

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life: (20)
Following Jesus Christ Rightly: #13b. Spiritual Gifts” (part 2)**

Introduction:

Last Lord’s Day we began to address the teaching of God’s Word regarding spiritual gifts and of their use within the local church. The employment of our spiritual gifts within the church body is one of the primary ways we are to serve the Lord, that is, to follow the Lord as His disciples. The Lord has ordained the local church to be the primary instrument through which He furthers His kingdom in the world. He has, therefore, distributed spiritual gifts to His disciples so that they might serve the body of Christ, His church. Through the use of our spiritual gifts in serving the Lord and His people, we will be better able to follow Jesus Christ rightly.

Last week we considered two places in the New Testament in which the subject of spiritual gifts are addressed, 1 Peter 4:7-11 and Romans 12:4-7. Today we will direct our attention to Paul’s most full exposition on the subject of spiritual gifts, which is in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13. Let us turn there.

We will begin with reading the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 12. Paul wrote:

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: ²You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. ³Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. ⁷But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: ⁸for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

¹²For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴For in fact the body is not one member but many.

¹⁵If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁶And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? ¹⁸But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. ¹⁹And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

²⁰But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. ²¹And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ²²No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. ²³And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, ²⁴but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, ²⁵that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. ²⁶And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

²⁷Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. ²⁸And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all

workers of miracles? ³⁰Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

I. The Apostle begins to address the wrong use of spiritual gifts in the church (1 Cor. 12:1-3)

The Apostle Paul wrote this epistle to the church at Corinth not only to instruct these Christians in the matter of the faith, but he wrote in large part to answer questions that the church had posed to him. He had received word that the church was having difficulties of various kinds, which included the use and abuse of spiritual gifts.

We see that Paul was answering their concerns in his words of **verse 1**: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant.” This church had not used the spiritual gifts that God had given them in a right manner. Rather than serving others with their spiritual gifts, they had been using their gift to exalt their own name and cause within the church. Apparently they had emphasized the gift of tongues in this errant use within the body.

The Corinthian believers had come out of great spiritual darkness, for Corinth was a place wholly given to idolatry. He spoke of this in **verses 2 and 3**:

²You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. ³Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

Paul assured them that the Holy Spirit Himself was governing the speech, even the confession of Christians regarding their faith in Jesus Christ. Here the apostle was asserting at the outset of his corrective of their practice that their speech was to be understandable to the church, governed by the Holy Spirit.

II. The Apostle set forth the bestowal, the operation, and the results of the gifts to the Holy Trinity (12:4-6)

We read in **verses 4 through 7** one of the clearest explanations in the Holy Scriptures of the nature and practice of spiritual gifts. God is at work in and through His people in order to accomplish His purposes in His churches. There we read,

⁴“There are diversities of gifts¹, but the same Spirit. ⁵There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

Paul set forth each person of the Holy Trinity as having a role in the imparting and use of the spiritual gifts of Christians. First, the “diversities of gifts” is attributed to the **Holy Spirit**. It is the Holy Spirit who distributes the gifts to Christians. Secondly, Paul attributed to the **Lord Jesus** the “differences of ministries.” This is the way that they spiritual gifts functioned or operated in the experience of the churches. And then thirdly, Paul referenced **God the Father** to the “diversities of activities” of the gifts. This speaks of the results or work accomplished through the gifts. Our One God, the blessed Holy Trinity, is at work through His people to accomplish His purposes in the world. As one once wrote:

The Divine Trinity is here indicated *in an ascending climax*, in such a way that we pass from the *Spirit*, who bestows the gifts, to the *Lord*, who is served by means of them, and finally to *God*, who, as the absolute First Cause and Possessor of all Christian powers, works the entire sum of charismatic deeds in all who are gifted. This passage has always (from Chrysostum and Theodoret onwards) been rightly adduced in opposition to anti-Trinitarian error.²

¹ The Greek word translated “gifts” is *χαρισμάτων* (*charismatone*), from which the word, “charismatic” originated.

² Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, **Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Parts V and VI, The Epistles to the Corinthians** (T & T Clark, 1877), p. 360.

