do anything to get them in your own power. “And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly” (Rom. 12:6; emphasis mine).

A gift is not earned or merited so a believer should not feel personal pride or self-satisfaction due to his gift. “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Ephesians 4:7; emphasis mine).

2. Spiritual gifts are a means of serving in the Body of Christ. Gifts are not to exalt the person who has the gift; they are to enable that person to serve other believers. “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet. 4:10).
3. Spiritual gifts necessitate the activity of the possessor. You will discover your gift as you function. Many do not recognize their gift because they are inactive. Just as a baby is born with all the necessary parts, he must learn to use those parts through activity. Many Christians are sitting around waiting to be discovered. In their waiting they become frustrated because they are not functioning as God intends.

Every Believer Is Important

As you study the spiritual gifts it is exciting to know that each be-

liever is essential to the Body of Christ. That makes everyone important. If you do not know your gift, you need to ask yourself this question: What one contribution can I make to enable this body of believers to be more effective in building other believers and in reaching the lost?

PERMANENT SPIRITUAL GIFT

Teaching

The Gift of Teaching Is the Most Important Gift in the Church Today

Paul establishes an order of importance in regard to the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28. He lists apostles first, prophets second, teachers third, and then the other gifts. This does not mean that the other gifts are not important, it simply means that there is an order of importance, just as there is in our body. Not all parts of our body have equal importance, but all parts of our body are necessary and important.

Basically, the gift of teaching is the supernatural ability to explain and apply the truths of the Word of God. As you shall see in all these permanent gifts, there is an aspect that is to be true of every believer, but the person with that particular gift will have a supernatural ability that goes beyond the ability of the average Christian.

One Who Has the Gift of Teaching Must Be a Good Student of the Word

A key aspect of the gift of teaching is knowledge of the Word. You cannot communicate what you do not know and you cannot teach what you do not know or understand. It is also important to know that just because you have knowledge of the Bible, you do not necessarily have the gift of teaching. We have all had the experience of sitting under a well-educated person with adequate training or even with a number of degrees who bored everyone who listened.

It is also true that you may have the gift of teaching and still not do

a very good job of exercising that gift. If you are lazy and do not study the Word, you will not be very effective.

All Believers Have Power to Understand the Bible

While it is true all believers have the Holy Spirit to help them understand God's Word, a person with the gift of teaching will have more power and ability to study the Word than other Christians and will have special insight to pull things out of the Word. How many times have you studied a portion of Scripture and thought you understood it quite well and then a teacher teaches that same passage, only with new meaning and deeper understanding?

Every believer can gain insight and understanding by studying the Word, but that knowledge has to be clarified and verified in relation to the total Word by those who have and exercise the gift of teaching. If the gift of teaching was not necessary, the Lord could have removed that gift and let each person study on his own.

Believers Recognize the Gift of Teaching in Others

There are some believers who think they have the gift of teaching, but the Lord has yet to provide those who are going to learn under them. They wonder why after three or four weeks, no one is in their classes.

If you think you have the gift of teaching, the first thing you need to do is study the Bible to be sure you know and understand the material you are going to teach. Then try teaching. Of course you have to give it a fair trial, for any new adventure has uncomfortable moments. However, if you have tried teaching for several weeks and do not feel you are reaching anyone or getting your points across, and those listening to you seem restless and uncomfortable, maybe teaching is not your gift. At least you have tried teaching and can then eliminate it as your gift. Then move on to something else that may prove to be your gift.

PERMANENT SPIRITUAL GIFT

Helps (Ministering)

The Gift of Helps Is a Broad Area

The gift of helps is the supernatural ability to serve or help the body, and it appears in two places in the New Testament: Romans 12:7 and 1 Corinthians 12:28.

Romans 12:7 uses the word meaning servant or ministering. We get the word deacon from it. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, there is a different word that means “to help” or “give aid.” It could be that there are two different gifts — one serving and one helping—but it seems that they are pretty close and probably blend together with the same idea.

Since the gift of helps is a broad area, we often do not recognize its importance. No body of believers could function if it were not for people with the gift of serving and helping and making the teaching of the Word possible.

Sensitivity in an Area May Indicate Your Gift

Many people point out areas to me that need attention. That may be an indication that they have a gift in that area and should be functioning there. It is amazing that some people perform the same functions around the church without praise, week after week, and yet they go about their task joyfully and never complain. That is an indication that they have that gift, and it is necessary to carry on so effectively. God is aware that you are or are not functioning and exercising your gifts. After all, He is really the One you should be serving. Those who serve unnoticed in the area of helps will probably receive the greatest rewards in heaven.

All Believers Should Be Serving In the Area of Helps to Some Degree

Those who have the gift of helps will provide the leadership in these various areas, but all believers are to help in varying degrees and with different abilities.

In 1 Corinthians 16:15, Paul tells of the household of Stephanas de-

voting themselves “for ministry to the saints (believers).” That is exactly what we as believers are to do. We are to be willing to help where there is a need, whether we have the gift of helps or not.

PERMANENT SPIRITUAL GIFT

Administration

Definition of Administration

The gift of administration is the supernatural ability to oversee and provide leadership for the Body of Christ. Again, there are two different words used: one in Romans 12:8 and the other in 1 Corinthians 12:28. The idea is the same in both verses, that of overseeing or supervision.

We recognize that all of us are equal in Christ. However, there is an orderly arrangement in the body. Although I am your equal, if God has given you the gift of administration, you are to provide leadership for me. That does not mean I am inferior to you, only that I am to be subject to you because the Spirit has gifted you with special insight to discern what is best for the body and how it should be governed.

The gift of administration is often connected with the office of elder because in the local church, elders are the leaders (1 Pet. 5:1–4). There are others who are leading under them, but ultimate leadership in the body is given to the elders.

We usually have two extremes in the area of administration: Some people want to serve because they get some glory and prominence with it; others do not want to serve because of the responsibility it entails. Every privilege has responsibility, and every gift has responsibility.

Believers Are to Respect Their Leaders

There are passages in the New Testament that warn believers to respect those who are their leaders:

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction (1 Thess. 5:12).

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you (Hebrews 13:17).

