

# **SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

*Unlocked*



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## INTRODUCTION

Spiritual gifts is a topic about which opinions abound. This is due to the fact that there are so many questions pertaining to this topic, especially in regards to the miraculous sign gifts. Are these gifts still here today or are they not? Why do some churches claim that they are still active while others claim that they have ceased? These are important questions which I hope to answer in this series on the spiritual gifts. As believers it is important that we base what we believe upon a strong foundation of Scripture. Therefore it is the goal of this study to present biblical evidence while taking into account the testimony of church history, which speaks to this issue as well.

One very important point which needs to be made at the beginning of this study is the fact that spiritual gifts are given for the common good of others (1 Cor. 12:7). They are not given for the purpose of self-edification (cf. 1 Cor. 10:24; Rom. 14:19; 15:2), but to ultimately give glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

Another point to remember is how one's predetermined views can prejudice his understanding of any issue. This can prevent an individual from seeing and thus understanding another point of view. For example, when a person hears phrases like, "the gift of tongues" or "word of knowledge," he immediately has a perception of what these things mean, right or wrong. This of course is normal. Yet it is important when trying to better understand something afresh that one makes an attempt to set aside their preconceived views so that he can reconsider the topic. This is important because there is much misinformation in the world today about spiritual gifts. Combining this with the fact that some spiritual gifts are more difficult to define since the Bible does not give us much information about them, makes this issue more complicated. Therefore, it is wise not to jump to conclusions without first making a serious attempt at understanding what the Bible has to say in contrast to prevalent unbiblical views.

In this study each of the gifts will be defined. First I will begin with those which are not the center of controversy. All the gifts which will be defined are those listed in the New Testament Scriptures. Consequently, this study will not include people's abilities or talents like being able to play a musical instrument, design and create beautiful things, to sing wonderfully, or understand complex things, etc. Also this study will not cover the Church offices listed in Ephesians 4:11 of apostle, prophet, evangelist or pastor-teacher. Although these positions were given as gifts to the Church, they in themselves are not "spiritual gifts" in the same way as the manifestations of the Spirit are (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7), which is the focus of this discussion. Although the holders of Church offices are spiritually gifted by the Holy Spirit to carry out their ministries, and although they will be mentioned in this study, they will not be examined in this context.

The spiritual gifts will be broken down into two main categories which will include five subtopics. The first main topic will cover those spiritual gifts associated with the well-being of others. This category will cover the following:

### 1. Spiritual gifts associated with the well-being of others

#### Instructional gifts

- Teaching (Rom. 12:7)
- Exhortation (Rom. 12:8)

#### Service gifts

- Service (Rom. 12:7)
- Giving (Rom. 12:8)
- Leadership (Rom. 12:8)
- Mercy (Rom. 12:8)
- Helps (1 Cor. 12:28)
- Administration (1 Cor. 12:28)

The next main category discussed will be:

## 2. Spiritual gifts associated with the Word of God

#### Revelatory gifts

- Word of wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8)
- Word of knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8)

#### Confirmatory gifts

- Faith (1 Cor. 12:9)
- Healing (1 Cor. 12:9)
- Miracles (1 Cor. 12:10)
- Prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10; Rom. 12:6)
- Distinguishing of spirits (1 Cor. 12:10)

#### Congregatory gifts

- Tongues (1 Cor. 12:10)
- Interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:10)

For some the categorization of these gifts may be slightly unusual, yet hopefully these classifications will become more understandable as the material is presented. Also for clarification, please note that the gifts listed in the first main category – gifts associated with the well-being of others -- are not only spiritual gifts but are also characteristics that all believers are to manifest to some degree as a result of their faith. The difference is that those who possess these as gifts will be able to manifest them to a greater degree with much greater efficiency due to the grace given them in contrast to those who are not gifted in the same way. Thus, followers of Jesus must work at growing in each of these areas with the goal of becoming more mature and therefore a more fruitful disciple.

A natural question that many may have is, “How am I gifted?” As we go through each of these gifts in this first main category, please think about yourself and ask yourself the following questions:

1. Which of these things do I really find joy in doing?
2. Which of these things am I good at doing and would like to excel in?
3. Which of these things have others noticed in me, making comments about my ability to do this particular thing well?

Whatever gift or gifts come to mind may very well be your spiritual gift or gifts.

## I. Defining Spiritual Gifts

### A. Spiritual gifts associated with the well-being of others

The first two gifts to be discussed are instructional gifts, which are teaching and exhortation.

#### 1. Instructional gifts

##### a. Teaching (Rom. 12:7)

The gift of teaching is the ability to explain revealed biblical truth in a manner that others can understand, resulting in them having a greater comprehension of a biblical text (cf. Heb. 5:12; 1 Tim. 1:7). This gift helps others grow in their knowledge of the Word of God and therefore in their faith as they apply what they better understand.

##### b. Exhortation (Rom. 12:8)

The gift of exhortation is the ability to use the Word of God (Titus 1:9) to plead with people, having the goal of persuading them to live according to God's standards (1 Cor. 1:10; 1 Thes. 4:1) by giving instruction in how to live and act (Hebrews 12:4–6; 1 Peter 5:1–5). Some also see this gift as a gift of encouragement by comforting believers in their faith. This is the same Greek word which was used in Acts 4:36 to define the name Barnabas, the new name given to a Levite named Joseph. Barnabas can be translated as Son of Encouragement or Son of Exhortation.

The next grouping of gifts which have been given to the body of Christ are to help others. These gifts include service, giving, leadership, mercy, helps and administration.

#### 2. Service gifts

##### a. Service (Rom. 12:7)

The gift of service listed in Romans 12:7 is speaking about a servant, such as a deacon (Gk., diakonia), who is to serve as he is instructed. Another Greek word which is translated as service is "douleuo" which is similar to "diakonia." It also has the idea of obeying and submitting, thus giving oneself to the service of others. A person with this gift, as in the case of any believer who is serving, is to do his work not as if he is doing it for man but for God (Eph. 6:7-8). Therefore, this gift is a special ability to serve others.

##### b. Giving (Rom. 12:8)

The gift of giving is the ability to bestow one's possessions upon others in a generous and liberal manner. The ultimate example of such giving was when God gave Jesus to the world. God, the greatest gift Giver, gave the greatest Gift (cf. 2 Cor. 9:15). Another example was when the Macedonians, who themselves were in need, gave beyond their ability and out of deep poverty to

help others in need. They were able to do this because they first gave themselves to the Lord and to His will (2 Cor. 8:1-5).

c. Leadership (Rom. 12:8)

The gift of leadership refers to one who is placed before (or over) others within the church with the task of leading, directing, aiding, caring for, giving attention to and protecting them. Such men will be held accountable for their care or lack of it for those whom God has placed under their charge (Heb. 13:17). These men are to be obeyed, appreciated and esteemed in love as they diligently labor (1 Pet. 5:1-4; 1 Thes. 5:12-13; Rom. 12:8).

d. Mercy (Rom. 12:8)

The gift of mercy is the ability to help those in need who are afflicted by showing them sympathy and compassion with cheerfulness, while if possible even feeling empathy for them. This is the compassion which God shows His children when He comforts them in their afflictions (cf. 2 Cor. 1:3-4).

e. Helps (1 Cor. 12:28)

The gift of helps is the ability to aid others in time of need, in work, in labors; assisting those who are weak and those in their times of struggle (cf. 1 Cor. 16:16; 1 Thes. 5:14; Php. 4:3; Heb. 4:16b). The possessor of this gift has the ability and desire to give a helping hand to others when they need it.

f. Administration (1 Cor. 12:28)

The gift of administration is the ability to navigate as a helmsman of a ship by giving guidance and direction (cf. Acts 27:11). Therefore, those with this gift must be wise (cf. Ezek. 27:8). They are able to help a church move forward toward a destination by navigating through all the various situations it will face. They are especially of great value when leading in times of difficulties as a captain of a ship would be when taking his ship through a storm.

It is necessary to understand that each of these gifts are important in the body of Christ and that each have their special place and role to fulfill since they are given according to a specific plan of God. Consequently each member of the body of Christ needs to recognize the importance of 1 Corinthians 12:18:

“But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.”

While the Holy Spirit is the One who gives believers their spiritual gift(s) when they believe (1 Cor. 12:7), God is the One who places them in the body of Christ where He desires them to serve. In other words, He determines their geographical location as well as the church of which He wants them to be a part. In other words, He has a plan for each believer. Jesus too has a part to play in all of this as He is the One who directs them in their work since all believers are a part of His body. First Corinthians 12:27 says:

“Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.”

Adding to this Colossians 1:18 states:

“He is also head of the body, the church...”

As the Head of the body, Jesus is the Church’s leader and director. Therefore, it is important for believers to understand their necessity and purpose in the body of Christ. They must realize that as they use their spiritual gift they will make a difference. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6:

- 4 “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.
- 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.
- 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*.”

Thus each believer must take seriously his spiritual gift, his place and work within the body of Christ. God does not make miscalculations. He has a specific plan for each and every one of His children.

The next portion of this study will look at those gifts which are associated with the Word of God. These gifts are more controversial; and sadly to say, at times are the center of divisive controversy within the Church.

## B. Spiritual gifts associated with the Word of God

The next group of gifts are all found in chapter 12 of the first letter to the Corinthians. In this passage Paul listed nine spiritual gifts which he separated into three individual categories. They are:

### Category 1

- Word of wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8)
- Word of knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8)

### Category 2

- Faith (1 Cor. 12:9)
- Healing (1 Cor. 12:9)
- Miracles (1 Cor. 12:10)
- Prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10; Rom. 12:6)
- Distinguishing of Spirits (1 Cor. 12:10)

### Category 3

- Tongues (1 Cor. 12:10)
- Interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:10)

Though these categories are not evident in most Bible translations, they are however evident in the Greek text. When Paul wrote this portion, he used two different Greek words for the word “another.” To divide the gifts into categories, Paul used the Greek word “heteros,” which means “another of a different kind.” When listing the individual gifts within each category, he used the word “allos,” which means “another of the same kind.” This is how Paul separated the categories while associating the gifts within each category.