III. The Apostle set forth a list of spiritual gifts (12:7-11)

Paul first declared that the purpose of the Holy Spirit in giving spiritual gifts to Christians is that the gifts would bring “the profit of all.” **Verse 7** reads, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.” This is a foundational principle in the right identification of a true spiritual gift from God and when it is being used rightly. It underscores what we asserted last week:

If you are a Christian, God gave you a spiritual gift to enable you to serve others for their spiritual benefit, in other words, for the building up of the local church.

We saw this in the passage we addressed last week. 1 Peter 4:10 reads, “As each one has received a gift, minister it *to one another*, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” God did not impart a spiritual gift to you so that you yourself would be built up or edified by that gift, but that by ministering that gift to others they might be built up or edified by you. This is a major principle that governs the purpose and use of spiritual gifts.

One of the great defects of the Corinthian church was that there were those using the miraculous, revelatory gifts for selfish purposes, in order to edify each one by his gift, rather than using his gift to build up the body of the local church. This problem at Corinth is still a problem among many of our charismatic friends. They claim to have spiritual gifts by which each one builds up himself. They individualize the use of what they claim to be their spiritual gift, each one thinking that God gave to him his gift for his own personal benefit. Paul made it clear that God never gave a spiritual gift for this purpose. He gives gifts to His people so that they can serve the other brethren in the church. Here is a word I received from a radio listener several days ago who had this twisted view of what he claimed to be his spiritual gift (please excuse the poor grammar and syntax.):

“Anyway as I read the Bible the Holy Spirit came upon me and I started speaking another language which completely freaked me out. I went to the Baptist Pastor who told me that does not happen etc. You know the Baptist theory on these matters. Well at the time I did not know the theory nor did I even know anything about Pentecostal teachings. I know I do not have the devil in me and I know this language I speak is divine and I know that God gave this gift for me to use. So having this gift knowing what is taught about this in the Baptist church. Knowing how you all see the scriptures and completely deny the gift. It is not like I am going to think you all have the answers. I know when my tongues moves in ways I cannot make it do it is not me. I feel the Spirit’s feelings and opinions about things and it is not me. (He obvious loves everybody and everything:)

“I have a twin sister who does not have very much church knowledge. She is untainted. After the Spirit came upon me she was worried about me. So she read the Bible and the exact same thing happen to her. But she is a little different than me. Her face turns red when the Spirit is on her and he has her do funny breathing stuff. The stuff she sees and hears at first I always think she is wacked. Then like a good student I research her theory or what she was told me in the Bible and guess what. She is always right! She hears directly from God and you be amazed at her teachings. I have so much religion pre taught stuff in me that it is harder to put that aside. She does not.

“We both agree we are in the New Covenant
We both agree Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father ruling...

“I will pop into different church denominations I like to see how God is working with the different branches. I am not loyal to one.

“I am blessed beyond measure. I do not have to work. God is very graces to me. I am always wondering why I am so blessed. Everything I touch pretty much turns to gold. There is nothing I cannot do with Christ. Animals flock to me as they know I have the Spirit of God inside of me. I know that some

disturbed people stand close to me as they can feel the spirit and it calms them. Kind of like when David played for Saul. I am in the Kingdom. I am a light that shines.”

Notice how his understanding and use of the “gift” he claims God gave him is wholly personal and has nothing to do with ministering to the body of a local church. He believes, in fact, that his gift has set him apart and above the church. He wishes he was like his sister, who had not been “tainted” by the teaching of a church. His understanding of what spiritual gifts is errant. His use of what he thinks is a spiritual gift is wrong. Yet what he espouses is very commonly believed and practiced in Christendom today.

By the way, this man claims to be a full preterist in his understanding of the endtime. In other words, He believes that the second coming of Jesus Christ took place in AD 70 when Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. He believes that we are now living in the eternal state of the new heavens and the new earth. He would not receive my instruction to him or efforts to correct him, for he claims to have the “Spirit” who speaks directly to him.

