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Spiritual Gifts-Part 1

We are studying 1 Corinthians 12 verse-by-verse and we have introduced the basic problem at Corinth indicated in 1 Cor 12:1-3. Apparently, before trusting in Christ they had been heavily involved in the mystery religions where being swept away by a spirit of ecstasy into tongues was interpreted as having communion with the divine. Now as Christians they were still placing emphasis on this kind of tongues phenomena and confusing it with the genuine gift of tongues given by the Holy Spirit. These tongues were not a sign of true spirituality but a return to their heathen days. Therefore Paul begins to correct them.

Since they were so narrow minded about the importance of tongues Paul's corrective in vv 4-11 is to emphasize variety. There are three lines of argument you can deduce from vv 4-6 that show this variety. First of all, verse 3, 4, 5 and 6 show there is variety in the Godhead, there is the Spirit, the Lord Jesus and the Father, a variety of Persons in the Godhead. God is not a solitary being but a diverse being. Second, derivative of this variety in the Godhead there are verse 4, gifts, verse 5, ministries and verse 6 effects. So it's not all about the gifts, there are also ministries and effects. And I see these all working together in the sense that you have a gift or gifts given to you by the Spirit and the Lord gives you opportunities to exercise your gift in love and the Father produces the results such that He gets the glory. Third, there is not just one gift, verse 4, but a variety of gifts, plural. These three lines of argument prove that tongues is not the only gift the Corinthians or modern Charismatics should be interested in, there are many other things. So the order of the day is variety and in verse 7 Paul introduces this variety by referring to the gifts in vv 8-10 as **manifestations of the Spirit** because

they are His gifts and the purpose of His gifts are for **the common good**, that is, to confer a benefit on others.

Now, there are three categories of gifts I'm going to lump the various gifts into; first of all, there are foundational gifts and these were gifts that were given for the foundation of the Church. Gifts in this list are prophecy, word of knowledge, word of wisdom; they all relate to the giving of new revelation. So when the canon of Scripture is open then these gifts are being given. When the canon of Scripture is closed then these gifts are not being given. Therefore, since the canon of Scripture closed with the writing of the Revelation in AD96 by the prophet John then these foundational gifts are no longer being given.

Second there are sign gifts and these gifts were given to indicate something, just like a sign on the road is there to indicate something and thereby direct you in a way, so there were sign gifts that were to indicate something. These too were given in the early Church. They might be given as signs of warning to the covenant nation Israel; they might be signs of authentication that a messenger and his message are from God. But in any case they are a sign of something. And gifts like healing, miracles, tongues and interpretation of tongues were sign gifts given to authenticate God's messengers and the message. Since God is no longer warning the covenant nation Israel of things or authenticating messengers as carrying new revelation then all the sign gifts have also ceased.

Third there are building gifts and these are all active continually, maybe not all in your local church but in a local church somewhere. From the name you could guess that the building gifts are designed by God to build up the church on the foundation which has already been laid. For this activity Christ has given two sub-categories of gifts; equipping gifts and body gifts. The equipping gifts are gifts like teacher and pastor-teacher; body gifts are gifts like helps, exhortation, mercy, giving, etc...things that enable the body of Christ to function as a loving community, meeting the needs of others in various ways. So most believers today have a body gift or gifts and these are essential to a vital community of believers but a few have the equipping gifts and these are vital for training and spiritual growth in the community. I happen to have the equipping gift of pastor-teacher and so my function in the body of Christ is to equip other believers. So your three categories are

foundational gifts, sign gifts and building gifts. They are all mixed together in the various gift lists in the NT. For example prophecy is a foundational gift but it's found in 1 Cor 12, Eph 4 and Rom 12. So, it's difficult to say the three major gifts passages are three distinct lists. It seems rather that they are mixed and intermingled but in the end after you study them out you can come up with three categories as I have done, foundational, sign and building. These may not be perfect categories but they are helpful in a study of the gifts.