To better understand each gift within its category, I have given the following classifications to indicate why I believe Paul grouped them as he did. They are:

- Category 1: Revelatory gifts
- Category 2: Confirmatory gifts
- Category 3: Congregatory gifts

It is important to note that these classifications focus on how these gifts were associated with the New Testament Scriptures, in that they were either a part of the:

- revelatory process of writing the new Scriptures
- confirmation process which established they were the Word of God
- congregatory process which drew people to the new truth

The first category I will discuss contains the revelatory gifts.

## 1. Revelatory gifts

The revelatory gifts were two gifts which gave their possessors comprehension and knowledge of God's mysteries and truth about Him and His will which were necessary when writing the New Testament. These two gifts were the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8).

To help understand the purpose of these two gifts let me illustrate. If I had a coin called "prophecy," the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge would each be one side of this coin. These three then would be a triad which are dependent upon each other, working together for a common purpose -- the writing of the New Testament Scriptures. Though proving this may be somewhat tedious, it is the goal of this section.

Paul not only grouped these two gifts together in 1 Corinthians 12, but he seems to have done it again in the next chapter, in 1 Corinthians 13:2, but with a slight variation in wordage. There Paul said:

"If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." (NIV)

In this verse Paul is tying together the fact that to the one who has the gift of prophecy belongs ("fathom," Gk., *oikeios*) all mysteries and knowledge. In other words, they are a package. But why did he use the word "mysteries" instead of the word "wisdom" as he did earlier? As will become evident, the gift of wisdom was the ability to understand God's mysteries which were given as revelation, this being the reason Paul wrote it this way. Since the Corinthians would have understood this, it was not a problem for Paul to have substituted the word "mysteries" for "wisdom." Paul tied together wisdom and knowledge in 1 Corinthians 12:8; in 1 Corinthians 13:2 he ties them together again with this variation. Now the gift of wisdom will be defined.

a. Word of wisdom

While defining this gift, it is necessary to discuss first the connection between the words “wisdom” and “mysteries.” To do this I will give a running commentary on Ephesians 3:1–10. In this passage many of the connections can be observed.

As Paul begins in verses 1-2, he talks about the stewardship which God gave him, a reference to his position as an apostle to the Gentiles which he mentions again in verse 8 (cf. Gal. 2:7). As such, he had the responsibility to take the gospel message to them.

- 1 “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—
- 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you”

Paul then wrote in verse 3 that because of this stewardship, or this responsibility given to him, God had revealed to him a mystery.

- 3 **“that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery,** as I wrote before in brief.” (emphasis added)

In this verse Paul ties together the mystery which was given to him with the fact that it was given through a revelation. Revelations and prophecies are very closely related. Whereas a revelation is a disclosure of something unknown (Gal. 1:12; Eph. 3:3), a prophecy is similar in that it is an unveiling of events yet future (e.g., Rev. 1:3; 10:11; 11:3). Revelations can be a form of prophecy (cf. Rev. 1:1-3), and although a revelation does not have to be futuristic in content (foretelling; e.g., Acts 5:1-10; Gal. 1:12), it can be as is observed in this passage. Therefore, what Paul is saying in Ephesians 3:3 is that a mystery had been revealed to him which he had written about to them earlier in this epistle (2:11-22). He then goes on in verse 4:

- 4 “By referring to this, **when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ**” (emphasis added)

Paul, who had the ability to understand this mystery, was then able to write about it to the Ephesians for their understanding. Paul then speaks more about this mystery in verse 5:

- 5 “which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it **has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit**” (emphasis added)

This mystery of Christ was not revealed before this (which is why it was called a mystery), but was revealed through the apostles and prophets. Why through the apostles and prophets? Because they were the ones who were given new revelation and wrote the Scriptures. They were also the ones who laid the foundation of the Church. It was to them that God made His mysteries known.

As Paul continues in verses 6 and 7, he then reveals the mystery.

- 6 “to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,
- 7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.”

The mystery was that the Gentiles were fellow heirs and members of the body of Christ of which Paul was a minister. Next in verses 8-10 he wrote why this grace was given to him.

- 8 “To me, the very least of all saints, **this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,**
- 9 **and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God** who created all things;
- 10 **so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church** to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.” (emphasis added)

Paul was given this grace so that he could preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ. What this means is that Paul was given the ability to understand the mysteries of God, those things which pertain to Christ which one cannot search out or comprehend (“unfathomable”) apart from this gift. These truths had been given to Paul and to the other apostles and prophets who had the grace to understand these mysteries so that they could make them known and explain them to the churches who in turn could spread this wisdom from God. As they did this, Paul said that they gave understanding of this mystery which he calls the “manifold wisdom of God.” Therefore, it can be observed in these verses that he tied together the words “mystery” and “wisdom”; that the mystery is the revelation of the manifold or multifaceted wisdom of God. This grace was given to the apostles and prophets according to verses 2, 5, and 8, and to them only. This is what the gift of the word of wisdom was -- the ability to understand the mysteries of God and explain them so that others could understand.

In another passage, 1 Corinthians 2:6–8, Paul again ties together the words wisdom and mystery.

- 6 “Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away;
- 7 **but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom** which God predestined before the ages to our glory;
- 8 *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” (emphasis added)

Here it is established that God’s hidden wisdom was spoken in a mystery. This is the mystery and wisdom which the apostles and prophets revealed in the New Testament Scriptures. In conjunction with this, Peter made an interesting comment about the apostle Paul in 2 Peter 3:14–16:

- 14 “Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,  
15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother **Paul, according to the wisdom given him**, wrote to you,  
16 as also **in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand**, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.” (emphasis added)

Peter not only states that Paul’s writings are Scripture, but because of the wisdom given to him by God, he was able to write about the same things Peter had written about which were difficult to understand. Paul, and Peter for that matter, having the gift of the word of wisdom were able to understand the mysteries of God and write to the churches about these things. As stated earlier, it was these men, along with the other apostles and prophets, who laid the foundation of the Church which Paul spoke about in Ephesians 2:19–22:

- 19 “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household,  
20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,  
21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,  
22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”

Because of this crucial work of laying the foundation of the Church, they needed to correctly and accurately understand God’s revelations to them in order to be able to explain them to others. For in Colossians 2:1–3 it says:

- 1 “For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face,  
2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself,  
3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

Christ Jesus is the storehouse of all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, He Himself being God’s mystery. As the writers of the New Testament and builders of the foundation of the Church, the apostles and prophets needed to understand Christ and the wisdom and knowledge which He made known to them. Second Peter 1:20–21 states:

- 20 “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation,  
21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

The Greek word for “interpretation” in verse 21 (Gk., *epiloosis*) literally means unloosening or releasing. In other words, God is the source and revealer of prophecy, not man; but the Holy Spirit is the agent of inspiration. For it is the Holy Spirit who moved (Gk., *pheromenoi*), bore or carried along the writers of Scripture like the wind does a ship’s sails when it fills them and moves it along. So when the Holy Spirit gave new revelation, the one receiving it needed to be able to understand it as well as accurately proclaim and write it.

Therefore, in summing up the observations made about the words “wisdom” and “mystery,” I would define the word of wisdom as follows:

- Word of wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8)

The gift of the word of wisdom was the capacity to understand God’s mysteries which were given through revelation by the Holy Spirit to its possessors – the apostles and prophets -- so that they could then communicate accurately God’s mysteries (Eph. 3:4-10; 1 Cor. 2:6-10), as well as knowledge about Him (Eph. 1:17-19).

Next the word of knowledge will be discussed.

b. Word of knowledge

The associated spiritual gift, the gift of knowledge, was a gift with a more elusive meaning. While there are various passages which could be used to construct a picture of what the gift of the word of wisdom was, this is not the case for the gift of the word of knowledge.

In determining the purpose of this gift, one needs to look at passages associated with the word “knowledge” in order to make a case for what this gift was. However, what is known about this gift is that it was associated with the gift of the word of wisdom and with prophecy, these three having been linked by Paul in at least four different verses in some manner (1 Cor. 12:8; 13:2,8-9). I will begin by referring once again to 1 Corinthians 13:2:

“If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” (NIV)

As this verse teaches, to the one who has the gift of prophecy belongs (“fathom”; Gk., *oikeios*) all mysteries (or the wisdom to understand all mysteries) and knowledge. This verse, as well as 1 Corinthians 12:8, ties together these two gifts, although 1 Corinthians 13:2 goes further by linking them together with prophecy. Continuing on in 1 Corinthians 13, verses 8 and 9 give more evidence to the relationship between knowledge and prophecy.

- 8 “Love never fails; but if *there are gifts* of prophecy, they will be done away; if *there are* tongues, they will cease; if *there is* knowledge, it will be done away.
- 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part;

Again the relationship between knowledge and prophecy is established.

Establishing this relationship between wisdom, knowledge and prophecy is important in defining what the gift of knowledge was. Therefore, seeing this triad again points to the fact that it was a revelatory gift as was the word of wisdom.

In an attempt to better understand and to be able to define the gift of knowledge, 1 Corinthians 13:12 is important:

“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.”

Paul says here that he knew in part but one day would fully know. This is true today as well. The question is, “What do believers currently know in part?” Keeping within a biblical framework, believers do not have a clear and complete understanding of things like:

- everything pertaining to God
- His plan
- His will
- the Scriptures
- angels
- heaven
- eternity
- etc.