Now in **verses 8 through 11** Paul gave a list of spiritual gifts. Before we look at them specifically, let us stand back and reflect on the many different kinds of spiritual gifts set forth in the New Testament. There are different lists of spiritual gifts to be found in several places of the New Testament. First, there is a list that we read last week in **Romans 12:3-8**. They include the following:

1. Prophesying (v. 6)³ --
2. Ministry (serving) (v. 7a)
3. Teaching (v. 7b)
4. Exhortation (encouraging) (v. 8a)
5. Giving (v. 8b)
6. Leadership (administration/management) (v. 8c)
7. Mercy (v. 8d)

There is also a short list in **Ephesians 4:11-13**. These are gifted men who serve in offices in the church.

1. Apostles⁴
2. Prophets
3. Evangelists⁵
4. Pastors
5. Teachers⁶

³ There were New Testament prophets through whom God revealed His will miraculously, who spoke on behalf of God to others. Their message may or may not have always been a foretelling nature. The formal office of a prophet existed in the earliest decades of the Christian era. This miraculous foretelling of future events was a temporary gift of the apostolic age. The church was built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (cf. Eph. 2:20). . But prophesying may also be considered in a broader sense of forthtelling the Word of God. Preaching the word of God may be described as “prophesying”; it is telling forth the Word of God

⁴ We should distinguish between apostles of Christ and what may be termed, “apostles of the church.” The word “apostle” means “sent one.” An apostle is an ambassador who is performing a function on behalf of another. He is one who bears the authority of his sender. “The Twelve” (and Paul) were uniquely “apostles of Christ”, as no others were. Through the foundational ministry of The Twelve the New Testament church was established. Through the apostles Jesus Christ performed great miraculous works as “signs” to show that they had a legitimate ministry as His representatives. “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds” (2 Cor. 12:12). But there are other “apostles” in the New Testament who could be described as “apostles of churches.” They were sent forth from local churches on missions. Barnabus (Acts 14:14), Andronicus and Junias (Rom. 16:7) are mentioned as these kinds of apostles.

⁵ Evangelists are men (and perhaps women?) uniquely gifted to bring the lost to repentance from sin toward God and faith in Jesus Christ. It would seem that “evangelists” not only initially brought people to faith, but God uses them to help Christians along their journey of faith unto their final salvation. Consider the role of “Evangelist” in Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. The one with the gift of being an evangelist reflects a role and work that is broader than the role of today’s “evangelist” cast largely through 19th and 20th century revivalism.

And then there is the list before us in our passage of **1 Corinthians 12:8-11**:

⁷But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: ⁸for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

Let us attempt to understand more clearly the nature of these gifts:

1. **Word of wisdom.** This was a spiritual capability given to a Christian enabling him or her to be able to see through all the confusion and error and give clear counsel on what is the will of God in a matter.
2. **Word of knowledge.** This was the ability to know miraculously some detail that is beyond the normal abilities of human beings. This may perhaps be illustrated in Peter's ability to know that Ananias and Saphira had lied to the church about their financial gift (Cf. Acts 5:1ff).
3. **Faith.** This was the special ability to pray and have God answer in marvelous ways.
4. **Gifts of healing.** The ability to heal people of their sickness or infirmities.
5. **Working of miracles**
6. **Prophecy.** Because of this word's association with other miraculous gifts, this is speaking about the ability to foretell the future.
7. **Discerning of spirits** -- the ability to recognize and distinguish between good and evil; being able to recognize subtleties of deception.
8. **Different tongues** (languages). The ability to speak an existing human language that was not formerly known or studied. There is no instance in the New Testament of what our charismatic friends claim to experience, that of a "heavenly language" or a "prayer language" or the "language of angels."
9. **Interpretation of tongues** (languages) – The ability to understand a foreign language not formerly known or studied. This would enable a church member to give a translation of the message that one with the gift of speaking in a foreign language (tongues) was giving before the church body.