Now with that introduction to the three categories of gifts the Corinthians were very rich in spiritual gifts, not lacking in any gift Paul says, which implies that other local churches were lacking in some gifts, but not at Corinth. They had all the gifts and that enabled them to minister in many, many ways and for God to produce tremendous results but they were emphasizing tongues. So Paul's approach is to emphasize a variety of gifts and put the least emphasis on tongues.

Today I want to focus on the nine gifts mentioned in vv 8-10 and we'll divide them into these three categories as we go along. Last time we studied the first four, so let's review them and press on to the other five. Some of these are very controversial, particularly when it comes to whether or not they are operating today; that debate is called cessation vs non-cessation and maybe you have heard of that debate. If you have that's good. If you haven't you will, people have really wanted to say tongues, apostle and prophet started again in the 20th century and so the Church has in many ways returned to Corinth which is a very sad, sad thing. Rather than focusing on the building of the church to maturity they have focused on looking for spectacular signs and foundational gifts that were necessary to forming the NT canon.

But let's start again in verse 8 with **the word of wisdom**. Now this is not general wisdom to navigate trials that James says comes by the prayer of a man of faith - that is something all believers need and God will supply at various times when we ask in faith. But the gift of **wisdom** is a revelatory gift as shown by the fact that the gift is not wisdom but **the word of wisdom**. Since the basic idea of **wisdom** is "skill" then the **word of wisdom** refers to God revealing a skillful discourse or delivery. We might say in our day, God revealing the words of a marvelous speech. And I take it this gift was predicted by our Lord when he said to His disciples, when you are

arrested and brought before kings and governors for My name's sake make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. When you read Acts 3 you find this gift in Peter and John who gave such a marvelous defense that the Sanhedrin was speechless. All they could say was where did they learn these things; these are uneducated, untrained men who did not attend the rabbinical schools? Answer; **the word of wisdom**. God gave them the words to speak in that hour of trial and now we have their wisdom captured in the canon of Scripture. Or remember Stephen in Acts 6 as he went into a synagogue in Jerusalem and debated the seminarians. It says, "They were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking." Yet he himself was not a seminarian. How could he so brilliantly defend the Scriptures? Answer; **the word of wisdom**. And then you have Paul before Felix, Paul before Festus and Paul before Agrippa, his defenses were so full of wisdom that Agrippa said, if you keep on speaking like this even I will be persuaded to become a Christian. How did Paul do it? Answer; **the word of wisdom**. He had this spiritual gift that was necessary to fulfill Christ's words in giving marvelous defenses. This was a foundational gift, a gift necessary to get the church firmly grounded for if they went before the rulers of men and failed to stand up with such wisdom the church would have never got off the ground. However, now that the church has been founded pastors can't say I don't study the Scriptures, I just get up and open my mouth and the Lord tells me what to say. Pastors who do that you can tell do that because the sermons are an inch deep and a mile wide. Anyone with half an ounce of maturity knows that's not the Lord. Their sermons are nothing like Peter's and Paul's. So now this gift has ceased to be given and now sermons have to be prepared or else the person sounds like a dodo.

The second one in verse 8 is **word of knowledge**. This gift is mentioned here and in 1 Cor 13:8. This again is not just having **knowledge** in the normal sense of studying a subject matter so that you have knowledge. Knowledge is something every Christian should strive for. Paul prays that all believers may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God (Eph 3:14-21). But that is not this gift because again the gift is not knowledge but the **word of knowledge**, signifying a revelatory gift. For example, do you

remember that strange incident in the Book of Acts where the couple Ananias and Sapphira sold some land and they told Peter that they gave all the proceeds to the church and yet they didn't; they held back some of the price. Now nobody knew that except Ananias and Sapphira, yet Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?" How did Peter know that? He didn't go down to the tax office and find the sale price. Answer; **the word of knowledge**. Peter just knew. That's the word of knowledge. Its knowledge of something you've never investigated. Some have called it a "flash of omniscience." Now today nobody has this gift, you may have intuition but you don't have this gift, this is not intuition; this is direct revelation from God telling you something you could never know unless He told you. It was necessary to get the church off the ground on the right foot. This gift has ceased because 1 Cor 13:8 says the gift of knowledge will be done away. So I take it this gift was necessary for the formation of the canon and when the canon was complete the gift ceased. Now if you want to know something you have to study.

