



## The Gifts of the Spirit at Monterey Bay Christian Center

God has designed that spiritual gifts should function in the church. This paper outlines how MBCC theologically understands the gifts of the Spirit and how they should be expressed in our corporate worship.

### The Purpose of Sunday Mornings

Why do we gather together on Sunday mornings? We gather to meet with God, worship Him. Man was made to worship and glorify God, and we are to do so with our entire lives (1 Cor. 10:31). As those who have been redeemed by God, we worship Him not only as Creator but also as the One who has rescued us from sin and the punishment we deserve for our sin. He has done this by placing that punishment upon His own Son and treating us now as His own sons and daughters. When we gather together, we have the opportunity to worship Him not only as individuals, but also together as a local expression of His chosen people. We are filled with thanksgiving and praise. We gather as His people to renew our covenant with Him, hearing God say that we are His and to again reply to Him in faith and obedience.

We also gather to edify one another. When we gather together, we usually call it “worship,” but the New Testament never actually uses the word “worship” to describe Christian gatherings.<sup>1</sup> It instead frames our gathering together in the language of encouragement and edification: “...let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but *encouraging* one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Paul often uses the language of edification or “building up.” God places leaders in the church to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, *for building up the body of Christ*” (Eph. 4:11). The Corinthians were to bring hymns, lessons and spiritual gifts to the corporate meeting, all for the purpose of “building up” (1 Cor. 14:26). As we pray, sing, and exercise spiritual gifts, everything must be intelligible, so that it can edify those in attendance (1 Cor. 14:6-19). In Scripture, God has given a broad variety of ministry He intends for the church to experience while gathered in corporate worship, all of which edify us and bring glory to Him: the reading the Word (1 Tim. 4:13), preaching (2 Tim. 4:2), prayer (1 Tim. 2:1), singing (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16), baptism (Matt. 28:19), the celebration of the Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 11:24-25), and the function of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14:26).

<sup>1</sup> The words which are used in the Old Testament for worship are applied in the New Testament to worshipping with all of our lives (Heb. 13:15-16, Rom. 12:1, 15:16, Phil. 2:17, 4:18, 2 Tim. 4:6). The transposition of “worship” language is stunning, showing that God is concerned with the entirety of our lives and not merely our ritual. The entire sacrificial system ended with Christ’s once for all sacrifice, and we now offer spiritual sacrifices with our entire lives. Some have argued that because Scripture does not use a word meaning “worship” to describe the Christian gatherings, neither should we. But if Christians live lives of worship, then certainly Christian gatherings are not less than worship.

Edification and intelligibility should be primary metrics we use to evaluate the countless practical issues that are a part of corporate worship today. Vaughan Roberts puts it this way: “Edification was so central to Paul’s understanding of the purpose of Christian meetings that it provided the test as to whether something should be included in them nor not. The question he wants us to ask about every aspect of our meeting is: ‘Is it edifying?’ ‘Does it build people up as believers?’”<sup>2</sup> These criteria are to be employed in every aspect of the church meeting, especially the spiritual gifts.

## **What We Believe about the Spiritual Gifts**

We, as a church, believe that the gifts described in the New Testament are available to believers today. What are the gifts which the Spirit gives? They include “spectacular” gifts like the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, the ability to distinguish between spirits, various kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:8-10). They also include many less “spectacular” gifts like service, teaching, giving, leadership, and the showing of mercy (Rom. 12:6-8). There are a broad variety of gifts which God gives to His church by His Spirit, and the New Testament does not distinguish between the various kinds. Some of those referred to are difficult for us to understand because the New Testament does not speak of them elsewhere (e.g., the utterance of wisdom and the utterance of knowledge), while others are far easier to understand (e.g., service and the showing of mercy). Some of these can obviously be used in the context of a church meeting, while others, like mercy, may occur primarily outside of the church gathering.

Why does God give us these gifts by the Spirit? We are given them not for ourselves, but for the edification of the church. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7). God instructs us that all spiritual gifts should be used for edification or “building up” (1 Cor. 14:26). We are to “strive to excel in building up the church” (1 Cor. 14:12).

For us to build up one another, we must use the gifts in love, for without love, they are useless (1 Cor. 13). The demonstration of gifts used in love will not only edify the church but will identify us as Christ’s disciples (John 13:35).

The spectacular gifts, particularly prophecy, have the ability to show the unbeliever that God is real and among His church. “But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you” (1 Cor. 14:24).