This list from 1 Corinthians 12 is troublesome to many. There are gifts here that are clearly supernatural in character and effect. Are these gifts evident for today or not? I for one am not willing to say that God does not work in extraordinary ways at various times in church history. He is sovereign in these matters. But having said that, we should not believe that everything that is claimed to be of God is of God. This is particularly true with what we may describe as the "revelatory gifts", those gifts whereby God spoke directly to and through individuals. God has given us a completed Bible, a "canon" or rule, that is to be our sole source of all objective knowledge about God and His will. Whenever you meet a Christian who advocates direct revelation of God's will through a spiritual gift, that person denies the sole authority and the sufficiency of Holy Scriptures. Our confession of faith states the matter well. Here is the first paragraph of the first article in **The Baptist Confession of 1689**:

The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience, although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and his will which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in divers manners to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church; and afterward for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan, and of the world, to

⁶ These last two may speak of one office, that of the pastor-teacher. Shepherding is done through teaching.

commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.⁷

There were certain conditions in the early Christian era that called for displays and works of a miraculous nature as well as for the need of God to communicate His Word directly to His people. We might cite two reasons. First, the New Testament books had not yet been written. But furthermore, even as the books were being written, they were not immediately recognized as Scripture nor were they widely decimated to all the churches. And second, the concept of New Testament Christianity which is composed of churches with both Gentile and Jewish members, all having equal status, was an unknown and non-established idea. The miraculous signs and revelatory gifts were the means by which God demonstrated that this was His doing. Only after the true nature of New Testament Christianity had been established was no longer the need for these miraculous gifts. Church history, by the way, records the gradual diminishing frequency of the miraculous gifts until they virtually disappeared in the second century. But by then Christianity was established throughout the empire.

Now after Paul identified the various gifts, he affirmed the unity of purpose and function of those gifts as directed by the Holy Spirit. **Verse 11** reads, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills." The Holy Spirit is sovereign in the dispensing of spiritual gifts to the Lord's people.

IV. The Apostle set forth the diversity of spiritual gifts among the members of the local church, showing the necessity that they function within the one body of Christ, the local church (12:12-30)

This passage is easily understood, so we will read it without much comment.

¹²For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body⁸—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴For in fact the body is not one member but many.

¹⁵If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? ¹⁸But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. ¹⁹And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

²⁰But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. ²¹And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²²No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. ²³And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, ²⁴but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, ²⁵that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. ²⁶And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

²⁷Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. ²⁸And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? ³⁰Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way. (1 Cor. 12:12-31)

⁷ **The Baptist Confession of 1689**, Article 1, Paragraph 1. The verses used to substantiate this statement include the following: 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Isa. 8:20; Luke 16:29, 31; Eph. 2:20; Rom. 1:19-21; 2:14f; Psalms 19:1-3; Heb. 1:1; Prov. 22:19-21; Rom. 15:4; 2 Peter 1:19f.

⁸ This speaks of Jesus Christ baptizing His people in the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

When Paul wrote, “And yet I show you a more excellent way”, he was referring to the greatest gift of love, which he set forth in the following chapter.

V. The Apostle set forth the greatest spiritual gift, that of love (13:1-13)

1 Corinthians 13 is the great love chapter of the Bible. Paul presents three perpetual or abiding gifts—faith, hope, and love. The greatest of these three abiding gifts is love. It is within this context that Paul wrote of the temporary nature of the revelatory spiritual gifts.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ²And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

⁴Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; ⁶does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

¹¹When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. ¹²For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

¹³And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Take note Paul did not say, “When Christ returns, then will abide only faith, hope, and love.” Rather, he declared that “now”, the gifts that would continue, that would “abide” for Christians, are “faith, hope, and love.”

VI. The apostle wrote of the cessation of revelatory spiritual gifts (13:8-10)

In **verses 8** through **10** Paul wrote of the discontinuance of revelatory spiritual gifts. Again, Paul wrote:

⁸Love never fails. But whether there are *prophecies*, they will fail; whether there are *tongues*, they will cease; whether there is *knowledge*, it will vanish away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