There are so many things which followers of Jesus only know in part. Yet when they see Him one day face to face, they will have a full understanding of these things. Although the writers of the New Testament did not have a complete knowledge of the things of God, and still did not even while writing the New Testament (1 Cor. 13:12), it was however important for them to have a sufficient and accurate knowledge of the things about which they spoke and wrote. Without this ability they would not have been able to write accurate, complete and inerrant Scriptures.

In John 14:26 Jesus had told eleven of His future apostles:

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, **He will teach you all things**, and **bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.**” (emphasis added)

Jesus promised His future apostles that they would be taught “all things” by the Holy Spirit. What do people gain when they are taught? They gain knowledge which is the goal of teaching. What kind of knowledge did the apostles and prophets need to inerrantly speak and write the New Testament Scriptures? They needed to know about:

- God
- Jesus
- the Holy Spirit

- the Old Testament Scriptures
- demonic forces
- the world system
- etc.

While the gift of wisdom focused on understanding the mysteries of the faith, evidence seems to indicate that the gift of knowledge focused on a correct understanding of factual issues.

One other ability they were given by the Holy Spirit according to this verse was the capacity to remember all the things which Christ had said to them. Because of this they would have a complete and accurate remembrance of all that Jesus had spoken to them, including all that He had taught them. This would have given them the knowledge needed to write the New Testament accurately while they laid the foundation of the Church.

Another passage which relates to the topic of knowledge is Colossians 1:9–10. In these verses Paul gives insight into the kind of knowledge that he wanted the Colossians to have for the building up and strengthening of their faith.

- 9 “For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask **that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will** in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,
- 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and **increasing in the knowledge of God**” (emphasis added)

Paul’s desire for the Colossians was that they be filled with the knowledge of God’s will and increase in the knowledge of Him (cf. Eph. 1:17) so that they would have spiritual wisdom and understanding, thus being able to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. Therefore, knowledge may very well have included these elements -- knowing not only about God, but also about His will.

Paul said in Romans 11:33:

**“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!** How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” (emphasis added)

Since the wisdom and knowledge of God are both deep and rich, being abundant and of great value, they are beyond the abilities of man to understand. Yet because of the grace given to the apostles and prophets to comprehend and accurately explain them, they were able to write the New Testament Scriptures. This is why Paul could say to the Romans as recorded in Romans 15:14:

“And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.”

The Romans were able to understand the things of God, His mysteries, etc., because they were first given to and understood by the apostles and prophets who then taught the Romans. As a result of this, they were filled with “all knowledge” and therefore able to teach one another.

Considering the issues discussed, I believe that the word of knowledge can be defined as follows:

- Word of knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8)

The gift of the word of knowledge was the ability to understand and know things about God and pertaining to Him (cf. Col 1:10), understanding and knowing His will (cf. Col. 1:9), as well as knowing all that Jesus spoke to His disciples during His earthly ministry, including other things one needed to know so that he could communicate a precise and correct knowledge about the things he wrote and taught (John 14:26; cf. Eph. 1:17-19).

Of course the Apostle Paul was not present to hear all that Jesus spoke to His disciples, yet Jesus did teach him separately about the gospel after he became a believer (Gal. 1:11-12). Although many may think that Jesus taught Paul only the simple facts of salvation, it can be assumed that Jesus taught him much more than that as the gospel is not just a few facts, but instead a very broad and deep body of truth. It is assumed by scholars that Paul may have been taught by Jesus over a period of three years since this is how long he was in Arabia before he began his ministry (Gal. 1:15-18). Paul, an apostle, having the gifts of wisdom and knowledge, would have then had the supernatural ability to know and understand the things of God in a precise and correct manner.

Therefore, the word of knowledge in combination with the word of wisdom gave those who had the gift of prophecy a complete understanding of what they taught and wrote about in the New Testament Scriptures while laying the foundation of the Church.

The next category of gifts which Paul placed in a group are the confirmatory gifts, which attested to the New Testament as the Word of God.

## 2. Confirmatory gifts

The group of confirmatory gifts were gifts which established that the New Testament was the Word of God. In other words, these gifts were proof that the message and messenger were sent from God. There will be a detailed discussion of this later, but first each of the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12 will be defined. They are faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, and distinguishing of spirits.

### a. Faith (1 Cor. 12:9)

The gift of faith was the ability to believe and trust God up and beyond the faith of an average believer. In 1 Corinthians 13:2 Paul alludes to a statement of Jesus when speaking about faith:



“if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”

The faith to remove mountains is an extraordinary faith, described here as “all faith.” In other words, if a person had faith which comprised the greatest amount available to an individual, he could move mountains. To do this Jesus said would be possible if the possessor only had faith the size of a mustard seed (Mat. 17:20; cf. Mat. 21:21; Mark 11:23).

Such great faith was necessary in the face of severe opposition to the apostles and prophets as they laid the foundation of the Church and wrote the New Testament. One example where such faith was needed was when Peter and John stood before the Jewish Sanhedrin, were threatened and told to stop teaching in the name of Jesus. Their response was one of great faith as recorded in Acts 4:

- 19 “But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;  
20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.’”

Earlier in this chapter the Sanhedrin made this observation about Peter and John:

“Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and *began* to recognize them as having been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13)

Their confidence was a result of their faith as they stood before this Council responsible for having Jesus crucified. They demonstrated great confidence in their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In a later situation, after all of the apostles had been arrested by the Sanhedrin, Acts 5:40–42 records this of the twelve:

- 40 “...after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and *then* released them.  
41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name.  
42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”

Though they had been flogged, a very painful punishment, they rejoiced and continued preaching Jesus, not only from house to house, but also in the temple where they could be observed by the authorities. Again this took great faith, a special faith, the gift of faith. Such faith in the face of such adversity was a confirmation that these men and their message were from God. Church history records that all of these men, except for of the Apostle John, were martyred for their faith. This clearly demonstrates their extraordinary faith and that they wholeheartedly believed in what they were preaching.

b. Healing (1 Cor. 12:9)

The gift of healing (1 Cor. 12:9,28,30) was the supernatural ability to heal those with illnesses, diseases, infirmities, disabilities, paralysis, etc. (cf. Acts 5:16; 8:7; 9:33-34). This gift would also have authenticated the messenger and his message. As those with this gift preached the Word of God and healed the infirm, this gave them credibility in the eyes of those healed and those observing by authenticating them and their message as coming from God.

c. Miracles (1 Cor. 12:10)

The gift of miracles (1 Cor. 12:10) was the supernatural ability to do things which are contrary to natural laws, these phenomena being accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. Miracles in the New Testament often occurred in conjunction with healing (Acts 4:14,16; 19:11-12), but they were also broader in scope (cf. 1 Cor. 10:9-10; 2 Cor. 12:12). Miracles in the New Testament were associated with such things as turning water into wine, casting out demons and raising the dead (John 6:2:1-10; Mark 9:38-39; Luke 7:11-16). Again, the gift of miracles done in conjunction with the preaching and teaching of the Word of God was an authentication of the messenger as well as his message.

d. Prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10; Rom. 12:6)

The gift of prophecy was a gift that had two facets, that of foretelling and forthtelling. Forthtelling was the ability to proclaim God's inerrant truth (e.g., Acts 2:14ff), whereas foretelling was the unveiling of information unknown at the time the prophecy was given (e.g., Acts 5:1-10; 11:28; 21:11; Rev. 13:16-17) or of events yet future (e.g., Rev. 1:3; 10:11; 11:3). The possessor of this gift spoke "to men for edification and exhortation and consolation" (1 Cor. 14:3).

Revelation was closely associated with the gift of prophecy, being a disclosure of information about something unknown (Gal. 1:12; Eph. 3:3), an existing situation (Acts 5:1-10; Gal. 1:12), what someone should do (Gal. 2:2), a precise and correct knowledge of God (cf. Eph. 1:17), and/or about what will take place in the future (Rev. 1:1). While revelation was information to be disclosed, prophecy was the means by which it was revealed. Again, such abilities were not only an important part of the process of writing the New Testament, but also authenticated both the message being unveiled along with its messenger.

e. Distinguishing of spirits (1 Cor. 12:10)

The gift of the distinguishing of spirits was the ability to discern between truth and error. This was important to the fledgling Church and to the future Church as well by being able to tell if the things spoken by alleged apostles and prophets were the authentic, pure Word of God. Thus the possessor of this gift was able to determine the source of a person's words, whether they were of the Holy Spirit or of a demonic spirit (cf. 1 John 4:1). This gift as well authenticated both the message and its messenger since he was able to

make a clear distinction between false teachers and their false teaching and those sent by God.

The last category of gifts associated with the Word of God listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 are the congregatory gifts.

### 3. Congregatory gifts

The congregatory gifts are the gifts of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. These two gifts, more specifically the gift of tongues, were used to draw people to congregate in order to hear the core message of the Word of God, that being the message of salvation.

#### a. Tongues (1 Cor. 12:10)

The gift of tongues was the ability to speak a known language or languages which the possessor did not previously know. This gift could better be titled, “the gift of languages,” as can be observed in Acts 2 when it first appeared:

“Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. They were amazed and astonished, saying, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? “And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? “Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God” (vss. 5–11).

Those who gathered together that day heard the apostles speaking “in his own language.”

An interesting characteristic of this gift is that not only did its possessor not know the language he was speaking, but he could not understand what he was saying either (1 Cor. 14:2; cf. 14:27-28). This is why someone with the gift of interpretation of languages was necessary when this gift was exercised within the Church.