Prophecy is one of a cluster of gifts that are characterized by supernatural knowledge from the Lord which can be communicated verbally. These include the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, the ability to distinguish between spirits, various kinds of tongues, the

<sup>2</sup> Vaughan Roberts, True Worship, 45.

interpretation of tongues, and revelation (1 Cor. 12:8-10, 14:26). Dreams and visions appear to be in a similar category (Matt. 2:13; Acts 16:9-10).

Of these verbal gifts which appear to involve supernatural knowledge from God, the one which we are told to most desire is prophecy. We are to “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1). Because of its biblical priority and because it helps us understand some of the other verbal gifts, we will examine it in greater detail.

## The Gift of Prophecy

The fullest description of prophecy given in the New Testament is in 1 Corinthians 14. We learn some of the importance of prophecy by a comparison of it to the gift of tongues. “One who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation...the one who prophesies builds up the church” (1 Cor. 14:2-4).

Prophecy can have various effects:

- Upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation (1 Cor. 14:3)
- Instruction (1 Cor. 14:31)
- Revealing the secrets of the heart (1 Cor. 14:24-25)
- Conviction (1 Cor. 14:24-25)
- Foretelling the future (Acts 11:27-30, 21:10-14)
- Confirming direction (Acts 13:1-2)

What are some of the general characteristics of prophecy? What might distinguish it from other forms of speech or revelation? From 1 Corinthians 14 we can make several observations.

Prophecy seems to be:

1. *Revelatory* (1 Cor. 14:30-31). It does not appear to be simply what someone has been meditating on or noticing. D.A. Carson notes that the text presupposes that “the informational base of prophecy is not study but revelation.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, the information or insight does not seem to originate with the prophet but it is something instead that God reveals. It is “reporting in one’s own words something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.”<sup>4</sup> In 1 Corinthians 14, this revelation occurs to prophets in the moment in the church gathering, such that one prophet sits when a revelation is made to another.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 119.

<sup>4</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1052.

<sup>5</sup> “Teaching or preaching is the teacher’s prepared explanation of a revelation already given in Scripture or tradition. Prophecy is the relating of a revelation given directly by God, and its content and organization is typically regarded as more directly and situationally inspired by God.” – Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, 187.

2. *Clear (1 Cor. 14:7-12)*. Others must be able to understand what is being said, for without understanding they cannot be edified.
3. *Contextual (1 Cor. 14:24)*. Prophecy seems to be typically directed towards a specific group, church or individual in a particular situation. It appears to be more local and situational and not normative and universal like Scripture is. Agabus' prophecy in Acts 11:28, however, is a counterexample.
4. *"Weighed" or "Tested" (1 Cor. 14:29, 14:37-38; 1 Thess. 5:20-21; 1 John 4:1)*. What is shared is to be offered in subservience to God's Word, and weighed and tested by others according to it.

### **What Prophecy Is Not**

Prophecy is not the primary way God leads us or speaks to us. We are to look to the Bible and application of His Word through teaching. Biblical teaching is always to be seen as more authoritative than prophecy.

"In our daily lives, it is the words of Scripture alone that must have first place in our hearts and our minds. We must read them, believe them, memorize them, love them, and cherish them as the very words of our Creator speaking to us. All other gifts and teachings today are to be subject to the words of Scripture and are to be judged by them. No other gift or teaching or writing should be allowed to compete with them for absolute priority in our lives." - Wayne Grudem<sup>6</sup>

"I have been the subject of such impressions, myself, and have seen very singular results. But to live by impressions is oftentimes to live the life of a fool and even to fall into downright rebellion against the revealed Word of God. Not your impressions, but that which is in this Bible must always guide you." - Charles Spurgeon.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Gifts of Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues**

In 1 Corinthians, Paul also instructs the church on use of the gifts of tongues and interpretation of tongues. "What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up" (1 Cor. 14:26). In 1 Corinthians 13 and 14:1, Paul makes it clear that the gifts of the Spirit are to be motivated by love. So, the gifts of tongues and interpretation are motivated by love and designed for building up. Like prophecy, these gifts have been given for the edification of the church.

Tongues has various effects:

- Edification of the one who speaks in a tongue (1 Cor. 14:4)

<sup>6</sup> The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today, 49.

<sup>7</sup> "A Well-Ordered Life," sermon #878.