It is always easier to criticize those who are leaders for not doing things the way we think they ought to be done than it is to help do them the right way. If you have insight as to what should be done and how leadership should be carried out, maybe you have the gift of administration and should exercise that gift. Whether or not you have the gift of administration, you must submit to those who are in authority over you and do so willingly and joyfully.

One Characteristic of Maturity— You Are Functioning in the Body

If it is God's desire for you to have the office of elder along with the gift of administration, the Lord will make that clear to you and to those who are responsible for that decision as well. However, you are not going to jump from zero to elder. You have to manifest the gift, the ability and the spiritual maturity first. If you are not functioning, you are not manifesting maturity.

The Board of Elders is only one place where leadership is exercised. There are many areas where a church needs leadership. If you are burdened for more leadership in the church, maybe you have the gift and ought to begin to discern areas where you can serve in that capacity.

PERMANENT SPIRITUAL GIFT

Evangelism

Definition of Evangelism

The gift of evangelism is the supernatural ability to excel in presenting the Gospel so unbelievers believe.

There are a variety of ways to divide the gifts into categories, but the

most common way is to divide them into two main, broad categories: speaking gifts and serving gifts. The gift of evangelism is obviously a speaking gift (1 Pet. 4).

All Believers Are to Be Witnesses, But Some Excel

All believers are to be able to present the Gospel. Even the newest Christian should be able to present the Gospel clearly enough to lead others to a personal faith in Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:20).

There is only one person in the New Testament who is called an evangelist. “And on the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him” (Acts 21:8). Philip was one of the seven picked to wait on tables in Acts 6, serving as one of the first deacons.

To see how Philip exercised his gift, turn to Acts 8:5, “And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.” Philip went into a new area and proclaimed Christ to the unbelievers and the unbelievers responded in faith in great numbers.

“But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike” (Acts 8:12).

An evangelist is the same as any other believer in sharing Christ except the Spirit uses him in a unique way to draw unbelievers to Christ.

A Gifted Believer Is Always Training Others

According to Ephesians 4 an evangelist will be training others to share their faith. In all areas, the gifted person will be training other people so even if I do not have the gift of evangelism, I need to be trained to reach others more effectively.

A new Christian may see great results from his witnessing because all his contacts are unbelievers, but as time goes on the number who are reached for Christ diminishes. At first when so many are believing as a result of his testimony, a new Christian may think he has the gift of evangelism, but a person with that gift will not run out of contacts. Like a bloodhound, the evangelist seeks out the unbelievers. When we think of evangelists today, we think of Billy Graham and men like him, but

within the local church are men who have the gift of evangelism which is essential in the growth of the body by winning the lost.

PERMANENT SPIRITUAL GIFT

Pastor

Anyone Who Is a Pastor Will Be a Teacher

The grammatical construction of the phrase “some as pastors and teachers” suggests a close connection between the two gifts of pastor and teacher. From the grammar it would appear that all pastors will be teachers but not all teachers will be pastors.

Pastor Is the Only Gift with a Dual Purpose

The gift of pastor is the supernatural ability to pastor the flock of God, to shepherd God’s people. As noted above, though, teaching is a key element in being a shepherd.

The main result of these speaking gifts, and particularly the gifts of pastor and teacher, is found in Ephesians 4:12, “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” The speaking gifts should be communicating the Word, serving the function of providing food and maturity for believers so they, too, can function effectively. When all believers are functioning, the body will be built up, which produces unity and stability.

“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Eph. 4:14).

Pastoring Is Tied to Responsibilities of Elders

The responsibility of pastoring the flock is tied to the responsibilities of the elders in the New Testament as in 1 Peter 5:1–4.

“Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory

that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

Elders are to be pastors. They are to be shepherds under Christ, the Great Shepherd as also referred to in Hebrews 13. There are guidelines these shepherds are to follow. A pastor is to be a shepherd voluntarily. Of course some elders are paid, but payment should not be the motivation.

Elders are not lords or masters, and their flock (the people) are not their slaves. Rather, the elders lead by their example to provide direction for the flock.

There is some confusion today about what a pastor is. Many think there is one pastor and a board of elders with the two being two distinct levels and functions. According to Acts 20:17–30, the responsibility of the elders is to shepherd the Church of God and keep them from false doctrine.

Pastors Must Have a Thorough Knowledge of the Word

One of the qualifications of an elder is to be sound in the Word. In 1 Timothy 3, an elder must be able to teach. In Titus 1, one of the qualifications in teaching is to have a thorough knowledge of the Word so a pastor can defend it against false doctrine and refute those who are in error.

To Rebel against God’s Shepherds Is to Rebel against God

There are two important aspects to be kept in mind: the responsibility of the pastors and the responsibilities of the sheep. If Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd and the Holy Spirit has appointed under-shepherds (Acts 20:28), then the flock must follow those shepherds God has provided. To rebel against God’s shepherds is to rebel against the Great Shepherd because you would be rebelling against those He has appointed for

leadership.

Gift of Pastor Is Not the Same as Administration

While many pastors (elders) have the gift of administration in addition to the gift of pastor, administration is much broader. The gift of pastor is more narrow and deals primarily with doctrinal areas.

Old Testament Warnings about False Shepherds

The principle God uses in leading His people is the same in the Old Testament and the New Testament. God is the Shepherd and He appoints under-shepherds who are responsible to lead the flock.

Ezekiel 34 gives us one of the severest condemnations of false shepherds in the whole Bible. It would be worthwhile to read the entire chapter.

The Bible never gives a situation in which a member of the flock goes off on his own because he doesn't need a shepherd. That is contrary to the nature of sheep. However, if the shepherd begins to teach false doctrine, he will have to give an account to God for that. If you as sheep stay under his ministry, you will have to give an account to God, too, for not checking what your leader preaches with the Word of God.

PERMANENT SPIRITUAL GIFT

Exhortation

Exhortation Is Used Primarily in the Area of Conduct

The gift of exhortation is basically the supernatural ability to encourage others and urge them to decision and action (both parts of that are important).

Exhort is related to the word *paraclete* used to mean the "Holy Spirit" in the Gospel of John. It is not the same word, but it is a related word meaning "one called to help" (encourage, comfort, beseech, admonish, entreat).