The purpose of this gift was to aid in the proclamation of the gospel. The possessor of this gift would speak the language of the people he was taking the gospel to by telling them of the mighty deeds of God (Acts 2:11; 10:46). Then after he had their attention once they had congregated, he would speak a common language they all knew such as Hebrew, Greek or Latin to share the gospel with them. This ability to speak a foreign language perfectly was a means God used to authenticate the messenger and his message as being from God.

Many today misunderstand this gift. To better understand what the gift was I will explain different aspects of it, beginning with the fact that tongues pertained to known languages.

## 1) Tongues was the gift of known languages and not a prayer language

It is clear from Acts 2 when the apostles first spoke in tongues that many from various people groups heard them speaking in their own language (Acts 2:4,8-11). But what about those today who claim that tongues started out as a gift of languages but then transformed into a heavenly prayer language? There is absolutely no evidence of this in the Scriptures. Actually, when tracing the gift of tongues in the book of Acts, it is clear that this gift did not change in its characteristics. Just eight years after the Church began in Acts 2, Acts 10 records that the first Gentiles who heard the gospel also spoke in tongues after receiving the Holy Spirit. Luke wrote:

- 44 “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.
- 45 All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.
- 46 **For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God.** Then Peter answered,
- 47 “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have **received the Holy Spirit just as we *did***, can he?” (emphasis added) (Acts 10:44-47)

In response to this event Peter said that the Gentiles were exalting God, this being the same thing which the apostles had done on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:11). Second he said they had received the Holy Spirit “just as we did.” In conjunction with this statement, he later said to those to whom he reported this event in Acts 11:17:

“Therefore if God gave to them **the same gift as *He gave to us*** also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (emphasis added).

In other words, these new Gentile converts spoke in tongues in the same way that the apostles did on the day the Church began eight years earlier by speaking in known languages.

Another indication that the gift of tongues was the same as it was on the day when it was given is seen when Paul laid his hands on twelve of John the Baptist’s disciples about 21 years after the Church began. When these twelve disciples of John received the Holy Spirit, Paul said they began to speak in tongues and began prophesying (Acts 19:1-7). Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, gives no indication that they had received a different type of gift of tongues. Obviously when Luke wrote these words he knew exactly how his readers would understand them since he had earlier written about the characteristics of this gift in chapter 2.

Another observation that tongues is not a prayer language can be found in 1 Corinthians 14:10–11, where Paul was correcting the Corinthians’ misuse of this gift:

- 10 "There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning.  
11 If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me."

In verse 10 Paul talks about the multitude of known languages in the world and that all have meaning. Yet he says in verse 11 that if one speaks in a language which others do not know, what benefit is that to them. The one speaking will appear as a foreigner, being unintelligible. Based upon this it can be concluded that Paul was speaking about known, human languages, not an unknown heavenly prayer language.

Next, in verses 18 and 19 Paul makes this statement:

- 18 "I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all;  
19 however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue."

The question one should ask is, "If the gift of tongues was an unknown heavenly prayer language, then why would Paul have needed to speak in many unknown heavenly prayer languages?" Wouldn't one have been sufficient with which to pray to God? Of course! Yet, because tongues was to be used as a congregatory gift to bring people together from many different people groups to hear the gospel, he and others needed to be able to speak about the mighty deeds of God in many different languages.

Lastly, having the ability to learn a language is not the gift of tongues. Twenty one years after the gift was given the disciples of John, when they began to speak in tongues immediately, began to speak in languages unknown to them (Acts 19:1-7). They did not have to learn a language over a period of time. In addition, because the possessors of the gift of tongues did not understand what they were saying, this is in sharp contrast with those who learn languages as they both know how to speak and understand them. Thus it is not the gift of tongues.

Next I will elaborate further on the fact that the gift of tongues was not understood by its possessor.

## 2) Tongues was not understood by its possessor

First Corinthians 14:2 makes it clear that the tongues spoken were not understood by their possessors:

"For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in *his* spirit he speaks mysteries."

Many misunderstand verse 2 as a statement that tongues is a special prayer language. On the contrary, in this verse Paul makes the point that the one who speaks in a tongue is himself speaking mysteries because he

does not understand what he is saying; only God understands because of course He knows all languages. The reason Paul made this point is because he was making a contrast between tongues and the gift of prophecy. Whereas the one who spoke in a tongue did not even understand what he was saying, the one who heard a prophetic utterance was either edified, exhorted, or consoled or possibly all three (vs. 3).

Continuing in this chapter, Paul wrote in verses 13-15:

- 13 "Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.
- 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.
- 15 What is *the outcome* then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also."

Why should the one with the gift of tongues pray that he may be able to interpret also? The reason is that the ones who spoke in a language which they did not understand did not know what they were saying. Because of this, Paul says that their minds were unfruitful in this process. Therefore Paul said that when he prayed, he did so not just with his spirit but with his mind also. In other words, he would pray in his spirit in a language that he understood. By praying in such a way his mind would not be unfruitful since he would understand what he was praying. Paul goes on to say in verses 18-19:

- 18 "I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all;
- 19 however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue."

In other words, Paul wanted to speak in a manner so that all were edified and not just himself. He would rather speak what he understood so that he could teach others for their benefit and edification. He could not do this if he spoke in a foreign language which he and his hearers did not understand. In so doing he would not be speaking with his mind but with his spirit only.

A final point confirming that the possessor of this gift did not understand what he was saying can be seen in verses 27 and 28, where Paul said:

- 27 "If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* by two or at the most three, and *each* in turn, and one must interpret;
- 28 but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God."

If the one who possessed the gift of tongues could understand the language he spoke, was an interpreter necessary? No, of course not! An interpreter was necessary because when one used this gift he did not understand what he was saying.

The next characteristic of the gift of tongues is the aspect of edification.

### 3) Tongues was to edify others, not self

As with all of the spiritual gifts, tongues was given to edify others and not oneself. First Corinthians 12:7 states:

“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good.**” (emphasis added)

In addition 1 Peter 4:10–11 says:

- 10 “As each one has received a *special* gift, **employ it in serving one another** as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.
- 11 Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (emphasis added)

The spiritual gifts were never meant to be used for self-edification, but for God’s glory and for serving others. One problem the Corinthians had was that they were using the gift of tongues for self-edification. They were praying in tongues, and possibly even singing in tongues (cf. 1 Cor. 14:15), but for whose edification? For their own! This is why Paul exhorts them in 1 Corinthians 14:11–12:

- 11 “If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me.
- 12 So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, **seek to abound for the edification of the church.**” (emphasis added)

Paul makes it clear that when one hears a language he cannot understand, the speaker is like a foreigner to him. In other words, communication and edification cannot occur. This is why Paul said in verse 12 that they are to seek for the edification of the church. He makes this point again later in verses 26-28:

- 26 “What is *the outcome* then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. **Let all things be done for edification.**
- 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* by two or at the most three, and *each* in turn, and one must interpret;
- 28 but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.” (emphasis added)

If tongues were going to be used in the church, people were to use them in a manner which edified the body. Therefore when an interpreter was not present, those with the gift of tongues were not to use it.

This leads to another important point, that being the purpose for the gift of tongues.

#### 4) Tongues was a gift for reaching unbelievers

The purpose of the gift of tongues was for reaching unbelievers with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul made this clear in 1 Corinthians 14:21–22:

- 21 “In the Law it is written, “By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me,” says the Lord.
- 22 So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy *is for a sign*, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.”

In verse 21 Paul quoted from Isaiah 28:11. There Isaiah had informed the Israelites that they were going to be invaded and judged by another nation whose language they would not know. When the foreign armies invaded, unbelieving Israel knew when they heard the strange tongues that judgement had arrived. In verse 22, Paul adds that tongues were a sign not to believers but to unbelievers, while prophecy was for those who believe. Therefore, like the foreign tongue of Israel’s invaders got their attention, the gift of tongues was given to get the attention of unbelievers, which it did. The response of the unbelieving Jews when the Church began is recorded in Acts 2:11–12.

- 11 “...we hear them in our *own* tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”
- 12 And they all continued in **amazement and great perplexity**, saying to one another, ‘**What does this mean?**’” (emphasis added)

This is why Paul said, “so then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers.” (1 Cor. 14:22)

The final point regarding tongues is that this gift ceased by the end of the first century.

#### 5) Tongues ceased by the end of the first century

Although the topic of the cessation of certain spiritual gifts will be addressed in some detail later, here I will give some preliminary evidence showing that the gift of tongues has ceased.

In 1 Corinthians 13:8 Paul stated to the Corinthians that love – the greatest of the eternal triad of faith, hope and love – will never fail. Why? Because this triad is eternal. However, on the other hand, the triad of gifts discussed in 1 Corinthians 13:8-11 – prophecy, tongues and knowledge -- would one day come to an end. He said:

“Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away.”



Here Paul made it clear – which is seen in the Greek text -- that at some point tongues would cease; or to put it another way, they would stop appearing as a spiritual gift at some unspecified time. The big question then is, “Has this happened; and if so, when did they cease?”

According to church history, the authentic gift of languages ceased long ago, many believing that this occurred during the first century of the Church. Pastor Dr. John MacArthur of Grace to You Ministries reports:

“Chrysostom and Augustine—the greatest theologians of the eastern and western churches—considered tongues obsolete. Writing in the fourth century, Chrysostom stated categorically that tongues had ceased by his time and described the gift as an obscure practice. Augustine referred to tongues as a sign that was adapted to the apostolic age.”<sup>1</sup>

Considering this testimony and the fact that the genuine gift of tongues is not seen in the world today gives strong evidence that this gift ceased long ago.

Since the goal of this section is to define the gifts, the cessation of this gift will be examined in greater detail later in this study.

