

**Earnestly Desire the
Best Gifts:
A Commentary on 1 Cor. 12-14**

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For the brothers and sisters in my fellowship,
who wanted to learn about the gifts

Chapter 1

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit

The Scriptures refer to the baptism in the Holy Spirit several times: Joel 2:28-29; Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:28-34; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4; 2:14-18; 8:14-17; 10:44-48; 11:15-17; 19:1-7. These passages help us to answer some questions about the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

1. What is the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

Our English word, *baptism*, comes directly from the Greek noun, *baptisma*, which in turn comes from the Greek verb, *baptizo*, which means “to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge.” It is used to describe the immersion of cloth into a dye. The cloth is in the dye and the dye is soaked into the cloth, that is, the dye is in the cloth and the cloth is surrounded by the dye. It is also used to describe sunken ships. The water is in the ships and the ships are surrounded by the water.

This means that when you are baptized in the Holy Spirit, you are immersed into the Spirit so that the Spirit is not only in you but also around you. The Holy Spirit is in you and you are in the Holy Spirit.

Baptizo comes from the Greek verb, *bapto*, which also means “to immerse,” but there is a significant difference between these two words.

This word (*baptizô*) should not be confused with *baptô*. The clearest example that shows the meaning of *baptizo* is a text from the Greek poet and physician Nicander, who lived about 200 B.C. It is a recipe for making pickles and is helpful because it uses both words. Nicander says that in order to make a pickle, the vegetable should first be 'dipped' (*baptô*) into boiling water and then 'baptised' (*baptizô*) in the vinegar solution. Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution. But the first is temporary. The second, the act of baptizing the vegetable, produces a permanent change.¹

In other words, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is permanent. You don't have to be baptized again and again. The baptism also makes a permanent change in you. We will see what that is when we get to question 7.

2. Who is baptized in the Holy Spirit?

Every believer can be baptized in the Holy Spirit. In Acts 19, Paul asks the disciples if they had received the Holy Spirit, which means that he expected every believer to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

3. When does the believer become baptized in the Holy Spirit?

A believer can be baptized in the Holy Spirit at the time he or she becomes a believer (which is what happened to Cornelius and his household), but usually a believer is baptized

¹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g907/kjv/tr/0-1/>

in the Holy Spirit at some point after he or she becomes a believer.

Every believer has the Holy Spirit in him or her (Rom. 8:9-11; John 7:37-39). But not every believer has been baptized in the Holy Spirit. The baptism is a work separate from salvation.

After his resurrection, Jesus breathed on the disciples and told them to receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). This, I believe, is when the disciples were born again, when the Holy Spirit began to dwell in them. But just before his ascension, Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were baptized in the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit would empower them to be his witnesses (Acts 1:4-8). This baptism occurred on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). So the disciples were baptized in the Holy Spirit *after* they became believers.

Philip preached the gospel to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5-13) and many became believers. The apostles then came and laid hands on the believers so that they could receive the Holy Spirit (8:14-17). So these Samaritans were also baptized in the Holy Spirit *after* they became believers.

In Acts 19:1-7, Paul meets some disciples (that is, believers) in Ephesus who have not yet been baptized in the Holy Spirit. They had been baptized in John's baptism, so Paul baptizes them in water in the name of the Lord Jesus, then lays hands on them. The Holy Spirit comes upon them and they begin to use some of the gifts of the Spirit. So these disciples were also baptized in the Holy Spirit *after* they became believers.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit, therefore, is a work separate from salvation. It is possible to be saved without being baptized in the Holy Spirit.

4. Where is the believer baptized in the Holy Spirit?

The believer can be baptized in the Holy Spirit anywhere. It does not have to happen in a formal church setting. The disciples were baptized in the upper room. Cornelius and his household were baptized in his house. There is no set location in which a believer must be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

5. How is the believer baptized in the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples in Acts and upon Cornelius and his household in Acts 10. But in Acts 8 and Acts 19, the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of hands. This was probably the usual way of baptizing believers in the Holy Spirit.

6. How do we know that we have been baptized in the Holy Spirit?

When the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples in Acts 2, they spoke in tongues. Peter says in Acts 11 that the same thing happened to Cornelius and his household when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostal position is that speaking in tongues is the only sign that a believer has been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

As we saw earlier, Paul expected every believer to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. But he also says in 1 Cor. 12:29-30, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" The answer to all of these questions is obviously, "No." If all believers have been baptized in the Holy Spirit, but not all of them speak in tongues, then speaking in tongues cannot be the

only sign that a believer has been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Joel did not say anything about speaking in tongues. Rather, he said that when the Spirit was poured out, people would begin to prophesy, dream dreams, and see visions. When the disciples in Acts 19 received the Holy Spirit, they spoke in tongues and prophesied. Luke does not make it clear if all of them did both or if some spoke in tongues while the others prophesied. Either way, the disciples were able to use both gifts, not just speak in tongues, when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

The charismatic position, therefore, is that the use of any of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is a sign that the believer has been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

7. Why does the believer need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit?

First of all, Jesus said that the baptism in the Holy Spirit would empower the disciples to be witnesses (Acts 1:4-8). I know that many evangelists and missionaries who have led many people to the Lord have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit, but I wonder if they would have been even more effective if they had been baptized.

Second, the people in the Scriptures who were baptized in the Holy Spirit immediately began to use the gifts of the Spirit. Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 12:7 that the gifts were given for the profit of all, that is, the purpose of the gifts is to edify the Church (1 Cor. 14:1-5).

A believer, therefore, should want to be baptized in the Holy Spirit so he or she can be a better witness and be able to use the gifts to help edify the Church.

Chapter 2

Concerning Spiritual Gifts

Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 12 what the gifts of the Holy Spirit are. He also tells us that the gifts have different functions. We, too, have different functions in the body of Christ. The gifts, therefore, are not signs of how spiritual we are. They are only functions that are intended to benefit the body.