There are some guidelines in using the gift of exhortation. “Just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children”

(1 Thes. 2:11). A person with this gift would act as a father toward his children, urging and encouraging them to proper conduct. That conduct is revealed in 1 Thessalonians 2:12, “So that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”

Exhortation Takes Great Patience and Instruction

“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Tim. 4:2).

In the ministry of exhortation, the same patience that is used with your children should be used in ministering to other believers. You cannot demand that a four year old act like he is fourteen, although sometimes we do. With patience you teach him and guide him to maturity. It is the same in the spiritual realm. There must be patience as believers reach various maturity levels. With the patience must come valid instruction or there will be no growth. Thus you can see how important it is that a person with the gift of exhortation know the Word of God to be able to instruct and advise others.

There is definitely an element of teaching in the gift of exhortation, but it is primarily in the context of encouragement to act in a certain way or to accomplish a particular task.

Exhortation Must Be Done With Authority and in the Word

Do not get the idea from the passage we read in 2 Timothy 4:2 that because exhortation is done with patience, there is a lack of authority. Quite the contrary, as you will readily see in Titus 2:15, “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.” All exhortation is to be done with God’s Word so there are no apologies. However, we must never exhort our own opinion, ideas or feelings. (See also Titus 1:9; Rom. 15:4; 1 Thes. 4:18.)

Gift of Exhortation Is Important in Christian Counseling

True exhortation is founded on the Word of God and in effect is a shedding of the light of the Word on a particular situation. The only true helpful counseling that can be done is biblical counseling.

You would be far better off to have a person with the gift of exhortation counseling you than to have the most knowledgeable person in the world of psychology or psychiatry who is ignorant of the Word of God. Remember that exhortation is a supernatural ability to aid people and their problems and guide them to proper conduct, so it is not a natural ability or even one that can be learned.

All believers are to encourage and exhort one another. However, not all have the gift of exhortation and not all function with the same effectiveness and to the same degree.

PERMANENT SPIRITUAL GIFT

Giving

Definition of Gift of Giving

The gift of giving is the supernatural ability to give of your material resources to support the work of God. This gift functions in the material realm. The Spirit gifts some individuals with that special ability to support the work of God. This gift does not relate necessarily to the ability to acquire great possessions. Not everyone who has the gift of giving is wealthy. Many times God has provided these gifted believers with great abundance so they are able to give more. “He who gives, with liberality” (Rom. 12:8). God often gives people with this gift more abundance because others of us who get more would use the extra on ourselves.

Every Believer Is to Give Without Ulterior Motives

You may have felt relief to find out that giving is a gift. Before you sigh too loudly with relief, remember there is a balance in giving. Every believer has a responsibility to give to God’s work. Your motivation to

give should be generosity. There should not be any ulterior motives such as tax deductions or for show. Many people figure out their income tax at the end of the year and that figure determines how much they plan to give for the Lord's work. A person with the gift of giving may be giving twice as much as he can deduct from taxes. It may not be a good business principle to give more than you can deduct, but it is a good spiritual principle with far greater results.

The most complete discussion of Christian giving is found in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, "Each one do (give) just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). This chapter covers the giving of all Christians, but certain principles that apply to all believers naturally apply to those who have the gift of giving.

There Are Guidelines to Follow in Giving

As we noted in 2 Corinthians 9:7, we are not to give grudgingly or because we feel we should just because we take up a seat on Sunday morning. You might as well keep your money if you give out of obligation.

Matthew gives a warning not to give to the Lord with showiness and display. "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 6:1). Matthew goes into more detail as to how you are not to give to the Lord in Matthew 6:1–4, and these verses also deal with giving for display.

Not all Giving Must Be Done in Secret

Sometimes we overreact and think all gifts must be in secret. In Acts 4:36–37, Barnabas sold a piece of land and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. Everybody knew Barnabas had given the money. If that had happened today, we would have told Barnabas to just put the money in the offering and we would say someone was generous and gave a gift.

What about pride? If giving is done openly, is there a danger of some giving for show? There is a danger now and there was a danger in the

early church of giving with the wrong motive. God will deal with that sin.

In Acts 5:1–11, Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, also sold a piece of land. They planned to keep back part of the money, but let the Church believe that they were giving the total amount. The result of their deceit was that they both dropped dead before the whole Church.

There is nothing wrong with people who have the gift of giving doing so openly. Evidence of their giving can be an encouragement to the body, just like all the other gifts. The motive for giving is the key factor. There is a danger of pride in every gift. Some teachers get proud, but that doesn't mean that the gift of teaching ought to be secret, on tapes anonymously.

If you have the gift of giving, you will be giving more than your share, but you will also be getting more than your share of blessings. Whenever you exercise your gift, you receive more than you give.

PERMANENT SPIRITUAL GIFT

Mercy

The gift of mercy is the supernatural ability to manifest compassion, pity, or mercy to comfort suffering believers. This is similar to the gift of helps, but the gift of mercy narrows down to a specific area of need.

All believers are to show mercy and help when they can. Those with the gift of mercy are able to see more needs and see the need more clearly to take the appropriate action. However, we are all to be good Samaritans (James 2:14–17).

We need to be careful that we do not criticize other believers who are not gifted the same way we are. They do not see all the needs we see, and therefore do not function as we do. If I have the gift of mercy, I will see opportunities everywhere because I will have the perception from God to see the needs and come to the aid and comfort of other believers.

This gift, along with all the others, is to be carried out in a cheerful and joyous way, not with the feeling that we are obligated to serve. "He who shows mercy, with cheerfulness" (Rom. 12:8).

PERMANENT SPIRITUAL GIFT

Faith

Definition of Gift of Faith

The gift of faith is the supernatural ability to believe and trust the Word of God beyond that of those believers who do not have this particular gift. “To another faith by the same Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:9).

All Believers Have Faith to Some Degree

It is interesting that we have the gift of faith because all believers have faith. You must have faith in Jesus Christ to be saved, but those with the gift of faith go beyond that of the rest of the believers who are not gifted.

Goals Should Be Set by Those with the Gift of Faith

Sometimes there is a conflict between those with the gift of faith and those without it. Those with the gift of faith have a vision of future goals, and Christians without the gift of faith do not have the same perception.

Usually the difference of opinions rests on the amount of money something will cost. The gift of faith is an exciting gift because it entails the impossible. God is not limited as man is, so I would rather follow God’s way, though it may seem impossible or impractical to me.