This is an important matter for us to understand. This is the issue that largely distinguishes non-charismatic from charismatic Christians. Charismatic Christians believe that the revelatory spiritual gifts of prophecy, a word of knowledge, and the gift of tongues continue to be present and are needful today. Non-charismatics believe that God no longer imparts these gifts; He ceased to do so in the early Christian era. Those who believe these revelatory (or sometimes referred to as “sign gifts”) gifts have ceased are commonly referred to as cessationists. And so, among evangelicals there are charismatics and cessationists. Cessationists espouse the finality and sufficiency of God’s revelation of Himself in the Bible. Charismatics do not believe in the sufficiency of the Bible. They certainly believe the necessity of the Bible, but they do not believe that the Bible is the final and sole authoritative Word that God has given to His people. They believe that God speaks apart from the Bible through the ongoing gifts of prophecy, tongues, and the gift of knowledge.⁹

⁹ Of course they also believe that the gift of tongues is an unintelligible heavenly, prayer language. We have already shown that this is not biblical. Every use of the gift of tongues in the Bible may be understood as God giving someone the miraculous ability to speak in a foreign language that he had not previously known or studied.

Now here in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 we read that these gifts were temporary in nature. Paul taught the church at Corinth that the time would arrive when these revelatory gifts, through which God communicates His Word, would come to an end. A consideration of the Greek verb tenses used would suggest the following ideas being conveyed by Paul: First, the gift of tongues would die out on their own; however, Paul does not say when this would occur. And second, Paul wrote that the gifts of prophecy and knowledge would cease to be manifest “when that which is perfect has come.”

This is a very much-debated passage. The greatest debate is over the expression, “when that which is perfect has come.” There are three major views.

(1) Some argue “that which is perfect” refers to **the Second Coming of Jesus Christ**. They would say, therefore, that these gifts through which God speaks to His people continues even until today. This is the view generally held by charismatics.

(2) Others argue that “the perfect” refers to **the completion of the New Testament**. Paul was telling the Corinthians that when the complete revelation of God has come in the New Testament Scriptures, then the temporary gifts would cease. Cessationists commonly hold this view (John MacArthur is a strong proponent of this position).

But interestingly, not all cessationists hold to this view. I noticed that the note in my New Geneva Study Bible, which reflects the opinions of Reformed theologians who are cessationists, do not all hold to Paul referring to the New Testament Scriptures. I tend not to hold that view as well, although I am a cessationist. It would seem both a violation of the context and reason to think that Paul is referring to the completion of the New Testament canon. This would mean that he is introducing an idea here that he does not identify specifically and that he nowhere else mentions in his other writings.

(3) Other views hold “that which is perfect” is to be understood as either (a) **a state of mature love** in the church that will signal the end of revelatory gifts, (b) **the maturing of the early church**, or (c) **the death of the early Christian**.

What is my understanding? *I believe that when the need for these “sign” gifts was no longer present, these gifts ceased to be seen in the churches.* In other words, during the *infant* stages of the church when God was showing to the world and His people that He was calling out a people from all the world (*i.e.* Gentiles) to be part of the kingdom of God, these gifts were needed. But when the church had matured that all Christians understood that the church of Jesus Christ was comprised of people called by God out of every nation, and that Gentile believers had equal standing as Jewish believers, then the purpose for these gifts had come to an end. God had confirmed and affirmed through the revelatory gifts that His church was to be comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. No further demonstration of God’s purpose through these gifts was needed; the sign or revelatory gifts ceased to be manifest among the churches.

Consider Paul’s use of the idea of spiritual *maturity* and unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church in Ephesians. This is particularly seen in **Ephesians 4:11-16**.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to *a perfect man*, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴that we should *no longer be children*, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵but, speaking the truth in love, may *grow up* in all things into Him who is the head-- Christ-- ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, *causes growth of the body* for the edifying of itself in love.

Notice that the maturity of the church has to do with recognizing the spiritual unity among true believers and manifesting love in the church. God gave the apostles and prophets (temporary offices) as well as

evangelists and pastor/teachers to bring about this maturing in unity, a unity comprised of all true believers in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile.

We may look at **1 Corinthians 14** we see the same kind of thought conveyed. Paul wrote that though he spoke in other languages due to the Lord gifting Him, he would rather speak five words which the church could understand rather than 10,000 words in an unknown language before the congregation that nobody understood. Let us read **verses 18** through **22**.