12:1 Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:

When Paul uses the word “Now” at the beginning of a sentence, he is signaling that he is starting a discussion on a new subject. The word “gifts” is in italics because it is not present in the Greek text, but translators often add this word to the translation because that is the subject of this passage.

Paul uses only the adjective “spiritual,” which in the Greek is *pneumatikos*. It comes from the Greek word *pneuma*, which means “wind, breath, spirit.” “Spiritual” is used to describe anything that consists of a spirit, or is produced by a spirit, or is controlled by a spirit, whether that spirit is the Holy Spirit or a demonic spirit. Examples of this are found in 1 Cor. 2:13-15. Paul uses “spiritual” in these verses to describe things and a person.

Here in 1 Cor. 12, Paul is talking about gifts that are produced or controlled by the Holy Spirit. “Ignorant” (*agnoeo*) means “not understand or think about.” Paul does

not want us to be among those who do not understand or think about the gifts. He wants us to know about them and understand them.

12:2-3 You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

“Dumb” (*aphonos*) means “without a voice.” The Corinthians grew up in a Gentile, that is, an idolatrous environment. Paul is reminding them not to think that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are like the prophecies, etc., that they might have witnessed in the pagan rituals. The idols cannot speak, so any prophecies they might have heard must have come from a false spirit. That should not be true among the Corinthians now that they have become Christians. Any prophecy that contradicts the truth about who Jesus really is cannot be a true prophecy from the Holy Spirit. This is his way of saying that a prophecy should not be accepted unquestionably simply because it is a prophecy. We must compare it to what God has already revealed, for God will not contradict himself. This is why Paul says that all prophecies given in a church service must be judged by the known prophets in the church (1 Cor. 14:29). Paul told the Thessalonians, “Do not despise prophecies,” but he also told them to “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess. 5:20-21). Even John, the apostle of love, said, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Jesus warned us that false prophets will arise with the intent to deceive even the elect (Matt. 24:24). Therefore, every prophecy

must be judged to see if it agrees with what God has already revealed.

12:4-6 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

“Diversities” and “differences” are the same Greek word, *diairesis*, which is used only in these three verses. It means “distinction, difference; in particular, a distinction arising from a different distribution to different persons.” In other words, each gift, ministry, and activity differs from the others *because* they are distributed to different persons. The pattern of these sentences, however, is intended to say that the gifts, ministries, and activities all come from the same source, meaning that the Spirit, the Lord, and God are the one source. Hence, Paul is referring to the Trinity.

“Gifts” is used for the first time in this passage in v. 4. The Greek word is *charisma*. We took this word directly into the English language. When we say that someone has charisma, we mean that he or she has been gifted with a quality or spiritual power which influences people. The plural of *charisma* is *charismata*. The charismatics, those who say that the use of any of the gifts is evidence that you have been baptized in the Holy Spirit, get their name from this word.

“Ministries” translates the Greek word *diakonia*, from which we get our word, “deacon.” It means “service, especially of those who execute the commands of others.” True Christian ministry, therefore, is done by executing the commands of God.

“Activities” translates the Greek word *energema* (“energy”). In the Bible, this word is used only in verses 6 and 10, and it does mean “activity of any sort.” There are, of course, activities that are evil, but all truly good activities come from God, who works everything good in everyone. The ability to do anything truly good, including using the gifts, comes from God, not ourselves.

12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*:

“Of all” is not in the Greek text, but this is clearly what Paul meant. “Manifestation” means “the act of making clear to the eye or the understanding.” Another word for “manifestation” is “appearance.” The use of the gifts makes the Spirit manifest (visible) to the church.

“Profit” translates the Greek word *symphero*. *Sym* means “together” and *phero* means “to bear.” So *symphero* means “to bear together or at the same time, to carry with others, hence, to help, to be profitable.” This reminds me of Gal. 6:2, which says, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” We help the church, the other members of the body of Christ, to bear their burdens by using the gifts.

12:8 for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit,

“Word” (*logos*) does not mean a single word, such as the name of an object. It means first “a gathering, a collection,” hence, “a gathering of thoughts.” Second, it means “the expression of thought,” hence, “a saying or a statement (a gathering or a collection of words).”

“Wisdom” (*sophia*) means “full of intelligence and knowledge.” In Acts 7:22, Stephen says, “Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.” He meant that Moses had learned all of the accumulated knowledge of the Egyptians.

But wisdom is more than just knowledge. It also includes knowing how to use that knowledge, including knowing how to interpret dreams, how to make artistic objects, how to speak eloquently and answer questions and arguments, and how to solve the problems that come up in everyday life. The first person in the Bible who is described as wise (besides Pharaoh’s wise men) is Joseph, who knew how to interpret dreams and knew how to solve the problem of the upcoming famine (Gen. 41:39; Acts 7:9-10). God said that the craftsmen who were to make Aaron’s garments were filled with the spirit of wisdom (Ex. 28:3). Bezalel, who was appointed by God to make the Tabernacle and everything in and around it, was filled with the Spirit of God. He and those who were appointed to help him were given wisdom, that is, the knowledge of how to make all that they were supposed to make (Ex. 31:1-6). Solomon’s wisdom was revealed when two women came to him, both of whom claimed to be the mother of a baby. His wisdom gave him the ability to solve the problem (1 Kings 3:16-28). Luke tells us that the Jews who disputed with Stephen “were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke” (Acts 6:8-10). He knew how to answer the arguments these Jews raised up against the gospel.

The word of wisdom, however, is not for ourselves. James tells us that if we lack wisdom, we should ask for it and God will give it to us, if we ask in faith (James 1:5-8). This wisdom benefits us. The gifts, however, were meant to edify others. The word of wisdom, therefore, is given by

the Holy Spirit to someone to tell *someone else* what he or she should do in a given situation. This wisdom is something the speaker would not have otherwise known if it had not been revealed by the Holy Spirit. It is a supernatural wisdom, not a learned wisdom.

“Word (*logos*) of knowledge (*gnosis*).” *Gnosis* can also mean “intelligence, understanding.” The word of knowledge is knowledge given by the Holy Spirit, not by natural or normal means. It is knowledge that the speaker would not otherwise have.