- Praising the person and works of God (1 Cor. 14:16)
- Thanksgiving to God (1 Cor. 14:16-17)
- Compensates for our own weakness in praying for ourselves or others (Rom. 8:26-27)

How are these gifts to function in the corporate worship setting? In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul addresses two concerns about the use of tongues in the church: 1) *Intelligibility*: people need to understand what is happening; 2) *Instruction*: the gifts have to be used in a way that is orderly.

What guidelines dictate the use of tongues and interpretation at MBCC?

1. *Tongues and interpretation are primarily directed to God, not people (1 Cor. 14:2a; 1 Cor. 14:17)*. Paul writes, “For one who speaks in a tongue *speaks not to men but to God...*” When someone gives a tongue, its interpretation should be addressed to God. For example, instead of “O, My people worship Me...” the interpretation might be rendered “O, Lord we worship You.”

2. *Two or at the Most Three Speak (1 Cor. 14:27)*. It seems that the Corinthian church had fallen into the habit of many people speaking in tongues simultaneously and because of this no interpretation was possible. The chaos meant that no one was benefiting from the exercise of the gift. For the sake of clarity, we have chosen to interpret 1 Cor. 14:27 to mean that there may be three total charismatic spoken manifestations or the gifts of Spirit in a given service (i.e., one prophecy, one tongue and one interpretation or three prophetic words).

3. *Tongues Need an Interpretation (1 Cor. 14:13)*. Paul’s preference is that the same individual who speaks in a tongue would also interpret the tongue, but if they do not have the interpretation then they should coordinate with someone known to function in the gift of interpretation or should wait to express their gift until someone with the gift of interpretation steps forward.

4. *If You Aren’t Assured of Interpretation Don’t Speak (1 Cor. 14:13, 14:27-28)*. In Paul’s mind there is a connection between the genuine exercise of this gift and a God-given confidence of interpretation. Some may ask, “How would I know?” Either you know you have the gift of interpretation, or you are familiar enough with the body of believers to know that there are people with the gift of interpretation (and you would go to one of them to ask if they have an interpretation).

5. *The Person Using This Gift should be Known by the Church (1 Cor. 12:12–13)*. We would ask that unless a person is a member of MBCC that they would refrain from giving a prophecy, a tongue or an interpretation.

6. *The Use of the Gifts Should Reflect the Character of God (1 Cor. 14:33, 40)*. God is not opposed to planning. God is by nature a God of order. Additionally, God delights in what reflects His character and nature. This truth should be a guiding principle in our worship and exercise of tongues and interpretation.

The fullest description of prophecy given in the New Testament is in 1 Corinthians 14. We learn some of the importance of prophecy by a comparison of it to the gift of tongues. "One who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation...the one who prophesies builds up the church" (1 Cor. 14:2-4).

### **What is the gift of Interpretation?**

The gift of interpretation of tongues is the Spirit-empowered ability to interpret a public utterance of tongues into the language of the congregation. The interpretation of a tongue might conceivably be a literal word-for-word translation, yet often tongues contain ideas that are parabolic or symbolic. This reality requires the interpreter via the interpretation to summarize the significance of what has been spoken.<sup>8</sup> The guidelines concerning the content of interpretations have been addressed in the section above.

### **Application: What Should the Use of Spiritual Gifts Look Like at MBCC?**

We can only do what God has called us to do by the power of the Spirit. Christ told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until Pentecost because they needed the Spirit's power to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:4-8). We must walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25) and seek to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). We are to earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that we may prophesy (1 Cor. 14:1).

### **Actual Practice**

Our practice of the spiritual gifts should not be limited to our corporate gatherings. Small groups are ideal contexts for developing one's spiritual gifts, because we are able to pray for and address one another more with greater particularity than in a large congregation. It is also often when we are praying, fasting or seeking God specifically with our petitions that He will grant gifts, whether that be at home, at a prayer meeting, in our family or in a group of friends.

Smaller contexts like small groups are ideal situations to reflect the diversity of gifts brought by each member in 1 Corinthians 14:26: "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation." We come not just to receive but to bring something to edify our fellow believers (1 Cor. 14:12).

In the Sunday services, we do something similar. The musicians have come with songs. The teacher comes with a sermon. The congregation brings other gifts. We should come to meetings not only seeking to receive, but also prepared with what we want to share for the building up of the fellow church members we love.