¹⁸I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; ¹⁹yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. ²⁰Brethren, do not be *children* in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be *mature*. ²¹In the law it is written: "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; and yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord. ²²Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.

Take note of what Paul declared. When he was rebuking the church for their wrong use of the gift of tongues, he wrote, "Do not be children in understanding"; rather, they were in their understanding to be "mature" (v. 20). Paul was declaring that when the church was as "children" they spoke using this gift of tongues, or in foreign languages. But once they became "mature" those childish practices were to be discarded. This is the same idea that he had given in 1 Corinthians 13:10 when he wrote, "But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away." The Greek word translated here as "perfect" is translated in 1 Corinthians 14:20 as "mature." The revelatory gifts, particularly the sign gift of speaking in tongues (foreign languages) and the interpretation of tongues were temporary gifts for the church in its childhood, but those things were put away once the church had become mature, when it was known that it was a world-wide church comprised of both Jewish and Gentile believers.

VII. Some practical considerations suggested by this topic of spiritual gifts

As we conclude today, let us ask ourselves some questions, questions that I have posed to us in the past. Let us ask ourselves several questions which may betray whether or not we have been transformed by the renewing of the mind in the realm of our membership and our identity as members of our local church.

1. Do we love the church as Christ loved the church?

The church of Jesus Christ is an easy target to shoot at. She is imperfect in so many ways. She still has many flaws and wrinkles. She is not yet without spot and without blemish. She is not yet presentable as a bride should be on her wedding day. She is a work in progress. But Christ loves her even now, as should we. How can some say that they love Jesus Christ, and not love the church that He loves?

Do we desire for the church what Jesus Christ Himself desires for her? Do we long to see her to be admired, respected, and praised? Do we long for her purity? Do we desire her maturity? Are these pressing concerns of our hearts? Do we even pray that these things that are so important to our Lord be realized in His churches?

2. Do we give ourselves to the church as Christ gives Himself to her?

Are we committed to achieving for the church that Christ has given His very life to obtain? He serves His church continuously to make her into all that she could and will be? Are we fellow-workers of Jesus Christ seeking through concrete practical ways to see His desires for her realized? Paul loved the church. 2 Tim. 2:10, "Therefore I endure all things for the elects' sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." We serve our Lord Jesus by serving one another within the church. We are to seek to accomplish in the church the same goals that our Lord has purposed to do for His people.

I would venture to say that there are few within the churches that have the concerns that Christ has for His church. Some would even oppose this work that Christ is conducting. They resist conforming the church to His Word and will, "for that is not how we have always done it." They resist the purifying of the church by

not endorsing, or even opposing efforts to discipline church members who not simply fail (we all fail), but refuse to depart from sin and refuse to be a part of the ongoing life of the church.

The point we are making is this. We should seek to understand the ideals and goals to which Christ has respecting His church. We should seek to identify these and then purpose in whatever and in as many ways as we can to see these realized within our own body. Does our Lord desire to see our church pure and holy? Then let us strive to be so. Does Christ desire His church to be responsive to Him as a bride is to her husband? Then let us do so. In every way let us give ourselves to the church as Christ gave Himself for the church.

3. Do we see ourselves as “the church”, a single entity for which and to which Christ gives Himself?

Again, one of our weaknesses as American Christians is our individualism. We tend to identify ourselves as individual Christians only. We tend only to view ourselves as individual Christians to the exclusion of our identity as a corporate body. We come “to church” but do we think of ourselves and identify ourselves as “the church”? Do we view our individual selves as we are in truth, individual parts of a whole, and dependent on the others of us in order to function properly before God? Or do we see ourselves only in terms of individual Christians? No, rather, we tend to see the church as only a place “I go to worship”, rather than the church as a single body of believers through which Christ manifests His life. The New Testament does not present a Christian living in isolation of other believers. Christians are to be in churches.

4. Do we see ourselves as part of a “church” whose individual lives are either blessed or adversely affected by the spiritual condition of the church body of which we are members?