The third gift mentioned here is verse 9 and that is **faith**. I told you last week I was unsure whether this gift was temporary or permanent. Let's look at it again. First, every believer has saving faith so that is not what we are talking about with the gift of faith. Although some believers of the Reformed persuasion say faith is the gift in Eph 2:8-9. The problem there is gift is neuter and faith is feminine and salvation is masculine, so there's no gender agreement. The point of that kind of grammar is to say that it's the by grace through faith salvation that is the gift, not the faith *per se* so that won't fly. In any case, saving faith is not the gift being referred to here. Secondly, Romans 12:3 says that every believer is allotted a measure of faith. Some have been allotted more and some less. This seems to be saying that every believer has been given a certain capacity to believe, a certain potential. Since all believers receive some potential to believe it does not seem to be a spiritual gift because no one gift is received by all believers. However, it seems more likely that this capacity relates to a third thing; namely, all believers can increase their faith by hearing the word of God. Hearing the word of God is the means by which our full capacity for believing is met. So the more you hear the word of God the more you are convinced and closer you get to achieving your full potential as a believer. Therefore our gradual increase in faith as we hear the word does not seem to be the spiritual gift of

faith either. What then is the spiritual gift of faith? It seems to be an unusual ability to instantaneously trust the Lord without hearing the word. In other words, it's a faith not achieved by normal study and hearing but by supernatural means. And if this is the case then this gift has also ceased which makes a lot of sense due to the fact that it is listed here with other gifts that ceased. So probably the best way to understand this gift is as a temporary gift. Examples of its use in the NT times may be Acts 6 and 7 where Stephen demonstrated his unusual faith when he stood before the Sanhedrin and offered one of the most stunning rebukes of the highest Jewish officials in the land. They became so convicted and angry that they transgressed their own law by taking him immediately to execution, bypassing Roman authority. Also Barnabas in Acts 11:20-24 is said to be "full of...faith" and he demonstrated it by encouraging new converts with a resolute heart to remain true to the Lord. It was through his remarkable ability to trust before the NT revelation was even given that the new converts were solidified in the faith.

However, even if this gift is not still being given today, I do believe God has given some men in the church a remarkable capacity to believe and that many such men have maximized their potential by availing themselves of the word of God. I think of Martin Luther who stood before the Roman Catholic authorities and was asked whether he would recant the things written in his books which lay before him on the table and he said, "I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen." Where will the church find it's inspiration, it's vitality if not in such men of great faith who are able to say I cannot see my way clearly to the outcome? Indeed it seems at odds with plain reason to follow the Lord at this point, but yet I can see clearly the ways of my God in Scripture and I trust Him, I can do no other. And if we had more such men in the church who would willingly cast themselves upon God then dare I say we might have a living church rather than a dead one! We are in want of men who trust not in their own devices and solutions but in God's word of truth!

The fourth gift mentioned is **gifts of healing** and this is a sign gift. It pointed to someone or something. And here we are not talking about praying for others to be healed and finding them healed. That is completely valid. Nor are we talking about going to the doctor and undergoing a surgical procedure

or a medicinal treatment that results in a cured condition. Surely these things occur but these are not the gifts of healing. The gift of healing is not due to an art learned or inherited, but an ability to instantaneously heal people by a word or the casting of a shadow. The outstanding character of healings in Scripture, for example, in Acts 19 when Paul lays upon the body of the young Eutychus who fell out the third story window during Bible class. How is it that his life came back in him when many bones were crushed in his fall, piercing his lungs and the breath departing from him? It was the **gift of healing** in the apostle Paul. It pointed to Paul as a genuine prophet whom God revealed NT truth to. And as with many of these cases, Eutychus did not ask to be healed, no one in the crowd is said to have had faith that he be healed, Paul simply exercised his gift of healing and the man's broken bones and punctured lungs were healed instantaneously, authenticating him as a prophet of God. Once the NT canon was complete the Spirit stopped giving this gift because it was no longer necessary to authenticate anyone as a messenger of God.