12:9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit,

“Faith” (*pistis*) is the same faith through which we are saved (Eph. 2:8). This is also the same faith that is defined in Heb. 11:1 as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” However, the gift of faith here is not saving faith, for it is given to those who are already saved.

Jesus said that if we have faith, we will receive whatever we ask for in prayer (Matt. 21:18-22). But the faith that Paul is talking about is meant to edify others. If I have the faith to believe that God will grant *my* prayer, that is not the gift of faith. Yes, God has given me the faith necessary to believe that he will answer my prayer, but again the gifts of the Spirit are meant to edify others. The gift of faith, therefore, is the belief, given by and sustained by the Spirit, that God will grant what *someone else* has requested from God.

“Gifts (*charismata*) of healings (*iama*).” This Greek word, which does mean healing, is used only in 1 Cor. 12 (vv. 9, 28, 30). Notice that these words are in the plural. There is more than one gift of healing. This may mean that

different persons are given the ability to heal different diseases. One may be able to heal blindness while another can heal cancer. Or it may mean that one person can heal more than one disease.

12:10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

“Working (*energema*) of miracles.” The Greek word for “miracles” is *dynamis*, from which we get our words “dynamite” and “dynamo.” It means “power” and it is often translated in the New King James Version as “mighty works.” This word is also in the plural, which perhaps means that different people can perform different miracles. Or it can mean that one person can perform more than one miracle.

Miracles include healings. We see the Greek words *dynamis* and *iaomai*, which is the verb form of *iama*, together in Luke 5:17 and Luke 6:19. However, Paul separates the gifts of healings from the working of miracles because miracles include other works, such as raising the dead or multiplying fish and loaves of bread or walking on water.

“Prophecy” (*propheteia*) means more than just predicting the future. It means speaking forth the very words of God himself. When a person delivers a prophecy, God speaks through that person to the church. Those who say that the gifts ceased when the apostles died argue that there is no need for more inspired words from God because the Bible is complete. There will never be any more inspired written books to add to the Bible. But not all prophecy is intended to be added to the Bible, nor did all of God’s prophets write inspired books. Elijah and Elisha

never wrote inspired books that were added to the Old Testament. And New Testament prophecies did not add to the Bible nor were they intended to do so. For example, the prophet Agabus prophesied that a famine was soon to come (Acts 11:27-30). Agabus did not add this prophecy to the Bible nor did he write an inspired book. The only reason we know about this prophecy is that Luke recorded it in his book. Notice how the disciples reacted to this prophecy. The prophecy forewarned the church so that they could prepare for the coming famine. The point of the prophecy was to give the church direction, to help them know what they should do next.

The Bible only gives us general direction. The gift of prophecy is given by the Spirit to enable people to do what the Biblical prophets did: to forewarn the church, to give specific direction to the church, to admonish the church, and to encourage the church. But it does not add to the inspired Word of God.

“Discerning of spirits” accurately translates the Greek. The person who has this gift can discern which spirit is at work, whether that spirit is the Holy Spirit or a demonic spirit. This gift is useful when Satan sends someone with the intent of deceiving the church. Again, this is supernatural knowledge, not knowledge that the person received through normal means.

“*Different kinds (genos) of tongues (glossa).*” “Different” is in italics because it is not in the Greek text. *Genos* literally means “kin, relative.” Depending on context, it can be translated as “offspring” or “family.” Since the members of a family are similar to each other (and different from the members of other families), the word came to mean “kind” or “type.” *Glossa* is literally the tongue, the organ that is in your mouth. Since the tongue is used to speak language, it also means “language.”

Hence, Paul is saying that there is more than one kind of language. This means that the gift of tongues is not just one language. People who speak in tongues are not necessarily using the same language. And a person who speaks in tongues more than once is also not necessarily using the same language. Paul says that it is possible to speak in the tongues of men and of angels (1 Cor. 13:1), so tongues are legitimate languages (not gibberish). But the person speaking in a tongue is speaking a language which he or she has not learned. The ability to speak in that language is supernaturally given by the Spirit.

“Interpretation (*hermeneia*) of tongues” is exactly that: the translation of the spoken tongue into the language the hearers can understand. As Paul will explain in 1 Cor. 14, speaking in tongues by itself does not edify the church, but speaking in tongues along with the interpretation does edify the church.

12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

“Distributing” in the Greek is *diaireo*, which is the verb form of *diairesis*, which we saw in verses 4-6. It means “to divide, to distribute.” As we shall see, our part in participating in the gifts is to seek them, to ask for them. But it is up to the Holy Spirit to decide who gets which gift when. Of course, it should go without saying that the Holy Spirit is acting in accordance with the will of the Father.

How do we know when the Holy Spirit wants us to use a gift? I have found that this is a learning experience. When you think that the Holy Spirit wants you to use a gift, you may find yourself arguing with yourself: Is this really the Holy Spirit prompting me to use a gift or is this just me? Eventually you will just have to step out in faith. If the Holy

Spirit did prompt you, then you will edify the church. If he did not and you made a mistake, learn from it and try again another time. The more often you do this, the sooner you will recognize the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

12:12-27 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.

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

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

the members rejoice with *it*. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

I have put all of these verses together rather than go through them one verse at a time because these verses must be read together to understand the points that Paul is making.

In this passage, Paul is explaining why the Spirit distributes the gifts as he wills, that is, why the Spirit gives different gifts to different people. “Members” (*melos*) in this passage means “parts of the body.” Sometimes in the New Testament, it means the parts of our physical bodies, as in Matt. 5:29-30.

Here Paul is using “members” to mean the parts of the body of Christ. In some of his other epistles, he also points out that each of us is a member of the body of Christ and explains how we are to behave because we are members of the body of Christ:

Rom. 12:3-8 – Because we are members of the body of Christ, we are not to think highly of ourselves. Rather, we are to exercise the gift which we have been given according to the grace that has been given to us.

Eph. 4:25 – Because we are members of the body of Christ, we are to speak truth to one another and stop lying to one another.