Having covered the gift of tongues, there is still one more tongues-related gift in this group to define, that of the interpretation of tongues.

b. Interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:10)

The interpretation of tongues was the ability to understand and therefore interpret known languages one did not previously understand (1 Cor. 12:10,30; 14:5,27-28). This means that the possessor of this gift did not have the ability to speak the language or languages he was able to interpret.

The main use of this gift was for the edification of the church when it gathered, this being why it too is a congregatory gift. The purpose of this gift is evident in that when one spoke in a tongue within the church that no one understood, he was to keep quiet if someone with the gift of the interpretation of tongues was not present. However, if someone was on hand with this gift, it was to be used for the purpose of edifying those present. This is seen in 1 Corinthians 14:26-28:

- 26 “What is *the outcome* then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. **Let all things be done for edification.**
- 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* by two or at the most three, and *each* in turn, and one must interpret;
- 28 but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.” (emphasis added)

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, John, Grace to You, <http://www.gty.org/resources/distinctives/DD06/the-gift-of-tongues>, 2001 Grace Community Church.

This gift may have had a secondary use, that of being able to understand other languages or dialects outside of the church, possibly while traveling and ministering. However this is not stated anywhere in the Scriptures. This gift would also have ceased with the cessation of the gift of tongues as they were corresponding gifts.

#### Addendum

Before I continue on to the next major point, I would like to give my opinion as to why I believe there is division in the Church over the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. The Church does not argue or disagree on the spiritual gifts given for the well-being of others such as teaching, mercy, leadership, helps, giving, etc. The reason for this is because these gifts are still active, still being given by the Holy Spirit and therefore easy to understand and identify. We see them operating in ourselves and in believers around us; thus we know what they are as well as their characteristics. However, I believe the reason division exists over the other gifts associated with the writing, confirmation and gathering of people to hear the Word of God is because they have ceased. Therefore, because:

- of their cessation
- we do not see them in operation today
- we do not know their initial characteristics

this causes people to argue over them and what they really were. It is my belief that if these gifts were in operation today, there would be no controversy or division over them because the Church would have a much clearer picture of what these gifts are as they would be easily recognized. Because this is not the case there is much controversy, and sadly, much division in the Church.

The next portion of this study will define terms related to gifts associated with the miraculous.

## II. Defining related terms

In this section three terms which are related to but not included with spiritual gifts will be examined and defined. They have to do with the miraculous, being signs and wonders, dreams and visions and casting out of demons.

### 1. Signs and wonders

A sign is something used to attest to and make a specific statement about something of importance (John 2:11, 18, 23; cf. Matt. 12:38-39). A wonder is a special display of God's power which produces astonishment in those who witness it (Acts 2:19-20). Therefore, signs and wonders are miraculous occurrences that are distinct from the normal and natural occurrences of life. They are a display of God's power which attest to Him and His purposes. They have the purpose of getting the attention of those to whom God displays them. Nevertheless, signs and wonders have been and will be performed by those who desire to oppose God and lead people astray (Exo. 7:10-12,22; 8:7,18; Mat. 24:24; Mark 13:22). Whereas signs

and wonders done by God are wrought by Him, those done by the opposition have Satan as their source.

Signs and wonders are also grouped separately from:

- other types of miracles (cf. 2 Cor. 12:12)
- the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 2:4)
- healing (Acts 4:20)

The main difference in these was the purpose for which they were used. Biblical references identify the following as signs and wonders:

- the signs and plagues done in Egypt when God was preparing to free Israel from slavery (Deut. 4:34; 6:22; 26:8; 29:2-3; 34:11)
- God's workings in Nebuchadnezzar's life, including his dream, his being driven into a field to live like an animal and then his restoration to his throne (Dan. 4, specifically Dan. 4:2)
- Daniel's deliverance from the lions when thrown into their den (Dan. 6:26)
- attesting miracles done by the apostles, excluding healing (Acts 4:30; 5:12; 14:3; 15:2; Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4)
- what the false prophets will do during the tribulation period to mislead the masses (Mat. 24:24; Mk. 13:22)

## 2. Dreams and visions

There are only three verses where dreams and visions are mentioned together in the Bible. They are in Daniel 1:17, 4:5 and 7:1. Daniel 7:1 says:

"In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind as he lay on his bed; then he wrote the dream down and related the following summary of it."

The key to distinguishing between the two is that a dream is something one sees while sleeping (cf. Gen. 20:3; Dan. 2:1) and visions while awake (Dan. 2:19; 9:21; 10:7-9; Luke 1:22). God uses them to reveal necessary information to specific people.

## 3. Casting out of demons

The casting out of demons was the supernatural ability to expel demonic spirits from a possessed individual (Mat. 8:16; 9:32-33). Jesus identified this as a miraculous power (Mark 9:38-39), with the Holy Spirit as the source.

Demon possessed people in the New Testament were afflicted with such things as blindness (Mat. 15:22), deafness (Mat. 15:22), physical disorders (e.g., Luke 13:11), wild and/or insane and self-destructive behaviors as well as illnesses (Mat. 17:15, Mark 5:5), and sometimes possessing extraordinary strength (Mark 5:3-4). This however does not mean that all people with these aforementioned conditions are demon possessed. Some demon possessed people are able to know information not otherwise known and may be able to predict future events as well (cf. Acts 16:16-17).

Since the casting out of demons was a miraculous display of power, and since the gift of miracles is no longer an active gift, this is not a practice that Christians can perform today or should attempt to be involved in. The only people in the New Testament who had this ability were those who were given the authority to do so. The twelve and seventy whom Jesus sent out were given the authority by Him to cast out demons. Luke records this in Luke 9:1:

"And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons, and to heal diseases."

In the case of the seventy, Luke 10:17 records the following after they returned from their journey and reported back to Jesus:

"And the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.'"

Then Jesus responded in verse 19:

"Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you."

In both cases Jesus' followers were given authority by Him over demons to the extent that even Judas, the betrayer of the Lord, could perform such miracles. Even though people may claim this power today, nowhere in Scripture is it stated that they are specially gifted or empowered for this task as the evidence shows that this was a miracle performed in the first century Church.

How then should one deal with a demon possessed individual today? Through prayer for only God has power over demonic beings. Therefore, asking Him to intervene in order to share the gospel of Christ with such an individual is the best recourse. Only when this person receives Jesus Christ as his Savior can he be freed from possession (cf. 1 John 4:4).

In the next portion of this discussion on spiritual gifts the goal is to understand the purpose of the miraculous gifts.

### **III. The purpose for the miraculous**

This section will discuss the purpose of the miraculous gifts which will lead into the last main section of this study, a discussion of the cessation of certain gifts.

The main issue of discussion in this section will be why God gave the sign gifts and what was the ultimate purpose of miracles. This is important because if the purpose of the sign gifts has been accomplished, then their existence is no longer necessary. However if their purpose has not yet been accomplished, then we should expect them to still be active today. The first main point will be how the miraculous confirmed both God's message and messengers since people desired and needed confirmation.

## A. Confirming the message and messenger

### 1. Confirmation was desired

It would be expected that when someone comes with a new message which he claims is from God that those listening would want some type of confirmation. They would want to know whether both the messenger and his message are actually from God, that they are authentic.

It is clear from the Bible that God has authenticated both His message and messengers by way of the miraculous. Beginning in the Old Testament, Moses will be the first example.

#### a) Moses

Moses knew that when God called him to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt that they probably would not accept his proclamation alone. Forty years earlier Moses had tried to lead Israel and failed (Exo. 2:11-15; Acts 7:22-29). Now forty years later when God spoke to him through a burning bush about this task, Moses posed various questions. He even questioned God's choice of him to do this (Exo. 3:11), as well as how to answer any opposition from the Israelites (Exo. 3:13; 4:1). Finally after all God promised to do to help Moses, Moses still wanted Him to send someone else to do this other than himself (Exo. 4:10-13). He had failed the first time so probably he was doubting his ability to do so at this time. In the end after God responded to each of his questions and his personal opposition to go, God gave him the tools needed to do the job, the miraculous power to show those who wanted confirmation. In regards to any opposition by the Israelites, God told Moses:

- Throw your staff on the ground!
- Put your hand into your bosom!
- Pour water from the Nile on the dry ground!

When Moses did this:

- His staff turned into a serpent
- His hand became leprous
- The water turned to blood

Moses made his staff turn into a serpent and the water of the Nile turn to blood when Pharaoh, King of Egypt asked for confirmation of Moses and his message. These and many other signs God used to authenticate Moses as His messenger, both for the Israelites and Egyptians.

Elijah and Elisha are two more Old Testament prophets whom God authenticated with the miraculous.

#### b) Elijah and Elisha

Elijah and Elisha performed many great signs and wonders to prove who they were and whose message they brought. During their lifetime the Jews had

turned to the worship of idols and false gods (cf. 1 Kings 18:37), and their purpose was to show them that there still was a God in Israel.

One of the great miraculous signs Elijah performed was when the prophets of Baal were brought together to see who was the true God, the God of Israel or Baal. The Jews were in agreement with this challenge because they too wanted to see who was the true God (1 Kings 18:20-24). God not only proved Himself at this gathering, but once again confirmed Elijah as His prophet. The people wanted proof, and God gave it to them through Elijah by having fire fall from heaven and consume his offering (1 Kings 18:38-39).

Moving on to the New Testament, this point can also be seen clearly in the lives of Jesus, Paul and the other apostles.

#### c) Jesus

During New Testament times the Jews wanted to know who Jesus was and if He was really from God. The following three passages establish this:

- Matthew 12:38

"Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.'"

- Matthew 16:1

"And the Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Him asked Him to show them a sign from heaven."

- John 6:30-31

"They said therefore to Him, 'What then do You do for a sign, that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT."'"

Obviously to confirm who Jesus was and whether the things He taught were truly from God, they wanted proof; they wanted Jesus to do the miraculous.