The fifth gift in Paul's list is **effecting of miracles** and this too is a sign gift. It is not referring to miracles that happen in general. For example, some say the salvation of each and every soul is itself a miracle. And with that I heartily agree. The rebirth of the human spirit is a miracle indeed, not accomplished by any natural means. Some say that things have occurred in history that are inexplicable by natural means. And to that I also say, yes, indeed such things do occur, albeit they are quite rare. Yet even this is not the gift of miracles.

What then is the gift of **effectingⁱ of miracles**? Actually three words are commonly used together in the NT to define this gift; signs, miracles and wonders. The first word, "miracles" is the Greek word *dunamis* and refers to "an act of power, a capability." The second word, "wonders" is the Greek word *teras* and refers to the effect of "wonder or astonishment" that comes upon the observer. The third word "signs" is the most important. The Greek word *semeion* refers to "a token, an indication" of the near presence of the kingdom of God. The kingdom had drawn near and as such the powers of the kingdom were exercised by men who were given this special ability. As the author of Hebrews says miracles were "powers of the age to come." All three words together indicate the God given ability of a man to perform some extraordinary work that indicates the nearness of the kingdom of God and elicits

awe among the observers. Since they relate to the kingdom of God they are related to the covenant nation Israel. And their occurrence in the Gospels and the Book of Acts was a sign to the nation Israel that the kingdom had come near.

As such in the NT the Lord Jesus offered the kingdom to the nation Israel in the gospels along with great signs, miracles and wonders, indicating that the kingdom was near. But the nation Israel rejected the king, arrested Him and crucified Him. Because the king prayed on the cross that that generation of Israel be forgiven for they knew not what they do, a second offer of the kingdom was made to the nation Israel during the Book of Acts. So then many signs, miracles and wonders occurred during that period because the kingdom was near. This is confirmed by what Jesus said in the Gospels to His disciples, you shall do greater miracles than these referring to the volume of miracles done by those in the Book of Acts when the kingdom was offered to the nation Israel a second time. But as the nation Israel gradually rejected this second offer of the kingdom the signs, miracles and wonders associated with the nearness of the kingdom gradually drifted away. As Alva McClain says, "In the fifth chapter of Acts "every one" of the sick who were brought from various cities to Jerusalem "were healed" by the apostles (5:16). Twenty five years later we find the greatest of all the apostles being denied his own earnest prayer for a well body (II Cor. 12:7-9). And as we near the end, we hear him advising Timothy to take a little wine for his "often infirmities" (I Tim. 5:23). Still later we learn that he has left another beloved worker "sick" at Miletum (II Tim. 4:20)... At the beginning and through the history of the Acts there were special and miraculous gifts by which divine revelation was channeled to men." By the time of Heb 2:3-4 they were virtually non-existent. Turn to Heb 2:3-4. This is a passage you really need to understand. Hebrews was written late in the NT period, AD67, it's the last book written before Jerusalem was destroyed in AD70. The Jews were on the brink of judgment and here is the Book of Hebrews warning Jewish believers to remain faithful so they wouldn't be caught up in the judgment. By this time the nation Israel had been witnessed to, witnessed to, witnessed to and witnessed and the time has almost come. The author of it is addressing the second generation group of Jewish believers. The first generation, say from the time of Christ was in their 70's. Now a younger generation of Jews had become Christians and this epistle was written for that second generation of Jewish believers. And notice what the author of Hebrews says in vv 3-4, "how will we escape" escape

what? Escape the AD70 judgment, “how will we escape the judgment,” we being the second generation Jewish believers, “if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,” those who heard were the first generation Jewish believers, they actually heard, verse 4, “God also testifying with them,” not with us, “with them both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.” The main verb is there in verse 3, “it was confirmed” and that’s an aorist tense, that’s a past completed action, it was not being confirmed, “it had already been “confirmed.” The first generation Jewish believers had it confirmed to them by sign’s miracles and wonders but the second generation did not get this same confirmation. Only the first generation. It’s interesting, we don’t know who authored the Book of Hebrews but we do know he was a second generation Jewish believer because he was not among the ones who had it confirmed to them. He’s a later Jewish believer. The main point is that by the second generation those signs, miracles and wonders had already begun to fade out to the point the author of Hebrews did not see them, but they were confirmed to have taken place by those earlier Jewish believers who did see them. And the year here is 67AD, so he’s looking back and he’s saying that was the glorious age when signs and miracles were happening but that’s already passed and the reason is because the kingdom had drawn near but as the kingdom offer was rejected and rejected and rejected these sign gifts of miracles began to die off. It was time for judgment.