Eph. 5:28-30 – Because we are members of the body of Christ, Christ nourishes and cherishes us, just as a man nourishes and cherishes his own body. This is also how a husband is to love his wife, as if she were his own body.

In 1 Cor. 12, Paul says that the Spirit gives different gifts to different people, not to emphasize our differences, but to emphasize our unity. Each of us is given a different gift because each of us have a different function, but each function is intended to contribute to the one body, not divide it.

In v. 13, Paul says that there is one body and one Spirit. Just as each of us has a spirit residing in his or her body, so too the body of Christ has only one Spirit residing in it: the Holy Spirit. Hence, each of us belong to the same body and have the same Spirit in us. Notice that Paul says we have been baptized into the one body. That means that the body of Christ is not only in each one of us but also around each one of us, that is, each of the Christians around us are also members of the body of Christ. But he does not say that we have been baptized into the Spirit. Instead, he says that we have been made to drink into the one Spirit. In a sense, we have ingested the Spirit, who is now residing in us. Paul recognizes that every Christian has the Spirit in him or her, but not every Christian has been baptized in the Spirit.

Because we are members of the body of Christ, the body needs each and every one of us, just as our physical bodies need every member. In vv. 15-20, Paul says that we should not think that we are not needed by the body just because our function is not the same as somebody else's function. In vv. 21-26, he talks about the reverse, that we should not think that someone else is not needed by the body because his or her function is not the same as ours. In short, when it comes to the gifts, we should not think that we are inferior to everyone else, nor should we think that we are superior to everyone else. Each person's function may be different, but each person's function is needed by the body. Each of us needs everyone else.

Some members of our physical bodies can be presented in public, but other members are not presentable and would bring us shame if we were to present them in public. On the less presentable members, we bestow more honor because we pay more attention to them by clothing them. The presentable members need less attention because they are already honorable. In this manner, we bestow honor equally to all members of our body. So, too, the presentable members of the body of Christ already receive honor, but to the members which we consider to be weaker, and therefore less presentable, we should pay more attention, not less.

God set the body up this way so as to not cause schism, that is, division in the body. Rather we are to have the same care for each other. If one member suffers, we should all suffer with that member. If one member is honored, we should all rejoice with that member.

The gift which we are given, therefore, does not determine our value to God or to the body of Christ, nor does the Spirit distribute the gifts according to how valuable we are to the body of Christ because each one of us is valuable to the body of Christ. The Spirit distributes the gifts according to our function in the body of Christ and those functions have been determined by God the Father (v. 18), not by us. The question, then, that we should be asking ourselves is, "Am I fulfilling the function that God has given me or am I fulfilling a function that I have chosen for myself?"

12:28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

Once again, Paul's point is that there are different functions within the one body of Christ. The Greek word (*tithemi*) translated here as "appointed" is translated as "set" in v. 18. Just as "God has set the members, each one of them in the body, just as He pleased" (v. 18), so too "God has appointed (set) these in the church." Each person has a different function, and therefore a different position, in the body and each person who occupies a position was set there by God himself. The question again is, are we taking the position and fulfilling the function that God has given us, or are we taking the position and fulfilling the function which we have chosen for ourselves?

In the literature of Paul's time, "first," "second," and "third" were used to denote rank. It can be said that Paul is ranking these positions in terms of how effective they are in edifying the body, that is, apostles edified the body better than the varieties of tongues. In actual practice in the early Church, the first three positions were also positions of authority.

This list of authoritative positions differs from the one Paul gives in Eph. 4:11. Notice that the positions of evangelist and pastor are missing from the list in 1 Cor. 12:28. As we go through the list in Eph. 4:11, we will see why these two are missing.

Eph. 4:11 – And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.

Apostle: The word "apostle" means "one sent forth," specifically one who is sent by Jesus Christ. An apostle was the most versatile of these positions. In fact, he combined the other positions into this one. He had the highest authority in the Church.

How many apostles were there? The original twelve were apostles (Matt. 10:2-4). After Judas died, the disciples chose Matthias to take his place (Acts 1:15-26). Paul was an apostle (Eph. 1:1). So was Barnabas (Acts 14:1-4, 14). Paul refers to James, the Lord's brother, as an apostle (Gal. 1:19). Even Jesus was called an Apostle (Heb. 3:1). That means there were more than twelve apostles. However, John, in the book of Revelation, says that the New Jerusalem has "twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14). I guess we will see which twelve names are on the foundations when we get there.

Are there apostles today? The Scriptures do not say whether the office of the apostle would cease. However, as the apostles began to die out, they did not appoint apostles to succeed them. They appointed elders and bishops to succeed them.

Irenaeus lived from about 130 AD to about 200 AD and he was the bishop of the church in Lyons, a city in what is now France. This is what he said about the succession of the apostles:

"It is necessary to obey the presbyters [elders] who are in the church—those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles. For those presbyters, together with the succession of the bishops, have received the certain gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father."²

Before Paul left a church which he had founded, he appointed elders to oversee the church (Acts 14:23). The word for elder is *presbyteros*, which simply means "an old

² Philip Schaff, editor, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1884, Vol. 1, p. 416.

man.” Paul told Titus to appoint elders in Crete, but when he lists the qualifications for an elder, he calls the elder a bishop (Tit. 1:5-9). The word for bishop is *episkopos*, which also means “overseer.” For Paul and some of the early Church leaders, the words “elder” and “bishop” were interchangeable. Hence, Paul’s churches were overseen by elders. For other early Church leaders, however, the words represented two different offices, with the bishop being the head elder. We have to remember that the Church in the first three centuries met in homes. The bishop was the ultimate leader of the church in a given region (usually a city) while the elders worked directly with the home churches, perhaps overseeing a particular home church, but available to all of the home churches in the area. Paul’s letter to the Philippians was addressed “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Phil. 1:1), which meant that there was more than one bishop in Philippi. However, by the end of the first century, the practice was to appoint only one bishop over a city. The apostle John, for example, appointed his disciple, Polycarp, to be the sole bishop over the city of Smyrna.