That is why the goals and direction of the church should be established by those who have the gift of faith. Then the believers who do not have this gift can work out the details. That can put pressure on those who work out the details if they do not realize the leading is from the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. Those who exercise their gift of faith will enable others to function more effectively.

PERMANENT SPIRITUAL GIFT

Celibacy

The gift of celibacy is the supernatural ability to abstain from sexual involvement. Thus, the Christian gifted in this area does not have the need to be married.

The gift of celibacy does not appear in any of the major lists of gifts. In 1 Corinthians 7:7–9, Paul almost mentions it in passing but that does not mean this gift is not important. Paul says this gift is given to enable a person to exercise other gifts more effectively. A person with the gift of celibacy does not have the burdens of family life (the responsibilities of a family), so he is free to give more time and attention to the things of the Lord.

Paul had the gift of celibacy so he was able to exercise his gift of apostleship more effectively. The gift of celibacy might be called an aiding gift.

Summary of Permanent Spiritual Gifts

Do we have a complete list of permanent spiritual gifts with these ten we have just covered? The indirect way God refers to the gift of celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7 may indicate that we do not have a complete list.

Any ability given by the Holy Spirit to enable a person to function more effectively as part of the Body of Christ is a spiritual gift. The concern should not be whether these ten permanent gifts are complete or final, but that every believer has a special supernatural gift from God. It is also vital to the Church that every believer know what his gift is and then be exercising that gift to the glory of Christ.

Generally these ten permanent gifts provide a broad category that most gifts would come under quite easily. If you do not know your gift, you should be experimenting in various areas of the church to find out where you should be serving (and you should be serving somewhere).

The basic guideline questions you should ask yourself are as follows:

1. What do I enjoy doing?
2. Am I able to see the needs of others in a certain area and then meet those needs?
3. Do others recognize that I have a gift in this particular area?
4. Do I continue to grow as a Christian working in this area?
5. Have I given this area a fair trial period?

Do not give up too easily. It takes time to develop your gift, to feel comfortable in a new area and to be effective in helping others.

When every believer is exercising his gift, the body will be developed to further maturity and stability, manifesting more clearly the character of Jesus Christ. What else is more important?

TEMPORARY SPIRITUAL GIFT

Apostleship

First Requirement of an Apostle — An Eye Witness to the Resurrection

In Acts 1, Judas (the one who betrayed Christ) had already committed suicide and the remaining eleven apostles want to replace him. The title apostle is a particular title of these twelve men and Paul even though there are other men that probably have the gift of apostleship such as Barnabas, Silas, possibly James and a couple of others. However, the prime focal point is on these twelve men and Paul. As the eleven apostles seek to replace Judas, there are certain requirements that person will have to meet.

The first requirement of an apostle is that he must have had a first-hand experience of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. “One of these (apostles) must become a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:22).

Paul defends his apostleship with proof that he, too, had seen the

resurrected Christ. “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (1 Cor. 9:1).

Some have said that Paul was not really an eye witness of Christ’s resurrection just as the Corinthians were doubting Paul’s right as an apostle. In answer to that doubt, Paul reviews Christ’s order of appearances, “and that He appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve” (1 Cor. 15:5). “After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time . . . then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:6, 7).

Then Christ appeared to Paul! “and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also” (1 Cor. 15:8).

There Are No Apostles Today

In light of the fact that a definite requirement of an apostle was that he must have seen the resurrected Christ, apostles ceased to exist when these first-century men died.

Today, some will say that apostles and missionaries are the same thing. It is true that missionary is the Latin word for the Greek word apostle, and both words mean “one who is sent with a special message.” However, the similarity ends there, for the twelve apostles had to have seen the resurrected Jesus Christ.

Second Requirement—Apostles Possessed Miracle Gifts (Signs, Wonders and Miracles)

The second qualification of an apostle carries us into some of the other gifts. Paul’s second evidence that he is a true apostle is that God has given him supernatural power in the form of miracle gifts. “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles” (2 Cor. 12:12). Now if there were all kinds of Christians running around Corinth doing miracles, Paul’s statement would lose any validity, for then miracles cease to be a sign of a true apostle.

It is consistent throughout the book of Acts that every time the miraculous happens, it is always in connection with the ministry of one of

the apostles. “At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people” (Acts 5:12).

Romans 15 is speaking about Christ’s accomplishments through Paul by use of the miraculous. “In the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit” (Rom. 15:19). Is Paul saying miracles were being done by all the Christians? No! He is talking about particular miracles being done by Paul as an apostle.

Miracles Validated the Apostles’ Ministries

“God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (Heb. 2:4). Even at this point in writing (about 68 A.D.), the miracles are written as something that is a past event—that those who heard salvation from Christ had their ministry confirmed (validated) by signs and wonders and different kinds of miracles.

All the verbs in Hebrews 2:3 are in the past tense (even before 70 A.D.). “After it was (past tense) at the first spoken (past tense) through the Lord, it was confirmed (past tense) to us by those who heard (past tense)” (Heb. 2:3; emphasis mine).

There is no longer a need for gifts for which the prime purpose is to validate a ministry of direct revelation. God’s Word is complete! The argument is sometimes given that because people do not believe in the Bible, we need the miraculous just as it was needed in the apostles’ day. Read Luke 16:27–31 where Abraham tells a man in Hades that if a man does not believe the written Scriptures (Moses and the prophets), he will not believe even if someone is raised from the dead. The proof of that is obvious. Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and people still did not believe—and still do not believe today.

The Apostles and the Prophets Laid the Foundation of the Church

The gift of apostleship is a foundational one and the most important gift of all the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:28).

The ministry of the apostles and prophets was to lay the foundation of the Church. They brought the truth regarding the one Body in Christ

to mankind. In Ephesians 2:19, Paul says we are “fellow-citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household.” The importance of the apostles and prophets is explained in Ephesians 2:20, “Having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.”

Once you have laid the foundation, there is no other foundation that needs to be laid. There is no other truth that needs to be conveyed for the Church to be constructed. There is no need for more apostles or prophets.

When constructing a building you would begin to worry if the workers came to lay the foundation after the building was half built, wouldn’t you? The same is true in a spiritual sense. The apostles and prophets have finished the foundation of the Church and no one should be trying to lay a new foundation. The foundation is done, settled and secure. We are building on that foundation. The gift of apostleship is finished.