<sup>8</sup> Sam Storms, *The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts*, 194.

We are committed to creating space so that gifts such as prophecy, words of knowledge, visions, interpretation of tongues or other verbal manifestations of the Spirit may be shared with the entire congregation.

In a congregational meeting of many people, not everyone can share all of their gifts in the same way it is possible in a small church. We must ensure that we maintain scriptural priorities, especially the reading and preaching of God's Word and prayer. All of the elements of the meeting are to be conducted "decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). That means prophecy and other unplanned elements are to be included, but with a sense of order and for the purpose of edification. The reason for this is that our God is "not a God of confusion but peace" (v33).

### **Are we quenching the Spirit if we don't allow someone to share their gift?**

There are times when God grants so many gifts that they cannot all be used in the public meeting. The principle provided by the apostle Paul is that two or three people may speak in a tongue at most (1 Cor. 14:27), and that two or three prophets speak (1 Cor. 14:29), Paul clearly employed limits on how much was shared. The spirit of prophets is subject to the prophets (1 Cor. 14:32).

Sometimes the pastors may opt to give more time to the reading and preaching of God's Word, singing biblically-based songs, and scripturally-rich prayers than to the use of supernatural gifts. God's Word is not opposed to the Spirit; rather Scripture is breathed out by God's Spirit (1 Tim. 3:16). The gifts allow us to see through a glass darkly; God's Word is light (Ps. 119:105). Prophecy and tongues will fade away, but God's Word will never pass away, even though the entire earth is destroyed (Matt. 5:18). Prophecy is fallible, but God's Word is never wrong (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

In the time of the writing of the epistles, Scripture's canon was not completed, and there was a greater dependence on the revelatory gifts. The church now has the completed canon. We are still to pursue the gifts and we long for a resurgence of them in our day. At the same time, we must be unapologetic about valuing the perfect word more than highly fallible words.

Thankfully, these are not opposed to one another. In practice, however, we must occasionally make choices about what will be most edifying to God's people when we cannot accomplish everything in one service. In such decisions, our default priority will be God's Word.

### **Who tests what is shared at the microphone?**

In 1 Corinthians 14:29, we are told that those leading a church meeting should "let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said." "The others" in this context appears to be the congregation. In a small group that would be the entire small group, but in our setting it seems to be wise to have a pastor or pastors pre-approve something before it is shared with the entire congregation. Even then, however, it does not mean that the pastors approve everything that the person shares, because what is communicated at the microphone may be different than what was communicated to the pastors.

Those who have questions about what they are considering to share should bring it to the pastors; they may be able to help discern whether it is a verbal, revelatory gift which should be shared. We would rather that people come forward and be turned away than to not come forward because of fear. There is no shame in coming to the microphone and being turned away. It may instead be an indicator of faithfulness in the pursuit of the gifts.

### **Isn't some of what is shared just "encouragement" rather than prophecy or other extra-natural gifts?**

In reality, yes. One of the ways of growing in these gifts is to exercise them. Sometimes the difference between encouragement and more specific manifestations is difficult to ascertain in the moment. But often, when the borderline is unclear, we will sometimes permit it to be shared because it is as an individual shares that he or she grows in hearing the Spirit's voice and has opportunity for what they are sharing to be tested.

If what is brought accords with Scripture, but does not appear to have a degree of spirit-driven urgency, we may at times not have that person share it. This is because while it may be true, it might not be more pertinent than what has already been prepared for the meeting. Many other "hymns," "lessons" and other edifying content and activities have been planned (1 Cor. 14:26).

### **Sometimes what is shared seems strange!**

In 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20 we are instructed, "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast to what is good." Beneath the instruction not to despise prophecy is an assumption that prophecy will, in fact, sometimes be despised. Similarly, when tongues were practiced in the church, there was concern that unbelievers would think that believers were out of their minds (1 Cor. 14:23). Nevertheless, Paul allowed for there to be tongues with interpretation (1 Cor. 14:13).

We should test what is shared not by our preconceptions, but by God's Word. But what is shared should be understandable and ultimately edifying (1 Cor. 14:26, 33).

### **Development**

As strange as it may sound, spiritual gifts can be developed with practice. We assume that you either hear God's voice through these gifts or you don't, or that you're a prophet or you're not. But some people may hear the Spirit's voice more frequently because they regularly pray for the ability to hear His voice or because others have asked God on their behalf. Some are more diligent at listening and seeking through prayer and/or fasting. Some have stepped out more frequently in response to how they thought God might be prompting them, and are more comfortable with the gift God has given them. They have learned through practice how to discern more readily what are their thoughts and what are the Lord's thoughts.