Next it will be shown that the miraculous was given to authenticate the messenger.

## 2. Confirmation of the messenger

### a. Example: Jesus

After John the Baptist was imprisoned, he wanted to be sure that Jesus was the Expected One, that He truly was Israel's promised Messiah. Therefore, he sent some of his disciples to Jesus to question Him for confirmation. Luke 7:20-23 records:

- 20 "When the men came to Him, they said, 'John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask, "Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?"
- 21 At that very time He cured many *people* of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many *who were* blind.
- 22 And He answered and said to them, 'Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: *the* BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT, *the* lame walk, *the* lepers are cleansed, and *the* deaf hear, *the* dead are raised up, *the* POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.
- 23 Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

What Jesus explained is that it had been prophesied that He, the Messiah, would come and do the miraculous as well as preach the gospel. In other words, John the Baptist and others should have known who Jesus was. These miracles authenticated Him as their Messiah. The Apostle Peter confirmed this when he said of Jesus in Acts 2:22:

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man **attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs** which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know." (emphasis added)

Jesus was "attested" to by God, meaning that God demonstrated, accredited and proved who He was by the miracles, wonders and signs He performed.

The next example is that of the Apostle Paul.

b. Example: Paul

The Corinthians questioned Paul's apostleship and his authority. In his own defense he told them in 2 Corinthians 12:12:

"The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles."

Paul's point is that he could do these miraculous signs because he was an Apostle, one sent from God. As such, the signs and wonders and miracles were his authentication; for anyone could claim he was an Apostle, but only a true one could do the miraculous.

Another example are the Apostles themselves.

c. Example: The Apostles

The writer of Hebrews wrote this about the Apostles in Hebrews 2:4:

"God also **bearing witness with them**, both by **signs and wonders and by various miracles** and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." (emphasis added)

God "bore witness," or in other words testified that the Apostles were His messengers. He did this by giving them the ability to perform signs and

wonders and various miracles. Thus it is evident that God confirmed His messengers who brought His message by means of the miraculous just as in the Old Testament.

Next it will be shown that God confirmed the message -- His Word -- through the miraculous, as well beginning with the Apostles.

### 3. Confirmation of the message

#### a. Example: Apostles

In Mark 16:20 it says:

"And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, **and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.**" (emphasis added)

As the Apostles went out, they performed miracles as a part of their ministry. Mark stated that through these Jesus confirmed the words they preached, that they were the Word of God.

Another example is found in the ministry of Paul and Barnabas.

#### b. Example: Paul and Barnabas

Luke records in Acts 14:3 while Paul and Barnabas were ministering in the city of Iconium:

"Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was **bearing witness to the word** of His grace, **granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.**" (emphasis added)

It is evident here as well that God "bore witness" to their words, by testifying through the signs and wonders they did that they spoke His Word.

Up to this point it is obvious that God used signs, wonders and miracles to authenticate His messengers and message. In the following passages it can be shown that signs and wonders also were used by God to draw people to His messengers and to salvation.

### B. Drawing people to the messengers, their message and to salvation

#### 1. Signs and miracles attracted people's attention

One example of how God used the miraculous to draw people to the messenger is found in John 12:18. This was written after Jesus had raised His friend Lazarus from the dead:

"For this cause also **the multitude went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign.**" (emphasis added)



This event drew the attention of many to Jesus as He entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, presenting Himself as the Savior of the world. Luke 19:37-38 also said this about Christ's entry into Jerusalem:

"And as He was now approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice **for all the miracles which they had seen**, saying, "BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (emphasis added)

It was His miracles which drew these people to Jesus, to praise God and declare that He is the King who came in the name of the Lord.

Another example is found in Acts 2:4–13, which occurred on the day of Pentecost shortly after Jesus had ascended into heaven. On that day the gift of tongues was given to the Apostles as a sign:

- 4 "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.
- 5 Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven.
- 6 And **when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered** because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.
- 7 They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?
- 8 "And how is it that we each hear *them* in our own language to which we were born?
- 9 "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,
- 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,
- 11 Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our *own* tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God."
- 12 **And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"**
- 13 But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine." (emphasis added)

The result of this sign – hearing these Galileans speak in many languages of many different people groups -- was that a crowd of thousands assembled. While some mocked, the majority were amazed and asked, "What does this mean?" As a result, this multitude listened to Peter as he preached, and three thousand believed in the gospel and were saved (Acts 2:41).

Another example of the miraculous drawing unbelievers to the messenger and to salvation is found in Acts 8:5-8:

"And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. **And the multitudes with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was**

**performing.** For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. So there was much rejoicing in that city.” (emphasis added)

Again it can be seen that the result of God’s messengers performing signs was that a multitude of people gathered. They then heard the gospel and many believed.

Thus the miraculous authenticated the message and messenger, which resulted in the salvation of many.

## 2. Not all signs and miracles were accepted by unbelievers

Although God used the miraculous to draw people and to bring them to salvation, this unfortunately did not mean that all who saw them believed. To the contrary, most did not. Matthew 11:20–24 records a message which Jesus had for three Galilean cities which did not believe in Him, the cities where most of His miracles had taken place.

- 20 “Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent.  
21 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.  
22 “Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in *the* day of judgment than for you.  
23 “And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.  
24 “Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in *the* day of judgment, than for you.”

Jesus had lived in Capernaum for a period of time during his three-year ministry, yet many there and in the neighboring two cities mentioned did not believe in Him. The result of their unbelief after having witnessed the miraculous will be to receive a greater judgement than the Gentile cities listed who were known for their wickedness.

The fact that many did not believe even after having witnessed miracles can also be seen in Mark 6:2-3:

“And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, ‘**Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?** Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?’ **And they took offense at Him.**” (emphasis added)

Instead of believing as a result of the things they witnessed and heard, they took offense at Jesus because of who He was in their eyes, just a local man from a carpenter’s family. Sadly then, not everyone who saw miracles believed.

Having shown that God used the miraculous to authenticate His messengers and message and to draw people to Himself, the question, “Are the miraculous gifts necessary today?” will now be examined.

#### **IV. Does God do the miraculous today?**

One question people have is, “Does God do the miraculous today?” This is an easy and uncomplicated question to answer. Yes! God does the miraculous today. Though God still does the miraculous, it seems to be a rare occurrence especially in the more developed parts of the world. However, in the context of this study a more vital question to be considered is, “Are the gifts of miracles, healing, tongues, etc. still functioning today?”

There is an important distinction which needs to be made between these two questions. The distinction is that though God still does miracles today in answer to prayer and/or as He sees fit, He is no longer distributing the miraculous gifts to believers through the Holy Spirit like He did during the first century when the foundation of the Church was being laid and the New Testament written. This is a key distinction, for during the first century while the Church was still in its infancy the miraculous gifts were necessary to help establish the fledgling Church, which we will see in this section. Once the Church had come to maturity, these gifts were no longer necessary and subsequently no longer distributed by the Holy Spirit. Although this is the case, this does not mean that God’s hands are tied and that He is unable to respond to the prayers of His children by doing the miraculous, such as healing someone who is in need.

At this point I will discuss in more detail the question, “Should we expect the sign gifts to be functioning today?”

##### **A. Should we expect the sign gifts to be functioning today?**

A view some believers may hold is that since we read about people doing miraculous things in the Bible – in both the Old and New Testaments – should we not therefore expect to see people doing them today? What about those on television who claim to possess the spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues, healing the sick, casting out demons, etc.? Don’t they possess these gifts? Are not these things sufficient proof that these spiritual gifts are still in existence today?

The first point to consider is that though God did miracles through people in the Old Testament period, He did them sporadically and only during certain time periods in Israel’s history. This is true in the Church Age as well. The concentration of His miraculous works took place in the first century when the New Testament was being written and the foundation of the Church laid. Whereas God did not perform miracles throughout the Old Testament, it should not seem unusual that He would limit the use of the miraculous during the Church Age. Let me clarify.

As was demonstrated already, the miraculous was to authenticate the messenger and his message as coming from God. This was of great importance when God conveyed new truth to man during the time when both the Old and New Testaments were being written. When Moses wrote the Pentateuch, the Israelites witnessed many signs and wonders while they were in Egypt during and shortly after their exodus. The

miraculous continued throughout the next forty years as they wandered in the desert, though infrequently. The main manifestation of God's power which they saw during these forty years after God's appearance to them on Mount Sinai was the provision of manna each morning and being led by a cloud by day and fire by night which remained upon the tabernacle when they were camped. Then, as they crossed to take possession of the land of Canaan, they saw the Jordan River stopped, the walls of Jericho fall down and God hold the sun still for an entire day so they could defeat their enemies in battle. After these events though the miraculous was infrequent.

Later, approximately 400 years after Israel had entered Canaan, God raised up the prophets Elijah and Elisha who once again performed many miracles of which Israel was aware for about 85 years. This was during a time when Israel needed to repent. Elijah and Elisha's combined ministries extended over the reign of six kings of Israel, during which time Israel was reminded once again as a result of their ministries that there was a God of Israel. However, the Israelites continued in their sin until eventually both the ten northern tribes and later the two southern tribes were sent into exile. Thereafter the miraculous was again infrequent in Israel for about the next 790 years leading up to the advent of Jesus.

With the coming of Jesus Christ to earth, another important time period began in which the miraculous occurred. During the thirty-three years of Jesus' ministry, Israel was called to repentance and offered the kingdom of God. Jesus did miracle after miracle, and though many believed, many more did not. The miraculous appeared to attract the Jews' attention, yet eventually they responded to their Savior by demanding the Romans crucify Him.