Summary of the Gift of Apostleship

The gift of apostleship is the most important gift given, but it was a temporary gift (one that has not continued down to our present day).

There were two qualifications for an apostle. First, he had to have been an eye witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (He had to have seen Jesus Christ bodily after the resurrection.) The second qualification was that miracles had to accompany an apostle’s ministry to validate or confirm his position as an apostle. Paul met both qualifications as an apostle.

Apostleship does not continue today simply because people have not seen Jesus Christ in His bodily resurrection. The apostles have completed the foundation of the Church, and God’s Word is complete. No new revelation is needed.

TEMPORARY SPIRITUAL GIFT

Prophecy

What Is a Prophet?

Basically, a prophet had the ability to receive direct revelation from God and then to communicate that revelation to men.

Some identify the gift of prophecy with the gift of preaching today, but that is not correct because the key element is missing—a preacher does not get his messages directly from God. A pastor gets his message from the Word of God (hopefully), but God does not appear to him in dreams and visions or by speaking directly to him. Since a prophet got his message from God, it was free from error, which obviously is not the case today! God cannot communicate mistakes! If God had so garbled the message He wanted to reveal to man and there were so many mistakes that the meaning was not clear, then God would not have revealed Himself at all.

Prophecy Is Necessary Only for Additional Revelation

The gift of prophecy is only necessary when God wants to give additional revelation (when He wants to reveal more of Himself than He has revealed up to that point in time). A person who says the gift of prophecy is present today is in the same breath saying the Bible is not complete and that we need more material revealed from God. However, God says the Bible is complete and there is no additional revelation. “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book” (Rev. 22:18).

The Revelation the Apostles and Prophets Received Is the Foundation of the Church

Just as the apostles received direct revelation from God, so did the prophets. That revelation is the foundation upon which the Church is built. Many times in both the Old and New Testaments, those who received the direct revelation were given the power to perform miracles and foretell the future. “One of them (the prophets) named Agabus stood

up and began to indicate by the Spirit (prophecy) that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius” (Acts 11:28). Later, Agabus was prophesying the imprisonment of Paul (Acts 21:11).

There were female prophets as well as men. “Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses” (Acts 21:9). The Old Testament also has examples of prophetesses such as Huldah, Deborah and Miriam.

Paul is classified among the prophets and teachers as well as an apostle (Acts 13:1). Not every prophet was an apostle, but in all probability every apostle had the gift of prophecy.

God Gave Prophets Direct Guidance

Connected with the gift of prophecy is direct guidance from God. “A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’ ” (Acts 16:9). God does not communicate in visions to Christians today. There is no need for God to appear in visions. He has given us the Bible as our guide for direction in our daily lives.

In a number of other places the Spirit directly reveals Himself to Paul and tells him something concerning his future activities (see Acts 18:9-10; 22:17–21; 27:23, 24).

Summary of the Gift of Prophecy

We have noted that the gift of prophecy was temporary. There are three main reasons which we have covered:

1. When the New Testament was completed, there was no reason for additional revelation and the gift of prophecy is always connected with receiving new material from God. You do not find prophets getting material from God just to reiterate what God has already done or said.
2. The apostles and prophets were the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20). When the foundation was laid, the material for the foundation was given. When the foundation was complete, there was no longer any need for apostles or prophets.

3. Since there is no longer a need for prophecy, the gift of prophecy came to an end with the completion of the New Testament. “Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away” (1 Cor. 13:8).

TEMPORARY SPIRITUAL GIFT

Miracles

Gift of Miracles Is the Ability to Do Supernatural Works of Power

The gift of miracles is one of the most exciting gifts, along with healing and tongues. These gifts probably generate the most interest and discussion today. The gift of miracles is broad and includes much more than miraculous healing. Any act which includes God’s intervention into natural processes is included in the gift of miracles.

Miracles Are Always Done in Connection With an Apostle in the New Testament

Acts 5 is the familiar account of Ananias and Sapphira with Peter as the apostle. Ananias and Sapphira had sold some land and had given some of the proceeds to the Church, but they pretended that they were giving all the proceeds to the Church.

Peter knew they had plotted to deceive the Church, and he performed a miracle through the power of God. Peter tells Ananias that he not only lied to men, but also to God. “And as he (Ananias) heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came upon all who heard of it” (Acts 5:5).

The same fate befell Sapphira in Acts 5:10. This is not like the miracles we think of usually, but still it is a miracle. Obviously God is not doing this today. Some of us can be thankful He isn’t! Why did God do that type of miracle then? God wanted to establish the ministry of the apostles, and this type of miracle caused the people to fear and respect the instructions and messages the apostles were giving. Not only did

God confirm the ministry of the apostles, He guaranteed the purity of the Church at its inception (2 Cor. 12:12).

Tabitha Came Back to Life in Peter's Ministry

Tabitha (Dorcas) died and Peter the Apostle came and performed a miracle by bringing her back to life. "But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up" (Acts 9:40). This miracle might be classified as a gift of healing, but it goes beyond the scope of just healing. It goes into the realm of the gift of miracles, although the two gifts are closely related.

Paul Stops a Magician with a Miracle

Elymas the magician was causing problems for Paul and hindering his ministry. Paul looked the magician right in the eye and said, "Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.' And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand" (Acts 13:11). This is a miracle of divine intervention by the Lord through Paul.

If I as a pastor had the gift of miracles, I would be running to people who are hindering the Gospel and striking them blind. I am not doing that, however, and neither is anyone else today. That gift has been taken away.

Other Miracles in Paul's Ministry

Paul was holding a late meeting and a certain young man named Eutychus was listening from a third floor window. He fell asleep and fell out of the window and was killed. Paul brought Eutychus back to life. "But Paul went down and fell upon him, and after embracing him, he said, 'Do not be troubled, for his life is in him' " (Acts 20:10).

Another miracle occurs in Acts 28:3–6 when Paul is bitten by a poisonous viper. Paul just shakes the snake off, and his hand does not even swell.

Three Main Periods of Miracles in the Bible

The first period of miracles occurs during Moses' ministry and the events surrounding it. Each time there is a miracle, the purpose of the miracle is to validate the message and testimony of Moses.