Now I’ll tell you, most Christians have no clue what the NT is teaching for one fundamental reason; they don’t understand the OT kingdom program. If they understood the kingdom that is covenanted and promised for Israel then they wouldn’t be so naïve as to think the church is the kingdom. It’s that one fatal misunderstanding that gets people confused. And it’s no wonder, Jesus said, seek first the kingdom and no Christian ever studies the kingdom. Yet if you study the kingdom all these signs, miracles and wonders fall into place. They are harbingers of the kingdom and whenever the kingdom is near miracles are near.

Now if you want to know who did those signs, miracles and wonders then there are two passages, Mark 16:14ff and 2 Cor 12:12. Mark 16:9-20 is the debated portion of Mark, the argument is whether these verses are original or not. I take it they are. In that section it says these signs will accompany

those who have believed, they'll drink poison and pick up snakes and cast out demons. And people argue here that Mark means all believers will do these miraculous things. But the verb "believed" is an aorist participle, in other words a past tense. What Jesus is saying is that signs would accompany those who had already believed; and the sense is that miracles would follow them around. Wherever they went signs would follow with them. In other words you have these believers before Pentecost, we'd call them OT saints, they were already justified by faith and then they crossed over at Pentecost and received the Spirit. And then through the Book of Acts you can trace these miracles done by those believers. Almost all the signs and miracles are done by those who had already believed before Pentecost. So, Acts records the fulfillment of Mark 16. Time and again you see the apostles doing signs and miracles. So Mark 16 is the general statement. The particular statement is in 2 Cor 12:12. Here we get confirmation that this is the right interpretation of Mark 16. And Paul says, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles." Now, if all believers do signs and miracles then all believers are apostles. So, only apostles did signs, wonders and miracles, they were the ID badge of apostles so others knew they were authenticated by God as His messengers. So, either Mark 16 was fulfilled by the apostles in Acts or Mark 16 is a lie and contradicts 2 Cor 12. But the main point is that when you couple these passages with Heb 2:3-4 you realize signs and wonders were already fading out by 67AD. The author of Hebrews says he didn't see these things. Today miracles are rare, we can pray for God to heal us, that kind of thing is fully legitimate, but miracles that came as signs to the nation Israel through the hands of the apostles, no, those are not occurring.

And the reason is simple, judgment already came on the nation Israel in AD70 and the kingdom offer was rescinded. Now as a point of interest and confirmation, when the kingdom of God draws near again in the future Tribulation the world will once more see genuine signs, miracles and wonders accomplished by God's angels and the two witnesses, amazing signs in heaven and on earth. Why? Because the kingdom will have drawn near once more. In the meantime, the kingdom is not near, so these powers of the age to come are not being exercised today.

Now when you look at the history of miracles it's very interesting that they come in spurts. There are not continuous ongoing miracles as most people

assume. There are actually four periods of high frequency miracles done by people and here's a chart that depicts them. Let's make some observations.

4 Periods of High Frequency Miracles			
1	2	3	4
Moses/Joshua	Elijah/Elisha	Jesus/Apostles	Elijah & 2 Witnesses/Jesus
2 Generations	2 Generations	2 Generations	2 Generations
Kingdom Established	Kingdom Threatened	Kingdom Offered	Kingdom Offered and Restored