The bishop, therefore, was the final authority in the given region. This did not mean, however, that the apostles, bishops, and elders were not held accountable by the rest of the Church. Peter, for example, was confronted by Jewish believers for entering a Gentile home after he preached to Cornelius and his family (Acts 11:1-18). He did not say that these believers did not have the right to confront him. Instead, he explained what happened and the people were satisfied with his explanation.

The bishops also held each other accountable. If a bishop began to teach or do something contrary to the Christian doctrine, at least one of the others would write to that bishop or visit him and confront him. The bishops

would also gather together and hold councils (similar to the one in Acts 15:1-29) whenever a heresy became popular or an issue affecting the whole Church needed to be addressed. These councils would rebuke and sometimes excommunicate false teachers, even if those false teachers were bishops or elders. This is how the early church kept the bishops accountable.

Prophet: From the Greek word *prophetes*, which means “prophet.” A prophet is someone who speaks the words of God. He could speak a word from God to those outside the Church, but more often he would have a word from God for the Church.

Judas and Silas were prophets in the early Church (Acts 15:32). Jesus called himself a prophet (Luke 13:33).

While the prophet had a home church, he was not obligated to stay at that church but could visit other churches and give them prophetic words. Agabus, for example, was based in Jerusalem but he gave a prophetic word to the church in Antioch (Acts 11:27-28) and he gave a prophetic word to Paul in Caesarea (Acts 21:8-11).

Are there prophets today? Again, the Scriptures do not say that this office would cease. Even the leaders of the first century Church expected it to continue.

Evangelist: An evangelist is a bringer of good news. His work would be primarily outside of the Church, bringing people into the Church, which is probably why he is not listed in the chain of command in 1 Cor. 12:28.

Philip was an evangelist (Acts 21:8). God used him to evangelize the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:5-40). The evangelist did not necessarily stay in any one region, but often moved about. Philip, for example, started in Samaria and ended up in Caesarea (Acts 21:8).

Pastor: The word “pastor” translates the Greek word for “shepherd” (*poimen*). This word is translated as “pastor” only here in the entire Bible.

No one in the New Testament is ever called “Pastor,” except Jesus himself, although the Greek is usually translated as “Shepherd” (John 10:14, Heb. 13:20, 1 Pet. 2:25). The early Church leaders also never mention the position of pastor.

Teacher: A teacher is the opposite of an evangelist in that his work is primarily inside the Church, teaching the disciples the doctrines of the Lord and helping them to mature.

There were several teachers at the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1). While Apollos is not specifically called a teacher, Luke says that he “taught accurately the things of the Lord” (Acts 18:24-25). Jesus was often called “Teacher” (John 13:13), though in most places in the Gospels the Greek word is translated as “Master.”

Like the prophet and the evangelist, the teacher did not necessarily stay at any one church. Apollos, for example, taught in Ephesus (Acts 18:24-28) and in Corinth (Acts 19:1).

Biblical scholars debate over how many positions are actually listed in Ephesians. Five positions are named, but the word “some” does not appear in front of “teachers,” as if “pastors” and “teachers” are supposed to be combined into one position (“pastor/teachers”). Hence, the teachers in Acts may have been pastor/teachers. And when Paul said, “Third, teachers,” in 1 Cor., he may have meant pastor/teachers. That Jesus thought that pastoring and teaching went together is shown in, for example, Mark 6:34.

Teachers are not the only ones who are expected to act like shepherds. In Acts 20, Paul tells the elders of the church at Ephesus “to shepherd the church of God” (Acts 20:28). Notice that he also calls them overseers (bishops). Peter tells some elders to “shepherd the flock of God” (1 Pet. 5:1-2). Peter was obviously an apostle (1 Pet. 1:1), yet he referred to himself as an elder, meaning that he included himself in the command. Perhaps he was remembering that Jesus himself many years earlier had told him to “Feed My sheep” (John 21:17). Peter also reminds his readers that Jesus was both a Shepherd and a Bishop (1 Pet. 2:25).

Hence, the elders of the church are also supposed to shepherd, to pastor, the church of God. This does not mean, however, that they are the pastor/teachers of Eph. 4:11. The apostles were succeeded by the elders, not the pastor/teachers. The pastor/teacher is still under the authority of the bishop and elders.

To summarize, the chain of command in the church is supposed to be first, the bishop and the elders (who succeeded the apostles), second, the prophet, and third, the pastor/teacher. Unlike the apostles, the bishop and the elders remained local because their primary responsibility was the local church. The prophet and the pastor/teacher, however, could (and often did) travel from church to church.

12:29-30 *Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?*

The answer, of course, is, “No.” As Paul says in Eph. 4:11, *some* are apostles, but not everyone is an apostle. *Some* are prophets, but not everyone is a prophet. *Some* are

teachers, but not everyone is a teacher. If everyone in the body of Christ had the same function, the other functions would be neglected.

The Pentecostals say that the only evidence that a person has been baptized in the Holy Spirit is speaking with tongues. Paul expected every Christian to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, but here he acknowledges that not everyone speaks with tongues. The Pentecostal position, therefore, is incorrect. The Charismatic position is that any of the gifts is evidence that a person has been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

12:31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

The Greek word for “earnestly desire” is *zeloo*, which means “to have warmth of feeling for or against.” In a negative sense, it means “to covet, to be envious.” It has this meaning in 1 Cor. 13:4. In a positive sense, it means “to be zealous, to earnestly desire.” It has this meaning in 1 Cor. 14:1, 39. Paul repeatedly says that we should earnestly desire the gifts, especially the gift of prophesy. So, it is good to desire the things that you should have, but wrong to desire the things which you should not have.

“The best gifts.” Paul does not specify which gifts are the best, but in 1 Cor. 14 he definitely states that prophesying is better than speaking with tongues.

The Greek word for “excellent” is *hyperbole*, from which we get our English word, “hyperbole.” The word literally means “a throwing beyond.” Hence, the way which he will talk about in 1 Cor. 13 goes beyond the gifts. Its value far exceeds that of the gifts.