The second period was perhaps at the low point in Israel's spiritual condition, although Elijah and Elisha did mighty miracles. For example, Elijah was sitting on a hill when fifty of the king's men came to get him and Elijah did a great miracle, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty" (2 Kin. 1:10). The king sends another fifty soldiers to get Elijah and again they are consumed by fire from heaven. The third group of soldiers came crawling to Elijah with profound respect. The miracle validated the ministry of Elijah.

The third period of miracles takes place during the time of Christ and his apostles. Although other miracles occur in other times in the Bible, they are not as concentrated as during these three periods. God did miracles to validate the message He had given. He never used miracles to validate previous revelation.

God Does Miracles Today

I believe God performs miracles today, but I do not believe the gift of miracles is in use today. The gift of miracles is seen in examples in the book of Acts where a given individual has a supernatural ability to do those works of power as a result of the Holy Spirit within him. God does the miraculous today in various ways, one of which is answering the prayers of believers.

Summary of Gift of Miracles

The primary purpose of miracles was to validate the message of one of God's spokesmen (either apostle or prophet) or their ministry. That does not mean that others did not do miracles, but it means that the miracles were always the result of the ministry of an apostle or a prophet.

For example, the Corinthian church had a gift of miracles, but they had that as a direct result of the Apostle Paul's ministry.

The gift of miracles is temporary because there are no longer prophets and apostles and no new revelation for God to validate. The Bible is

the complete revelation of God and nothing more needs to be added for men to know the plan of salvation.

TEMPORARY SPIRITUAL GIFT

Healing

Definition of Gift of Healing

The gift of healing is a variation of miracles, but it is more limited because healings had to do with restoring the physical body back to health.

Miracles went beyond that. Miracles included the negative aspect in that the supernatural power was used not just to heal blindness, but to make the seeing blind; not just to bring to life but to put to death. The gift of healing was limited to the positive aspect of healing all types of illnesses at will.

The gift of healings is usually referred to as plural but when we refer to the gift of healing it entails all ramifications of supernatural power to heal (1 Cor. 12:9, 28, 30).

The church at Corinth had the gift of healing, but they had that ability as a result of the ministry of the Apostle Paul in their midst. Healing is inseparably linked to the ministry of one of the apostles.

Gift of Healing Began to Fade During Paul's Earthly Ministry

When Paul was writing to Timothy he advised him on his health. "No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments" (1 Tim. 5:23).

Why didn't Paul just heal Timothy? Timothy had enough problems without having stomach problems. Why didn't Paul just use his gift of healing instead of giving him some advice on how to help the problem?

In 2 Timothy 4:20, Paul had to leave Trophimus behind at Miletus because Trophimus was so sick. Why didn't Paul, who had raised Eutychus from the dead (Acts 20:10), just heal Trophimus? The only explanation seems to be that this ministry—this particular gift of healing—is being phased out, because in 2 Timothy, Paul is close to the end of his ministry. It was no longer necessary to validate Paul's ministry by the miraculous—Paul's writings were beginning to be recognized as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15–16).

Philippians 2:27 gives another example where Paul does not (cannot) heal a fellow Christian, “For indeed he (Epaphroditus) was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.” That is strange as you think of Paul's power as a miracle worker in the earlier part of his ministry.

God Does Heal Today in Response to Prayer

It is important to remember that God does heal today and He still does the miraculous in various ways. We do not put limits on God's power, but there is biblical evidence that the gift of healing has been taken away and that there are not people today who have special power to heal.³

Experiences Do not Negate God's Word

Your experience does not determine what is genuine; the Word of God determines what is genuine even if you say you saw someone healed on television or as an eye witness. You must first determine what the Word says about this subject and adjust your thinking accordingly. Do not adjust God's Word to the experience.

Summary of Gift of Healing

The main purpose of the gift of healing, just as the gift of miracles, was to validate God's message. Each time the gift of healing was ad-

3. Note: James 5:14, 15 is in the broader context of sin in the life of a believer, and the illness incurred is the punishment for that sin (1 Cor. 11:30). The calling for the elders is indicative of a desire to deal with the sin. As such, this passage is not related to the gift of healing.

ministered, it was done in connection with one of the apostles. Since the apostles were primarily teachers of the Word and not healers, when the message they brought was authenticated and established, there was no longer a need for the gift of healing nor any of the other miraculous gifts.

TEMPORARY SPIRITUAL GIFT

Discerning Spirits

Definition of Gift of Discerning Spirits

“And to another the distinguishing of spirits” (1 Cor. 12:10). The gift of discerning spirits was the supernatural ability to discern what was true and what was false. This was a crucial gift when men did not have the New Testament. Believers needed men who had the ability and insight to discern what teaching and which men were really from God.

Discerning Takes Place in Light of the Scriptures Today

Now that we have the completed revelation from God, discerning takes place in light of the Scripture. We do not need a special gift. If I want to know if a teacher/preacher is genuine, I listen to what he says and teaches and measure that in light of the Word. They could not do that when they did not have the entire Bible.

“If any one comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting” (2 John 10). What John is saying is simple, if someone does not bring the teaching the apostles have brought (the teaching that we now know as the New Testament), do not let him into your house or even greet him! Believers in the early church were to discern teachers in light of what the apostles had taught—as we are to do today.

Believers Are to Test the Spirits via God’s Word

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see

whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). The spirit here refers to the speaker, the teacher, the pastor. There are false teachers, and we are to discern them by sifting what they say through the Word of God. John gives the standard, but he does not say to use the gift of discernment. Instead he says to measure what they say against what John is going to teach them. That is the same standard we are to use today—the Bible. John taught the Bible verbally; we have it in written form.

Summary of Gift of Discerning Spirits

The main purpose of the gift of discerning spirits was to separate the phonies from the real messengers of God until the complete revelation of the Word was finished. Once the Word was completed and available to men as the truth, the gift of discerning spirits was no longer needed.

TEMPORARY SPIRITUAL GIFT

Word of Wisdom

Definition of Word of Wisdom

The gift of word of wisdom is the supernatural ability to discern and apply the Word of God. It was used for the specific and temporary purpose of giving wisdom before and during the time the New Testament was being revealed.