Each one of us need to develop and stir up the gifts we have been given. We do not know what gift Timothy was given, but we do know that he was told to develop it. “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching” (1 Tim. 4:14-16a).

The context and size of a meeting can sometimes determine how gifts are used. For example, all married men are to teach their families God’s Word (Eph. 6:4); some men become elders because they are able to not only teach their family, but also others (1 Tim. 3:2); of those elders, some become those who labor especially in preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17). In the same way, some of us may have gifts that are suitable for private conversations, others have gifts suitable in a larger gathering, while others through God’s gifting and practice be more like the person in 1 Corinthians 13:2 who is able to reveal mysteries through prophetic powers. We are not to envy one another, but instead be content with the gifts we have (Romans 12:3), earnestly desire more for the edification of the body (1 Cor. 14:1,12), and give thanks that God has put others in our church body through whom we and the rest of the church can be built up (1 Cor. 12:21-26).

### **Breadth of opportunity**

We don’t want the Sunday service to be the only place our minds go when we think about spiritual gifts. Each one of us should seek to use and develop our gifts, whether it be personal conversation and counseling, small groups, prayer meetings, ministry teams or other contexts. We should come to prayer meetings and our small group meetings not only to receive, but also to bring something for others.

On Sundays, there are also many opportunities. We should encourage one another when we talk in the lobby and auditorium. When we pray for one another before, during or after the meeting, we should ask God to grant words of knowledge and wisdom. We can ask God that unbelievers would be greeted by someone who shares with them the secrets of their hearts (1 Cor. 14:24-25). Each of us can bring many non-verbal gifts as well, including administration on ministry teams, helping and giving.

### **How can we earnestly desire these gifts?**

1. Pray to God for the gift, both for ourselves and for others in the church.
2. Immerse ourselves in Scripture.
3. Pray for situations, events, individuals and groups. Develop God’s heart for them.
4. Pray and expect to be used.
5. Step out in faith when we sense the Lord’s prompting.
6. Start small.
7. Learn from our own experiences and the experiences we hear from others.

## Practical Criteria Used for Using Gifts Publicly

### 1. Faithful to Scripture

*All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” – 1 Peter 1:24-25*

Whether from the pulpit, in prayer or song or from the ministry mic, we must base everything said and sung in our church services on the truths of Scripture.

Prophecy and other gifts should never contradict what God has spoken in Scripture. It also should not promise what Scripture does not promise. We must exercise caution in presuming upon God’s future work (e.g., communicating to someone that their family will be saved or that they will certainly be healed in this life). It is vital for those wanting to grow in the gift of prophecy and encouragement to grow in their knowledge of Scripture.

When Scripture is used, it should

- Be used in a way reflects the author’s original intent.
- Be directly connected to the rest of what is said.
- Be shared in such a way that the congregation knows what is Scripture and what is not.

### 2. Edifying

*“The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.” – 1 Corinthians 14:3*

*“Since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in building up the church.” – 1 Corinthians 14:12*

We should use our spiritual gifts for the edification or “building up” of the church. Our speech should reflect God’s heart of love for His people. Prophecy is not normally corrective, though when it is, it always reflects God’s purposes for His people. It involves encouragement and consolation (1 Cor. 14:3).

### 3. Prophetic [Revelatory]

*“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.” – 1 Corinthians 14:29-30*

In contrast to teaching and preaching, the verbal revelatory gifts appear to be more spontaneously given to believers. They represent a particular burden or thought which weighs upon the soul which does not originate ultimately with the prophet. This revelation may occur while the church is meeting, as in the example of this passage. It is possible also that it may

occur before the church gathers. But it should not just be a good thought we had during our devotional time, a Scripture that seems to relate to what is happening now or a personal burden we want to share with others. It should not be something we reasoned our way toward. It should instead originate with an impression or thought which does not seem to be from us.

#### **4. Clear**

*“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.” – 1 Corinthians 14:33*

Our church gatherings should reflect the nature of the God we worship. He is a God of order and of peace.

People speaking during a service should seek to share what God has revealed, and not expand beyond that. Usually, the more it is brief, the more it is clear.