Chapter 3

The More Excellent Way

Paul places this passage on love between chapters 12 and 14, the two passages about the gifts of the Spirit, because he wants to emphasize the point that the use of the gifts is to be motivated, not by pride, but by love. The gifts are intended to benefit others, not ourselves.

13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

“The tongues of men and of angels” are legitimate languages, not gibberish, but if you speak in tongues without love, you might as well be speaking gibberish. Sounding brass and a clanging cymbal make noise, but the noise does not mean anything. Hence, speaking in tongues without love is the same as not communicating at all.

13:2 And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

Paul points out in chapters 12 and 14 that the gifts of the Spirit are important. They are necessary for the edification of the church. But if you use any of the gifts without love,

they are worthless. The gifts do not prove how spiritual you are. How much you love does.

13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

Even if we do the things that we Christians think are so important and so spiritual, if we move in the gifts of the Spirit, if we feed the poor, if we are martyred by being burned at the stake, but have not love, there is no reward for us.

Paul is saying that it is possible to do all of these things in love or without love. Hence, two people could be doing what outwardly looks like the very same thing, but one is doing it in love and the other is not. The first will be rewarded but the second will not. Of course, God wants us to do the right thing, but he also wants us to do it for the right reason. Whether we act in love or without love makes all the difference in the world. That is why Paul calls love the “more excellent way” (12:31).

13:4 Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

“Suffers long” (*makrothymeo*) means “to persevere patiently.” How long are we to persevere? Until the Lord comes back (James 5:7-8). It also means “to be patient with others” (1 Thess. 5:14).

“Kind” (*chresteuomai*) is used only here in the New Testament and does mean “to be kind.”

“Does not envy” translates the Greek word, *zeloo*, which was used in 12:31 to mean “earnestly desire.” Here it is being used in its negative sense.

“Does not parade itself.” The Greek word for “parade itself” is *perpereuomai*, and it means “to be a braggart.” It is used only here in the New Testament.

“Is not puffed up” (*physioo*) literally means “to inflate, to cause to swell.” The Greeks recognized that proud people, even back then, tend to have swelled heads and puffed up chests. Hence, this word means “to be or make proud.”

In 1 Cor. 8:1, Paul says “Knowledge (*gnosis*) puffs up, but love edifies.” Knowledge, by itself, can make one proud, but knowledge, combined with love, builds up others, that is, knowledge by itself can be self-serving but knowledge combined with love serves others.

In 1 Cor. 8:1-4, Paul puns on the two Greek words for “know,” *eido* and *ginosko*. The first means “head knowledge,” but the second means “heart knowledge.” This punning is covered up by the English translation which uses the word “know” for both words.

“Now concerning things offered to idols: We know (*eido*) that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows (*eido*) anything, he knows (*eido*) nothing yet as he ought to know (*ginosko*). But if anyone loves God, this one is known (*ginosko*) by Him. Therefore, concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know (*eido*) that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.”

If anyone has only head knowledge, then he does not yet have the heart knowledge, which is more important. Having a heart-to-heart relationship with God is better than mere head knowledge, even if that knowledge is correct.

13:5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

“Behave rudely” (*aschemoneo*) means “to act in a way that is not fitting or appropriate.” Love takes into account the people and the situation it finds itself in and acts accordingly. For example, Proverbs says, “A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart” (Prov. 18:2). However, “The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil” (Prov. 15:28). The fool just blurts out whatever comes to mind, but the righteous takes into account the situation in which he finds himself and the people to whom he is speaking.

“Does not seek its own.” A loving person does take care of himself or herself, but what benefits others is more important (1 Cor. 10:24, 33; Phil. 2:4).

“Provoked” (*paroxyno*) means “to irritate, to arouse to anger.”

“Thinks no evil.” “Thinks” (*logizomai*) comes from the word *logos* and means “to think, to impute,” In some contexts, it is an accounting term meaning to record in an account. Hence, “thinks no evil” can also mean “keeps no record of wrongdoing.” This does not mean that love does not recognize when someone is doing something wrong. It means that love will love that person anyway.

13:6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

“Rejoice” in the Greek is *chairo*, which simply means “to rejoice.” But “rejoices” in the Greek is *sygchairo* which means “to rejoice with.” This last word also appeared in 1 Cor. 12:26, which says, “If one member is honored, all the

members rejoice with it.” So love rejoices with the truth and rejoices with others when they receive the truth.

Paul often treats iniquity as the opposite of truth (Rom. 2:5-8, 2 Thess. 2:9-12). When people reject the truth, they automatically turn to iniquity. Those are the only options.

13:7 bears all things, believes all things, hope all things, endures all things.

“Bears” (*stego*) literally means “to roof over, to cover.” You can cover something to protect it or to hide it. Here, it means to cover in order to hide and protect until whatever is threatening you goes away. Hence, it means to hold up or bear up against whatever comes your way.

“Endures” (*hypomeno*) means “to remain with, to continue with.” So, you remain with and continue with whoever you love no matter what happens. Christ does that for us (Heb. 13:5). It also means that you continue on the path of righteousness no matter what.

Obviously, Paul does not mean that we should believe everything we are told, nor are we to hope for the wrong things (for example, we should not hope that our enemies will perish in the lake of fire). He means that love bears and believes the truth and hopes for what God has promised and endures no matter what comes our way. In short, as the next verse says, “Love never fails.”

13:8-10 Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

I put these verses together because this passage is the source of controversy between two groups of people. Those who believe that the gifts of the Spirit have continued to be available and to be used by the Church since the first century are called *continuationists*. Those who believe that the gifts of the Spirit ceased to be available after the first century are called *cessationists*, and they argue that this passage proves that their belief is correct. So let's analyze this passage to see what it actually says.