Following Jesus' ascension into heaven the Apostles received the Holy Spirit enabling them to perform the miraculous on a regular basis, whereas in the past they could do so only when Jesus had given them the authority; and at times, others as well (cf. Luke 9:1; 10:1,17). Thereafter the Apostles went out preaching and teaching, writing the New Testament Scriptures as they laid the foundation of the Church and called people to repentance. During this time the miraculous was more prevalent, especially as the Church was being established. It is noteworthy that less and less is written about the miraculous in the book of Acts from its midpoint to its conclusion. The miraculous was not as necessary as it was initially in laying the foundation of the Church as it became more established along with the writings of the New Testament Scriptures. Thus, by the time the New Testament was completed, the necessity for apostles and prophets and the need to authenticate their message became obsolete. This is why the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and the positions of apostle and prophet are no longer in existence today.

The next question to be discussed is, "Is the Word of God sufficient?" In other words, now that we have the completed Scriptures, is the Bible sufficient in itself, or is the miraculous still necessary today?

#### B. Is the Word of God sufficient?

It is important to remember the purpose of the miraculous which was earlier discussed. The miraculous was to draw people's attention to the Word of God and was used for authentication, but not for salvation. The purpose however of the gospel message is to bring people to salvation and faith in God.

The first verse to consider is Romans 1:16:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, **for it is the power of God for salvation** to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (emphasis added)

Paul makes it very clear here that the gospel message is a very powerful message by which people are saved. Peter makes this evident as well in 1 Peter 1:23:

“**for you have been born again** not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, **through the living and enduring word of God.**” (emphasis added)

It is the imperishable Word of God which regenerates people.

Paul makes this point once again when he reminds the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 1:5 about the first time he came to them and preached the gospel.

“for our gospel did not come to you in word only, **but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction**; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.” (emphasis added)

The Word of God is powerful in and of itself, it being accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit and His conviction. This is seen plainly in Acts 2:37 on the day when the Church began and 3,000 people were saved after hearing the gospel message:

“Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”

The gospel pierced their hearts and many who heard were saved.

Another verse which shows the power of the Word of God is found in Hebrews 4:12:

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

The Word of God is living! It is active! It is sharp! It is piercing! It can judge a man's heart! In other words, it is powerful and totally sufficient to permeate and effect change in a person's heart.

The point I want to stress is that only the Word of God can bring a person to salvation. While a miracle can undoubtedly capture someone's attention, by itself without sufficient knowledge of the gospel message, it cannot change him. It is only the Word of God which can provide the truth necessary for a person to repent. An example where this is illustrated can be found in Acts 14.

In Acts 14:11-13 the Apostle Paul and Barnabas were in Lystra. After Paul healed a lame man, it is obvious that this miracle got the people's attention:

- 11 "When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, 'The gods have become like men and have come down to us.'
- 12 And they *began* calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.
- 13 The priest of Zeus, whose *temple* was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds."

The people, after believing that Paul and Barnabas were gods, got very excited. They believed that they were their gods Zeus and Hermes. As a result, they wanted to worship and sacrifice oxen to them. At the time Paul and Barnabas were able to restrain the crowds and attempted to preach the gospel to them. However after some Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived and turned the crowds against them, they stoned Paul leaving him for dead. So although the miraculous attracted the attention of the people, a miracle alone is not sufficient to save anyone.

Another example which shows this is when Jesus spoke about a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus in Luke 16. In this account the rich man upon dying went to a place called Hades, a place of fire and torment. Lazarus on the other hand went to a place called Abraham's Bosom. From Hades the rich man could see Lazarus with Abraham where he was being comforted. So the rich man, desiring that his brothers not come to Hades also, asked Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his brothers. In Luke 16:27–31 the conversation proceeds as follows with the rich man speaking first:

- 27 "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—
- 28 for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'
- 29 "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'
- 30 "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!'
- 31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

What Abraham said in effect was that if the rich man's brothers did not listen to Moses and the Prophets, or in other words, to the Old Testament Scriptures written by them, they would not be persuaded even if someone arose from the dead. Really?! Is that true? It is. Please consider the following:

- Did all who saw Jesus' friend Lazarus rise from the grave believe? No! Some wanted to kill him so that others would not believe in Jesus as a result of Lazarus' resurrection (John 12:9-11).
- Did all who heard about Jesus rising from the grave believe? No! Instead some tried to cover up the truth with the lie that His disciples came and stole His body from the tomb (Mat. 28:11-15).

Obviously the Word of God is more powerful than a great and miraculous event such as person rising from the dead. Since the Church has had the completed Word of God for almost 2,000 years, the necessity for new revelation and its authentication in

the Church Age is not required. This in itself is one major reason why the miraculous gifts are not seen today throughout the world.

This next portion will focus in detail on 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 as to why this passage is important to this discussion.

### C. Why is 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 important to this discussion?

#### 1. Preliminary discussion

In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul makes the point that the spiritual gifts will one day cease, but faith, hope and love will never cease as they are eternal. In this argument Paul states in verse 8:

“Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away.”

Paul makes it clear in this verse that at some point tongues would cease, or to put it another way, they would eventually stop appearing as a spiritual gift. Of prophecy and knowledge he says that they will be stopped, brought to an end as the result of something else, which is evident in the Greek text. Though tongues would cease on their own, what was it that would stop prophecy and knowledge? First Corinthians 13:10 says:

“but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.”

The important and long-debated question is, “What is the perfect?” There are various views of what the perfect is, such as:

- completion of the New Testament Scriptures
- maturation of the Church
- rapture of the Church
- second coming of Christ
- millennial kingdom
- eternal state

The key to defining which of these views is correct needs to begin with the definition of the word “perfect.” This word in the Greek has the idea of “full grown, adult, mature.” This is the same word used in James 1:4:

“And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

The idea of this verse is not that a person in this life would become perfect, without defect or error or sin, but that he would become mature, living and acting like a mature, grownup believer. Therefore, when considering the meaning of this word in conjunction with the context of 1 Corinthians 13:10, the credible option is the maturation of the Church. This view also fits very well with the reality of what can be observed in the world today.

The main function of the apostles and prophets was to lay the Church's foundation, which is seen in Ephesians 2:19–22:

- 19 “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,
- 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*,
- 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,
- 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”

It is revealed here that God's household – the Church – was built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, of which Jesus is the corner stone. It was these men who laid the foundation of the Church. As churches were established and the New Testament written and shared, the Church was built up and the foundation laid. First Corinthians 3:10 gives reference to this process:

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, **like a wise master builder I laid a foundation**, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.” (emphasis added)

Paul had started the church in Corinth and built it up in accordance with Ephesians 4:11-16, thus laying the foundation of the church. This was the responsibility of the apostles and prophets along with evangelists (church planters) and pastor-teachers. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:11–13:

- 11 “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,
- 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;
- 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

The goal then of the apostles and prophets, as is the goal today of evangelists and pastor-teachers, is the maturation of churches. In other words, it is to be their goal to bring believers to maturity. The work of the apostles and prophets during the first century was to bring not only individual churches to maturity, but more importantly the Church as a whole. Therefore, when the Church began, it took baby steps moving forward in its infancy. Yet there was a point in time when this new, fledgling Church reached maturity. When did this occur?

It is logical that the maturation of the Church occurred when the foundation of the Church was laid by the apostles and prophets. This took place by the end of the first century with the death of the last apostle, John. By this point the necessary Scriptures to oversee and guide it were completed and were being circulated from church to church (cf. Col. 4:15). The Church was established. This brought the fledgling Church to a state of maturity, adulthood, no longer in its infancy. Once this was accomplished the Church offices of apostle and prophet concluded, for in the case of the Apostles no other believers were appointed to replace them to lead the Church (cf. Rev. 21:14). It was then that the gift of prophecy was also



done away with for the perfect – the maturation of the Church – had occurred (1 Cor. 13:10). As a result of this, the partial was done away with -- those gifts associated with the Word of God found in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 which were discussed earlier. Thus the first century Church was mature and able to take the gospel forward by itself to the ends of the earth without the necessity of apostles and prophets.

Has the Church reached complete maturity? No, this will occur at the resurrection and rapture of the Church spoken about in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. When this takes place, the entire universal Church will be together in heaven in its totality, being ultimately sanctified and absolutely perfect – fully mature. Until then the Church, God’s household “in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:21–22). So until the resurrection and rapture of the Church takes place, the universal Church continues to grow and is not yet complete nor as a whole ultimately sanctified.

## 2. Further discussion

Coming back to the discussion of if or when tongues ceased, 1 Corinthians 13:8–12 states:

- 8 “Love never fails; but if *there are gifts* of prophecy, they will be done away; if *there are* tongues, they will cease; if *there is* knowledge, it will be done away.
- 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part;
- 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.
- 11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.
- 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.”

The Greek word for “ceased” in verse 8 expresses the fact that at some time in the future, after Paul had written 1 Corinthians, that tongues would assuredly on their own come to an end. Other than this fact, there is nothing besides Church history to speak as to when this occurred. When looking at Church history, many believe that the authentic gift of languages had ceased long ago during the first century of the Church. As quoted earlier in this study, Dr. John MacArthur of Grace to You Ministries wrote:

“Chrysostom and Augustine—the greatest theologians of the eastern and western churches—considered tongues obsolete. Writing in the fourth century, Chrysostom stated categorically that tongues had ceased by his time and described the gift as an obscure practice. Augustine referred to tongues as a sign that was adapted to the apostolic age. In fact, during the first five hundred years of the church, the only people who claimed to have spoken in tongues were followers of Montanus, who was branded as a heretic.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, John, Grace to You, <http://www.gty.org/resources/distinctives/DD06/the-gift-of-tongues>, 2001 Grace Community Church.