We must resist the temptation to expand upon the impression we’ve received, fearing that others might think we’re unspiritual or lack eloquence.

#### **5. Specific**

*“But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.” – 1 Corinthians 14:24- 25*

When God uses prophecy to reveal to an unbeliever that He knows the secrets of her heart, it causes her to believe that God really is present in the church and at work in her life. The more specific a prophecy, the more likely that an unbeliever will recognize it is for him or her. We can pray that God will give us this kind of specificity.

#### **6. In Order**

*“So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.” – 1 Corinthians 14:40*

*“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.” (1 Cor. 14:29)*

Prophets are to speak in order, give the floor to one another and only two or three at a time (1 Cor. 14:29-32). We are not to quench the Spirit nor despise prophecy (1 Thess. 5:19), while at the same time recognizing that the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets, to make way for others to speak (1 Cor. 14:32).

The primary “weighing what is said” in 1 Corinthians 14:29 occurs by the congregation. But because of our size, it has seemed good for words to be weighed by a few before they are weighed by many, and we thus have pastors to whom members share before they share

with the entire congregation. These pastors are not infallible but seek to discern what will edify the church. Members who wish to share can speak with a pastor during the meeting or immediately prior.

During the week, those planning the Sunday services ask the Holy Spirit to guide them in preparing Scripture readings, the sermon, songs and prayers. We always endeavor to make space for God to adjust those plans and still maintain the order of our meetings. How a word fits with the themes and ideas of the morning may be a consideration (though not the main consideration) of the pastors.

Over time, the pastors seek to be faithful to help individuals grow in their gift by providing them feedback on what they share based on the criteria above. Similar leadership in less formal meetings, such as prayer and small group meetings, can be employed, though it is not required. All things should be done for edification.

### **Resources for Further Study**

D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996).

John Piper, "Using Our Gifts In Proportion to Our Faith, Part 1"  
<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/using-our-gifts-in-proportion-to-our-faith-part-1>

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), chapters 52 and 53.

Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000).

Sam Storms, *The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (Regal, 2013).

## Appendix:

### Defense of the continuation of the gifts

While we believe that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit are available to the church today, we recognize that some people who come to our church may not have that same conviction. For this reason, we want to give a brief explanation for why we believe the gifts of the Spirit still exist and have not ceased as some would advocate.

The primary argument for the cessation of the gifts comes from 1 Cor. 13:8-12. This passage says “As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away” (v. 8-10). Some say that the perfection to which this passage refers is the completion of the Scriptures in the first century. This explanation does not account for the context of the verses, however. Paul says that “now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12). It is clear from the context that Paul is talking about seeing Christ face to face upon His return. The partial will pass away when Christ returns, not at the completion of the canon. We now see the Lord dimly and we prophesy in part, but then we will see Him face to face and will no longer need the partial revelation of prophecy.

Another argument for the cessation of the gifts is that God used the gifts to authenticate the apostles’ testimony and role, but the gifts ceased to function when the apostles died. While the gifts did indeed accredit the apostles (Acts 14:3) in the same way miraculous gifts accredited the testimony of Jesus (Acts 2:22), it is incorrect to conclude that such gifts were not given to non-apostolic people. Non-apostolic people ministering in the gifts of the Holy Spirit include Agabus (Acts 11:28, 21:10), who was from the church of Antioch in which there were multiple prophets (Acts 21:27). The Corinthian church was said to lack no spiritual gift (1 Cor. 1:7) and it clearly was not a church of apostles only. Philip the evangelist had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8-9). The New Testament testifies clearly that the gifts of the Spirit extend beyond corroborating the New Testament apostles. We must be careful not to make arguments from silence. While the presence of the Spirit was unique with the apostles, Christians today should live with the expectation that the same Spirit testifying to the message of Jesus in the early church is the same Spirit at work in their lives.

Another common stance as to the pursuit of the work of the Spirit is to be “open but cautious.” This view is advocated by those who realize that a cessationist position is difficult to defend biblically or are genuinely convinced the gifts are for today, but do not earnestly pursue their use. This may be because of a lack of experience with the gifts, genuine concerns about their misuse, or a concern about undermining the centrality of God’s Word. We are told, however, to “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1). We must not “quench the Spirit” nor “despise prophecies, but test everything” and “hold fast to what is good” (1 Thess. 5:19-21). He wants us to earnestly desire them so that we can exercise them to build up the church.