"Fails" (*ekpipto*) means "to fall, to perish." Our culture teaches that love is an emotion that can come and go at any moment and that when it does leave, it is time to end the relationship. But the Word says that love never fails, which means that a love that does fail is not really love. Nowhere in 1 Cor. 13 or anywhere else in the Word is love described as an emotion. Love is described by what it does and does not do. Hence, love is a choice. I can choose to love even when I don't feel love. This is why love never fails. If I choose not to love, then *I* have failed. But love never does. This is an example of why the Word, not culture, is the final determiner of what is true.

"But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail." "Fail" here is a different word (*katargeo*), which means "to cease, to pass away." At some point in time, prophecies will cease.

"Whether *there are* tongues, they will cease." "Cease" (*pauso*) means "to stop, to restrain." Our English word "pause" comes from this Greek word. At some point in time, speaking in tongues will stop.

"Whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away." "Vanish away" is again the Greek word *katargeo*. Paul is not saying that all knowledge will one day vanish away. He means that the gift of the word of knowledge will cease one day.

“Part” (*meros*) means “part, portion.” It originally referred to one’s portion (or part) of an inheritance. It came to mean a part of anything whole.

“But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away (*katargeo*)” (v. 10). This is the statement that is at the center of the controversy. Both the continuationists and the cessationists agree that the gifts will cease at some point in time. From what we have seen so far in this passage, this is what Paul clearly means. The question is, when will they cease? Paul says they will cease when “the perfect” comes. But what is “the perfect”?

The cessationists say that the perfect is the perfect Word of God. They say that the gifts ceased when the final book of the New Testament was written near the end of the first century. The gifts are no longer necessary because God has given us everything we need in the completed Scriptures. There is no longer a need for prophecy because we have the complete revelation in the Scriptures. There is no longer a need for the word of knowledge because we have all the knowledge we need in the Scriptures. But if Paul knew that the gifts would cease when the Scriptures were completed, why didn’t he clearly say so? Why didn’t he say, “The gifts will cease once all of the Scriptures have been written”?

The continuationists say that, since Jesus is the only perfect person, Paul is referring to the second coming of Christ. When Christ, the perfect one, comes again, the gifts will no longer be needed. But again, if that is what Paul meant, why didn’t he clearly say so? Besides, the Greek word for “perfect” is neuter, not masculine. Paul is referring to a perfect thing, not a perfect man.

Both sides are misunderstanding this passage because both of them are misunderstanding the meaning of the

word, “perfect,” and because they are not taking into account the rest of the chapter. The word “perfect” in the Greek is *teleios*. It does mean “perfect,” which is why the continuationists think that it refers to Christ. It does mean “complete,” which is why the cessationists think that it refers to the completed Scriptures.

But it also means “mature.” This is its meaning in 1 Cor. 14:20: “Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.” When a word has multiple meanings, the context determines which meaning should be understood. The word is translated as mature in 1 Cor. 14:20 because Paul is contrasting immaturity with maturity. Here in 1 Cor. 13:10, Paul means “when the mature comes.” How do I know this? Because of what he says in the next two verses.

13:11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Here again, Paul is contrasting immaturity with maturity. When we become mature, our childish way of speaking, understanding, and thinking ceases. So, too, when we become mature, the gifts of the Spirit will cease. But when does a Christian become fully mature?

13:12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

The first “know” in this verse is *ginosko*, the heart knowledge. But it is only a partial knowledge. The second “know” and the word, “known,” in the Greek is *epiginosko*, which means “to know thoroughly and accurately.” The Christian

will be fully mature once he or she knows thoroughly and accurately even as God already knows us thoroughly and accurately. But that won't happen until we stand face to face with our Lord and Savior in our resurrected bodies. Only then will we be fully mature. Obviously, that has not happened yet for us, which is why the gifts of the Spirit are still needed in the Church today.

Besides, the cessationists are incorrect when they say that the gifts of the Spirit ceased at the end of the first century. There are dozens of passages from the writings of the early Church leaders which testify that the gifts were still being used into the fourth century. I will quote some of those passages in Chapter 5.

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

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). But one day we will see those things that are now not seen. “Hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?” (Rom. 8:24). But again, one day we will see what we hope for. Our greatest hope is the second coming of our Lord (Tit. 2:13), and one day he will come back for us. So faith and hope will eventually not be needed. But love will always be needed and will always endure, which is why it is the greatest of these.

Chapter 4

Let All Things be Done Decently and in Order

Paul returns to discussing the gifts of the Holy Spirit and teaches us how to use them properly in a church service.

14:1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.

Chapters 12, 13, and 14 form an ABA pattern, with chapter 12 talking about the gifts, chapter 13 talking about love, and chapter 14 talking about the gifts again. Like a sandwich, what is in the middle is the most important. Love is more important than the gifts because without love, the gifts are meaningless. But that does not mean, as some would say, that love is so important that we do not need the gifts. We need both.

To make this point perfectly clear, Paul says that we are to “Pursue love, AND desire spiritual gifts.” These are commands. We have been commanded to do both.

“Pursue” (*dioko*) means “to run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing.” We have been commanded to run after love until we catch it.

The Greek word for “desire” (*zeloo*) we have seen before in 12:31. It means “to have warmth of feeling, for or against.” It can have a negative sense and a positive sense. In a positive sense, it means “to be zealous, to earnestly

desire.” We have been commanded to earnestly and zealously desire spiritual gifts.

Paul says we should especially desire that we may prophesy. Why?

14:2 For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands *him*; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.

If a person speaks to the congregation (without an interpreter) in a language that no one in the congregation understands, then no one will understand him. The only person who will understand is God himself, so in reality the person is speaking to God but not to the congregation. By speaking out loud in a tongue without an interpreter, that person is in fact wasting the congregation’s time. This does not mean that the person is speaking gibberish. He speaks “mysteries.” A “mystery” (*mysterion*) is something which we do not know or which we do not understand but which God—obviously—does. A person who speaks in a tongue, therefore, speaks about things which we do not understand in a language which we do not understand.

14:3 But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.

Prophecy is delivered in a language which the congregation does understand, so the person who is prophesying can edify and exhort and comfort the congregation.

“Edification” (*oikodome*) means “the act of building up.” To edify the church means to help the members of the church to grow up.