The Lord does indeed see us as individuals, but He sees us as a single entity as well. He sees us as a “local church.” Recall the letters that our Lord sent out to the churches that are contained in Revelation 2 and 3. He spoke to these seven churches as seven individual entities. As the individual church went, so went all the members. If the church was approved, all within the church had part in His approval. If the church was rebuked, all had part in His rebuke and His temporal judgments.

Do you recall the defeat of Israel at Ai? God did not bless Israel because one man, Achan, violated the command of God and therefore through His sin forfeited God’s blessing on the nation of which he was a part. To the degree our church has the blessing of God, will be to the degree that our members as individual Christians will potentially experience the blessing of God.

5. Do we model our understanding and belief in Christ’s love for His church and His churches love for Him through our marriages, in the roles through which He has ordained that we serve Him?

How do we show forth as individuals the relationship of Christ to His church? We manifest this relationship in the way that we order our marriages, in the way we fulfill our roles as husbands and wives.

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace,
which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance
among all them which are sanctified. (Acts 20:32)

**Some further words on
The Gift of Tongues in the New Testament**

God used the gift of tongues in the New Testament era in order to demonstrate conclusively that He was undertaking a great shift in His dealings with mankind. Until the crucifixion of Christ, God’s kingdom was principally confined to the nation of Israel. After the resurrection God extended His purpose to encompass a

people from all nations. God gifting some in the early churches to speak in different languages both enabled this plan to be implemented on a grand scale and it served to validate conclusively that this was indeed of God. This matter of God validating His purpose to reach the nations with the gospel is what is meant by the gift of tongues as a sign. It was a sign, a proof that God's purpose was to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ into the world.

Let us see how this is demonstrated in the Book of Acts. We read in Acts 1:8 an "outline" of what unfolds in this book. Here the Lord Jesus instructed His disciples that after the Holy Spirit came upon them on the day of Pentecost, they would become His witnesses first in *Jerusalem*, then in *Judea and Samaria*, then to *the uttermost parts of the earth*. The gift of tongues is the miraculous ability to communicate the Gospel in other languages, (1) enabled this world-wide witness to be accomplished and (2) signified to those watching that it was a work of God. The result was an understanding that God was doing something wholly new. He was calling out for Himself a people comprised of believers in Jesus Christ from every kindred and tongue.

We see then that at first, on the day of Pentecost, the city of *Jerusalem* was made aware of the Gospel. Through the use of the gift of tongues Jews gathered in Jerusalem from all parts of the Roman Empire heard the gospel. They could say, "We hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:11).

Later, we read of a somewhat similar happening in the region of Samaria, in fulfillment of God's purpose for Christ's disciples to reach *Judea and Samaria*. In Acts 8 we read of the initial response of the Samaritans (Acts 8:1, 4-8, 14-17, 25). The manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the *Samaritan believers* "through the hands of the Apostles" validated the fact that God was in this thing; Samaritans also were becoming a part of God's kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ.

Then in Acts 10 we read of a further expansion of the Gospel in the region of Judea and Samaria when Peter took the Gospel to the Gentile household of *Cornelius*, a Roman officer. We read in Acts 10:44-48 that the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his household. This demonstrated first to Peter then later to the Jewish disciples at Jerusalem that God was now at work among the Gentiles of Judea and Samaria bringing them into the kingdom of God. The gift of tongues was a "sign" that this was so.

Last, we read in Acts 19 of the Gospel being embraced by Gentiles in far off Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7). From the perspective of Jews in Jerusalem, Ephesus was at *the uttermost parts of the earth*. Here again, in the last description of tongues in the Book of Acts, we see that tongues were for a sign. God had used this gift at each significant stage of the advancement of the gospel into the world.

We read in 1 Corinthians 14:22, "Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers." A sign to whom? I would say chiefly to Jews who had refused to believe on Jesus. I say that based on the quotation that Paul uses from Isaiah 28. When the gospel began to be proclaimed through the gift of various languages in a miraculous way, it was evident proof to the Jews that God was doing a work of God in other places than within the Jewish sphere. At the same time these manifestations of the Spirit gifting Gentile Christians to speak miraculously foreign languages was a "sign" of impending judgment and rejection of Jews who refused to believe on Jesus (1 Cor. 14:34).