First of all, notice the bottom row, they are all related in some way to the kingdom. In the first column the kingdom of God was established during the ministries of Moses and Joshua and those two generations saw amazing miracles: Moses splitting the Red Sea, Moses striking the rock and water coming out, Joshua taking Jericho; miracle after miracle after miracle. Then they die off considerably until you come to the time of Elijah and Elisha when the kingdom was threatened because Ahab had capitulated to the pagan religion of his wife Jezebel, Baalism was on the rise and therefore the existence of the kingdom was threatened and so you have a rise of miracles: Elijah's defeat of the Baal prophets at Carmel, the shutting off of rain for three years, etc...then they die off considerably again until the time of Jesus and the apostles when the kingdom had drawn near and was being offered to the nation Israel. Finally, in the future another intense period of miracles will come with Elijah and the two witnesses in the Tribulation and of course Jesus in the millennial kingdom, when the kingdom comes then you will see the greatest miracles ever. The powers of the age to come will be the norm, predator will lie with prey, the entire earth's topography will be radically modified, the sower will be on the heels of the reaper and so forth and so forth, the great age of miracles is still to come. As Joseph Dillow says, "This shows that sign manifestations always were temporary, lasting about seventy years each time they appeared. Furthermore, there were gaps between them in which God was silent. This helps explain the silence of God over the last nineteen centuries and the disappearance of the miraculous gifts at the end of the first century. We should at the same time remember that between these great periods of sign manifestations there were scattered miracles for

specific purposes. But no one would have argued from those few miracles that that was God's normal operation for that time. Likewise, no one doubts that the Lord Jesus Christ is performing miracles today. The question is whether this is the norm. The charismatic movement has that it should be and the Bible says it shouldn't."

Finally then, what do we say about the so-called miracle working of God today through healers and miracle-workers? We say they are charlatans. Beware of those who claim to have the gift of miracles today - for even our Lord said in Matt 24 that such signs and wonders would occur so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. And Paul said in 2 Thess 2 that Satan has all power and signs and false wonders so as to deceive those who do not love the truth. Ultimately what is at stake is love of the truth, not love for the spectacular. As Moses said in Deuteronomy 13 if one arises who gives you a sign or a wonder and the sign or the wonder comes true yet he says let us go after other gods and let us serve them you shall not listen to the words of that man for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and whether you will cling to Him. I say again, do not be deceived by those who claim to do miracles. Plainly and simply it is not primarily the sign or wonder that you are interested in, that is a spectacular thing that can lead you astray, what is truly at stake is what the person says, their theology, not what they can do, for as God said, such miracles can be done by Satan and God is testing you to see whether you love Him. This sign gift has passed from the scene.

Now to the fifth gift listed by the apostle Paul, the gift of **prophecy**. This is a foundational gift. It was necessary for the founding of the church. Paul says in Eph 2:20, "Apostles and prophets are the foundation of the Church." Now prophecy is not just proclaiming the word in the sense of a Bible teacher. Sometimes people say prophecy is ongoing today by those who teach the word. However, there is a very large difference between one who proclaims the word by teaching and by prophesying. The difference is that the prophet does it under divine inspiration but the teacher is not inspired. Therefore the prophet is proclaiming the word inerrantly, the teacher errantly. Yet God has given teachers to the church so the fact they make mistakes is not a reason to dismiss them. But they do not speak as inspired instruments of God as prophets.

In conclusion, there are three categories of gifts; foundational gifts, these were necessary during the foundation phase of the church, gifts like word of wisdom, word of knowledge apostle, prophet. Then there are sign gifts, these were also necessary in the early church as signs pointing to someone or something, gifts like healing and miracles pointed to the fact that Israel's kingdom had drawn near. Sign gifts also authenticated the messenger as from God and the message. These messengers were necessary to write the NT. Both foundational and sign gifts have ceased. The other gifts are the building gifts and they continue. We don't see any of them here, not even faith. Since we are studying all these foundational and sign gifts in this passage, if you want to see passages that contain building gifts then the best passage is Romans 12:1-8. The important thing to recognize in Romans 12 is that the gifts follow the most famous verses in Romans, offer yourselves as living sacrifices, be not transformed to the world but by the renewing of your mind be transformed into Christ-likeness. Nobody realizes those verses are preparatory for using your spiritual gift right. They just quote those verses and don't think about spiritual gifts.

¹ The Greek word **effecting** is *energemon* and refers to an energetic ability or we might simply say the capability.

[Back To The Top](#)

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