The modern tongues movement began in 1906 in California in the United States of America. Up until that point in modern history the supposed occurrence of tongues was rare during the past 1900 years. Therefore the attestation of the Church is that the authentic gift of tongues had ceased long ago. Glenn Hinson, a church historian, wrote this about the cessation of tongues, "The first sixteen centuries of its history were lean ones indeed.... if the first five centuries were lean the next were starvation years for the practice in Western Christendom and doubtful ones in Eastern Christendom."<sup>3</sup>

Having already looked at the purpose of the authentic gift of tongues earlier in this study along with the attestation of Church history that the gift of tongues as described in Acts chapter 2 is not in existence today, it becomes clear that this gift has ceased and has not been functioning for the past 1900 years.

What then about the gifts of knowledge and prophecy? As discussed, the gifts of knowledge and prophecy along with the other gifts associated with the Word of God as presented in this study listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 ended when the perfect came, when the maturation of the Church was fulfilled by the end of the first century.

As was stated earlier, this view corresponds well with this text in which Paul wrote in verses 9 and 10:

9 "For we know in part and we prophesy in part;  
10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away."

In verse 9 Paul refers to the gifts of knowledge and prophecy as giving partial understanding to the Church at the time of his writing. Yet he stated that when the perfect comes that the partial gifts will be done away. Why? Because the New Testament would be complete, the foundation of the Church would be laid, and therefore the partial would no longer be necessary. Paul then clarifies this by using a metaphor of his own personal development in verse 11:

"When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things."

In this illustration Paul refers to the three gifts mentioned -- tongues, knowledge and prophecy. Looking at this verse with inserted notes will clarify this:

"When I was a child, I used to speak [tongues] like a child, think [knowledge] like a child, reason like a child [prophecy]; when I became a man, I did away with childish things." (notes added)

Paul's point is that when he was a child he possessed characteristics of immaturity in the way he spoke, thought and reasoned. This was true of the infant Church as well which can be expected, it too having characteristics of immaturity. In requiring help to grow and mature, the partial gifts of tongues, knowledge and prophecy listed here, as well as the other gifts already discussed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 were necessary. Paul then finishes verse 11 with these words:

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<sup>3</sup> Frank Staggs, E. Glenn Hinson, and Wayne E. Oates, *Glossotolia* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), pp. 45-46.

“when I became a man, I did away with childish things.”

Paul’s point was that when he reached adulthood – maturity – he no longer needed childish things. This was true of the Church as well because when the apostles and prophets had laid the foundation of the Church and had completed the New Testament Scriptures, the Church reached maturity. As a result those things needed during childhood -- the gifts of tongues, knowledge and prophecy and the other partial gifts -- were no longer necessary since the Church had now reached adulthood.

Paul goes on to say in verse 12:

“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.”

At this point Paul is making a summary statement about the Church’s maturity. While Paul spoke about the Church’s maturation on earth in verses 9-11, he is now looking ahead to the Church’s ultimate sanctification or its ultimate maturity which will take place at the resurrection and rapture of the Church (1 Thes. 4:13-18). To see this more clearly, let’s look at this verse again with added emphases and notes in brackets:

“**For now** we see [prophecy] in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; **now** I know [knowledge] in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.” (notes and emphasis added)

Paul was looking forward to that day when the Church in its completeness will one day see and know clearly when it sees the Father face to face. Though the Church has reached its earthly maturation, it continues in the process of sanctification like any believer does, by being assisted by church planters (evangelists) and pastor-teachers. Paul’s illustration of seeing in a mirror dimly was a vivid one for the Corinthians since they were known for producing high quality mirrors at the time of Paul’s writing, yet not as of high a quality as those available today. One day when the Church experiences its ultimate maturation at its combined resurrection and rapture, it will know all things fully as it already is now fully and completely known by God. Therefore, in correlation with Paul’s illustration in verse 11, when he became a mature man, he did not become perfect, or in other words ultimately sanctified. For Paul this occurred when he died, but for the universal Church it will not occur until it is complete, when all of its members are gathered to heaven at the resurrection/rapture.

## CONCLUSION:

Spiritual gifts were given to the Church for its edification. Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 14:12:

“So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.”

Therefore, as was the purpose of the Church during Paul’s time, it is today. The focus of the Church is not to seek or promote the miraculous, but instead to bring glory to God by

serving one another. Those who focus on the display of power have either strayed from the truth or are false teachers who desire to lead people astray.

As was discussed, the Word of God is much more powerful than the miraculous, therefore it is to be the focus of the Church today. Second Timothy 3:16–17 speaks to the value and benefits of the Word of God:

- 16 “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;  
17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

It is the Word of God which prepares the man of God for ministry, his spiritual gift(s) being a tool in his work. Thus the Church needs to focus on the reason why it exists. My purpose statement for the Church is this:

The purpose of the local church is the glorification of God (1 Cor. 10:31) through being the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), through its declaration to the nations of His excellencies (1 Pet. 2:9) and His message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; cf. Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8), and through its good deeds (Titus 2:14; 3:14; Eph. 2:10; Gal. 6:10).<sup>4</sup>

This purpose statement clarifies that God and His excellencies are to be proclaimed along with the gospel message, while the Church, the pillar and support of the Word of God preaches His Word and does good deeds. Therefore the Church is not to focus on the supernatural, but on spreading the completed, sufficient Word of God.

Unfortunately in the world today there are many false teachers and false religions leading people astray, believers and unbelievers alike. This is why believers must be careful to study and know the Word of God well so as not to be deceived by craftiness and false doctrine (Eph. 4:14). Paul exhorts believers in 2 Timothy 2:15:

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”

As believers do this they will grow in maturity, and their wisdom, knowledge and discernment will increase as they focus upon and apply the Word of God. How is maturity attained? Paul says that it results from believers being equipped and built up in their faith (Eph. 4:12). He then defines it in Ephesians 4:13:

- 13 “until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

This definition of maturity is attained when a believer is filled with Christ to the fullest extent possible while being unified in his faith which results from having the knowledge of Christ which he lives in accordance with. What is the result of this maturity? Paul continues in Ephesians 4 and says in verses 14-16:

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<sup>4</sup> Hillebrand, Randall J. (2011), Building a Dynamic Church, page 11.

- 14 "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;
- 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,
- 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

As believers reach spiritual maturity, they will not be easily led astray from the truth. Instead they will manifest love, grow in their faith in Christ and become more unified with the body of Christ. This being the goal, every believer must be working toward maturity to protect themselves from being drawn away.

In Paul's time as today, false teachers try to honor and distinguish themselves. Thus it was Paul's desire to not allow them to elevate themselves within the churches. Whereas Paul refused to accept money from the Corinthians, the false teachers took it readily. His refusal, which resulted in hardship for him, showed his love for them. Thus Paul warned in 2 Corinthians 11:12–15:

- 12 "But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.
- 13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.
- 14 No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.
- 15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."

Satan has his operatives working in the world, disguised as righteous servants of God, even as apostles of Christ. This should be expected because even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. This is why believers must be skeptical regarding those who claim great things about themselves, that they are faith healers, workers of miracles, people who have special messages from God, etc. While some may simply be misled and have an incomplete knowledge of the Word of God, others desire people's admiration, money and unquestioned loyalty. They do this by distorting God's Word for their own purposes as they deceitfully lead people away from Jesus. Regarding such people, Jesus said in Matthew 7:15–23:

- 15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.
- 16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they?
- 17 "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.
- 18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.
- 19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
- 20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits.
- 21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*.
- 22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'

23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

Followers of Jesus need to carefully examine the fruit of the trees from which they are eating. Is it good fruit? Is it bad fruit? Is it healthy or unhealthy? Do the shepherds have sharp fangs or are they gentle and self-sacrificing like Jesus? Many will say to Jesus that they did the miraculous, prophesied and cast out demons in His name, but to them He will say, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.”

The focus of the local church must be on those things which are important and necessary and not on those things which Satan uses to sidetrack it from its objectives. Therefore, church leaders need to focus on bringing their congregations to maturity by helping their members discover their spiritual gifts and training them in their use for the glory of God. Then they will become mature and fruitful which is the goal of the church's leaders. Beloved, may God bless you in your work for Him!

## About the Author

Randy was raised in a Catholic home in the United States. During his childhood he began to question the existence of God, and in his early adult life considered himself an atheist. Later, as a result of people speaking to him about Christ, he began to question his beliefs. He read the New Testament and portions of the Old Testament while considering the claims made about Jesus. After understanding that Jesus was who He claimed to be, Randy understood that there had to be a God. It was at this time (August 18, 1982) that he placed his faith and trust in Jesus Christ as his Savior.

In the Chicago area Randy was the interim pastor of two small churches, which needed assistance and was involved in jail ministry as well as evangelism to the homeless. He later served as the senior pastor of the Bark River Bible Church in Michigan for over eight years. He ministered as an associate of Bible Related Ministries for 10 years (1990-2000), an organization which assists churches in need of help, ranging from providing pulpit supply to pastors, to helping mediate church disputes.

Randy and his wife Annette serve the Lord in Eurasia, and at the time of this writing live in Kiev, Ukraine. Besides Randy's writing ministry, he and Annette are involved in training and assisting church leaders and women where they Lord gives opportunity. They have four children.

Randy's educational background includes a degree in electronic technology, a Bachelor's degree in Bible and a Master's degree in Ministry, both from Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, Illinois.

Randy's other works include:

- Building a Dynamic Church
- Evangelism: How to Mobilize Your Church
- Persecution: A Biblical Perspective
- Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage: A Biblical Perspective
- Bride Price and Dowry: A Biblical Response (Exclusively Mainland Southeast Asia, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka)
- Various tracts on different topics

These publications are available for download at: [www.hillebrandministries.com](http://www.hillebrandministries.com)