In 1 Corinthians 2:7, Paul connects wisdom with his ministry and he connects it with special revelation (which indicates that this gift is in the context of special revelation). They did not have the written Word for obtaining wisdom as we do.

Some May Define Word of Wisdom as a Permanent Gift

Some theologians see the gift of wisdom as a permanent gift and define it as an ability to apply the Word of God to certain situations. If you define the word of wisdom that way, it is a special ability to apply the Word to certain situations. We connect that certain ability to counseling

situations. A counselor would have special insight to apply doctrine to experience and practical situations.

Summary of Gift of Wisdom

Whether you place the word of wisdom with the temporary gifts or the permanent gifts would depend entirely on your definition of wisdom. If you connect wisdom with discernment in the revelation of God's Word, then it must be classified as temporary, but if you limit wisdom to applying the Bible truths to the specific needs of others, then it could be thought of as permanent. I prefer to classify the gift of wisdom as a temporary gift as there appears to be more evidence that the wisdom was directly related to the revealing of God's Word in laying the foundation of the Bible.

TEMPORARY SPIRITUAL GIFT

Word of Knowledge

Special Knowledge as Direct Revelation from God

“And to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:8). The knowledge referred to here is a supernatural knowledge. In 1 Corinthians 13:8, we are told that knowledge shall pass away. The knowledge has to mean supernatural or special knowledge from God because knowledge in a general sense will never cease to exist. Throughout all eternity we are going to have knowledge of God and grow in that knowledge.

Before men had the New Testament, they needed those who had special knowledge from God so they would know about God and know what they were to do and not to do. Today we can examine the Word to know what God has to say.

Relationship to the Gift of Prophecy

The gift of knowledge is closely related to the gift of prophecy in

that both involved the reception of direct revelation from God. However, prophecy is presented as a more important and prominent gift. It evidently included revelation on a broader scale (including future events) as well as having a greater emphasis on the proclamation of the revelation received.

Summary of Gift of Word of Knowledge

The gift of word of knowledge was a temporary gift to establish the truth of God and mankind. This was accomplished with the New Testament. The word of knowledge was a special supernatural knowledge, not the knowledge that comes as a result of studying the Bible.

TEMPORARY SPIRITUAL GIFT

Tongues

Tongues Refer to Earthly Languages

The gift of tongues was a supernatural ability to speak an earthly foreign language without special training. Tongues comes from the Greek word glossa, so the word glossalalia means “to speak in tongues.” The word tongues (glossa), when used in the New Testament, either refers to the physical tongue and its basic meaning or to the language that the tongue speaks.

To begin a study of tongues, get a concordance and look up the word tongue (glossa), and look at all the places it is used and how it is used. In the following references (not a complete list) every time the word tongue (glossa) is used, it always refers to an earthly foreign language: Revelation 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9.

Law of First Mention

In hermeneutics (the study of interpreting the Scripture), there is a Law of First Mention which simply refers to the fact that the first mention of an area, a fact or a word, becomes a pattern for subsequent uses

of that word or expression or phenomenon.

The first mention of speaking in tongues in the Bible is found in Acts 2:4, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.” Other “tongues” is the Greek word *glossa*. All the different people present are listed in verses 9 and 10. These various groups of people are saying that they hear what is being said in their own language (verse 11).

Tongues an earthly language is further substantiated in Acts 2:6, “And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were bewildered, because they were each one hearing them speak in his own language.” The Greek word used here for language is “dialect,” but *glossa* and *dialect* are used interchangeably so *glossa* has to mean an earthly language. (*Dialect* is also used in verse 8.)

The gift of tongues was Spirit-motivated speech (Acts 2:4) in a particular language as we have already established. Now it would be hard to believe that the Spirit today is motivating believers to speak in babblings or ecstatic speech, because that is contrary to what God did when He first gave this ability. Unless there is good reason to think that God changed this particular ability and gift, we have to assume that the gift of tongues will be the same throughout the entire Bible.

Gift of Tongues Was a Sign to Unbelievers and a Sign of Judgment to Israel

“So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers” (1 Cor. 14:22).

In verse 21, the Old Testament is quoted to substantiate that one of the basic purposes of tongues is to be a sign for unbelievers, but also tongues were a sign to the Jewish nation that they were to be judged for their unbelief (Deut. 28:49).

Anytime there is a foreign language being spoken among the Jews, it is a sign that God is judging the nation Israel because these foreigners would have conquered Israel (Isa. 28:9–13). Isaiah foretells the judgment God is going to bring on Israel. The particular people here who have stammering lips and a foreign tongue are the Assyrians. The presence of the Assyrian language in Israel is an indication and a sign to Israel that

God is judging them for their unbelief.

Tongues Were One of the Sign Gifts

The sign gifts, remember, were temporary gifts to validate the ministry of the apostles (2 Cor. 12:12). Tongues are specifically called a sign in 1 Corinthians 14:22.

Once a message had been confirmed by signs and wonders, there was no longer a need for further confirmation (Heb. 2:3–4).

The Gift of Tongues is not Present Today

What about the ecstatic speech that is a common phenomenon today? Speaking in tongues as it is practiced today is not biblical tongues. (We have already established that biblical tongues refers to foreign languages.) The babblings of today have their origin in the mystery cults of ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, and it was practiced by unbelievers.

Experiences Can Be Contrary to the Bible

Be careful not to sift your Bible through what is going on—instead, know what the Bible says and determine your experiences in light of the standard—the Word of God! That can be very difficult because you cannot deny your experiences. However, a person on drugs might have beautiful mind-boggling experiences, even religious experiences, but those experiences are not bringing him closer to God. His experience is wrong and drawing him further away from God’s truth. Some experiences are distractions from God’s Word.

The Book of Acts Is a Transition Book From Old Testament to New Testament

The Book of Acts records a transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament, the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. God deals differently with men in the New Testament. Throughout the Old Testament, beginning with Abraham all the way down to Acts 2, God was dealing primarily with one group of people—the Jews. Then in Acts 2, God begins a totally new work; He is going to deal with all peoples and all nations and make them one people.

To make sure that there is not a Jewish church developing and a separate Samaritan church developing, the Samaritans are brought under the umbrella of the apostles' leadership in Acts 8. They can be sure that God is working through the apostles to lead and teach them because they receive the Holy Spirit.

You can readily see the importance of tongues as a sign gift—as a demonstration of God doing a new work and in doing that new work, He is also judging the nation Israel for their unbelief.

Tongues Were a Sign to the Jews that Gentiles Were to Be Part of the Body of Christ

In the first part of Acts 10, God had to give Peter a special vision so that Peter would be willing to speak to Cornelius and his household (Gentiles). “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message” (Acts 10:44). What was the reaction of the Jewish believers? “And all the circumcised believers (Jews) who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also” (Acts 10:45). The Jews recognized this sign and its significance (Acts 11:15–18).

What was the sign that the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles? The sign is found in Acts 10:46, “For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God.” So again, the gift of tongues was proof that God was not only going to include Jews and Samaritans, but Gentiles as well into the one body God was making. Once the fact had been established, it did not have to be repeated. Once the Jews knew that the Gentiles were to be a part of the Body of Christ, it does not make sense that every time a Gentile believed, God had to give the evidence, for that had already been established. That is the foundation we are to build upon.

God Began a New Work in Book of Acts

In Acts 19, when Paul meets the disciples of John at Ephesus, Paul asks them if they have received the Holy Spirit and they answer, “No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2). Now

some people take this verse as proof that you do not receive the Holy Spirit when you first believe. However, if you read on in Acts 19, you find out they have been baptized “into John’s baptism.” If they have been part of John’s ministry, they know that there is a Holy Spirit (John 1:33), so Acts 19:2 cannot mean they did not know about the Holy Spirit. What it obviously means is that they had not heard whether the Holy Spirit had been given—that the Holy Spirit was here performing His baptizing ministry.

“And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying” (Acts 19:6). God wanted to demonstrate that He was doing a new work, and when you recognize that it was a new work, you have to recognize that the book of Acts is mainly about the transition from Old Covenant to the New Covenant.

Ephesians 2 stresses the fact that God was indeed doing a new work, a work that is today revealed through the Apostle Paul’s writing, “Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12; see also verses, 11–16).

Then in Ephesians 3:4–5, “And by referring to this when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.” Note that this was not previously revealed; it was new revelation. As a new revelation, it needed the signs and miraculous evidence that it was indeed revelation. “As it has now been revealed” to whom?—all the apostles and prophets!

Self-Edification Was Never the Main Purpose of Tongues

The main purpose of tongues as already pointed out, was to give a sign to unbelievers. Self-edification was a side effect that the believer enjoyed for merely exercising his gift of tongues (true of every believer who exercises his gift). The modern day Pentecostal movement stresses

edification for the individual believer and the Church.

Most people who are advocating tongues for today have quoted 1 Corinthians 14:2, “For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.” There are some problems here. In chapter 12, the purpose of the gifts is edification of other believers. Now if I might say this respectfully, God does not need to be edified (built up to further maturity). First Corinthians 14:2 is not an encouragement to speak to God in tongues (a different language), for He will understand whatever language I use, including English. The advantage of my using English is that you and other believers will understand and that is the purpose of spiritual gifts—to communicate, to serve and to build up other believers.

Not Every Believer Was Expected to Have Gift of Tongues

“All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they?” (1 Cor. 12:30). The gift of tongues was limited to few even in the time of the apostles. How can people today say that to have the Holy Spirit a believer must speak in tongues? That is unbiblical.

First Corinthians 14:5 is often quoted to prove that the gift of tongues is still operative today. “Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.” Why do some put the emphasis on tongues when Paul said that he had a greater desire for the people to prophesy? I do not have anyone coming around to my door saying that I need to get the gift of prophecy, but I have people praying that I will get the gift of tongues. Paul said that he would like them to have all the gifts, but he would rather that they have the greater gifts. Paul did not say that tongues was the gift they should have. If they should have any, it should be the greater gift of prophecy. The gift of tongues was the least important of all the spiritual gifts. It was last on the list (see 1 Cor. 12:28).

Summary of Gift of Tongues

It is not my purpose to put down the gift of tongues which was a

very necessary gift at one time, but rather to evaluate whether or not that gift has continued until today. According to the Bible, the gift of tongues ceased to exist with the passing of the apostles.

Scripture teaches that tongues was a special ability to speak in an earthly foreign language without special training. The purpose of such a gift was to be used as a sign to validate the ministry of the apostles as they laid the foundation of the Church. Once the foundation was complete, there was no need for special signs to confirm the validity of God's work.

The present day phenomenon called "speaking in tongues" (glossalalia) is characterized by indiscernible sounds. Since that could not be called a foreign language that is understandable by some group today, glossalalia cannot be validly called biblical tongues.

TEMPORARY SPIRITUAL GIFT

Interpreting Tongues

Definition of Interpreting Tongues

The gift of interpreting tongues was the supernatural ability to understand a foreign language without special training, and then to communicate the message to other believers. Interpreting tongues was directly related to the gift of tongues. In the gift of tongues God would speak directly through a person, and he would begin to speak in a language that they had never learned. Someone else would interpret even though he also had never learned that language, and the other believers were built up (edified) as they heard the special message from God.

Tongues Was of No Value Unless It Was Interpreted

Tongues had no value as a spiritual gift unless it was interpreted because that was the only way the message was beneficial to the Church.

When tongues was interpreted, it basically became a form of prophecy. A person received a message from God and gave that message in an

intelligible form. If someone preaches the Word in Italian, it does nothing for me because I do not understand the language. Interpretation is the key, and you cannot have tongues without interpretation.

“But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?” (1 Cor. 14:6). Paul is saying that tongues is of no benefit unless there is some understandable message (interpretation). Paul compares speaking in tongues with musical instruments producing meaningful sounds.

“Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp?” (1 Cor. 14:7).

The message is clear. Anyone who speaks in tongues which no one understands is just talking into the air, signifying nothing. “So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air” (1 Cor. 14:9).

Summary of Gift of Interpreting Tongues

The combined purposes of the gift of tongues and interpreting tongues (you cannot biblically separate the two gifts) were: (1) used as a sign to confirm the work of the apostles and (2) to edify the Church (never for personal edification).

Legitimate tongues and interpreting tongues are extinct today as their purposes have ended (see Heb. 2:3–4). Since those gifts have fulfilled their confirming purpose (which was their main reason for existing), tongues and interpretation have been withdrawn.