“Exhortation” (*paraklesis*) literally means “a calling alongside, a summons, especially to help.” It is similar to

the Greek word, *paraclete*, which is the word used to describe the Holy Spirit (John 14:26) and literally means “one who is called alongside to help.” To exhort someone, therefore, means to come alongside a person and use words that will help that person to do what is right.

“Comfort” (*paramythia*) is used only in this verse and means “any address (or speech), whether made for the purpose of persuading, or of arousing and stimulating, or of calming and consoling.” Prophecy, therefore, can be used by God to persuade us of truth, to arouse us to action, or to calm and console us.

14:4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

Since the person is speaking in a language which the congregation does not understand, he is not edifying the church but only himself. But a gift that does not edify the church is not really a *gift*. The gifts are supposed to be motivated by love, but love “does not seek its own” (1 Cor. 13:5). A person who loves does not seek to edify only himself; he also seeks to edify everyone else.

14:5 I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

Once again, Paul recognizes that not every Christian speaks in tongues. He expects every Christian to be baptized in the Spirit, but he knows that not every Christian will speak in tongues. Tongues, therefore, is not the only evidence that a Christian has been baptized in the Spirit.

Paul also recognizes that not every Christian prophesies, though he wishes that all of them did, because prophecy, and not tongues alone, edifies the church. This is the third time in these five verses that he points out that the purpose of the gifts is to edify the church. This is why the one who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless that person also interprets, for then the congregation will understand what was said and be edified. As we shall see later in this chapter, this is the reason why the person who wishes to speak in tongues should keep silent when there is no interpreter. The congregation would not understand what was being said and therefore would not be edified. If a person chooses to speak in tongues out loud anyway, he would in fact be selfish because the tongues would edify only himself. If he truly loved the congregation, he would keep silent.

Paul also says, “He who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, *unless indeed he interprets.*” Speaking in tongues with an interpretation is the same as prophesying. Speaking in tongues without an interpretation is less than prophesying, but speaking in tongues with an interpretation equals prophesying.

In 14:6-12, Paul emphasizes his point that speaking in tongues without an interpreter does not edify the church.

14:6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?

All of these ways of communicating are done in the language which the congregation understands.

14:7 Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played?

Each song has its own melody. If the musical instrument does not play a distinctive melody, no one will know which song is being played.

14:8 For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?

Trumpets were used to tell an army when to assemble, when to attack, when to retreat, etc. Each command had its own trumpet sound. If the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, the army will not know what to do.

14:9 So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

If you speak in tongues without an interpreter, you might as well speak to the air, for no one will understand you.

14:10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance.

“Without significance” (*aphonos*) is literally “no sound.” Each language has its own set of distinct sounds, each of which has meaning.

14:11 Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks *will be* a foreigner to me.

If you speak to the congregation in a language they do not understand, you might as well be a foreigner.

14:12 Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual *gifts*, *let it be* for the edification of the church *that* you seek to excel.

Again, the purpose of the gifts is to edify the church. Speaking in tongues alone does not edify the church.

14:13 Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.

This verse is proof that the person who speaks in a tongue does not understand the language either. If I speak in a language which the congregation does not understand but which I do, I am not speaking in tongues and there is no need for me to pray for the interpretation because I already know what it is. However, if I do speak in a language which I do not understand, the interpretation does not necessarily have to come from someone else. The Holy Spirit can also give me the gift of interpretation so that I can interpret my own tongues.

14:14-15 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is *the conclusion* then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.

The Pentecostals think that these verses support their contention that there is a difference between speaking in tongues out loud in a service and praying in tongues in private in your prayer closet. According to them, not every-

one who has been baptized in the Spirit will speak in tongues out loud in a service, but will have their own private prayer language. This private prayer language is the evidence that a person has been baptized in the Spirit. However, there is no specific Scripture that says that there are two types of speaking in tongues. According to the Scriptures, the only difference between speaking in tongues in a service and praying in tongues is whether there is an interpreter. Paul says that when a person speaks in tongues without an interpreter, whether out loud in a service (14:2) or quietly (14:28), the person is speaking to God, that is, the person is praying. So speaking in tongues and praying in tongues are the same thing, the only difference being whether there is an interpreter.

14:16-17 Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.

“Uninformed” (*idiotes*) does not mean “idiot” the way we mean it now, but means “unlearned, illiterate.” If you bless with the spirit by speaking in tongues without an interpreter, the uninformed, the ones who have not learned about the gifts, will not be able to bless with you and be edified.

Because of these verses and because of Acts 2:11 (the disciples were speaking about the wonderful works of God) and Acts 10:46 (they magnified God), Chuck Smith, the late founder of Calvary Chapel, thought that the only legitimate use of speaking in tongues is to give thanks to God and glorify God. He considered any tongues and interpretation that predicted the future, for example, as not coming from the Spirit. But in 14:5, Paul says that he who prophesies is

greater than he who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, which suggests that tongues and interpretation are at least equal to prophecy. That means that tongues and interpretation, like prophecy, can be used to exhort and comfort the church (and predict the future).

14:18-19 I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Paul acknowledges that he speaks in tongues quite often, so he is not belittling the gift or saying that it should never be used. But he emphasizes once again that *in the church service* the purpose of the gifts is to benefit *others*. He can benefit others if he teaches them in a language they understand, but he cannot benefit them if he speaks to them in tongues alone.

14:20 Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.

The Greek word for “mature” (*teleios*) is the same word that is translated as “perfect” in 1 Cor. 13:10. As he did in 13:10-11, so, too, Paul here contrasts immaturity with maturity. When it comes to malice (evil), we should be babes (immature), that is, we should not be practicing it. But when it comes to understanding the gifts and their purpose, we should not be children but be mature, that is, we should have a full understanding.

14:21 In the law it is written:

“With *men of* other tongues and other lips

I will speak to this people;
And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,”

says the Lord.

Paul is not actually quoting from the law (the first five books of the Bible) but is quoting from Is. 28:11-12. However, the Jews often referred to the entire Old Testament as the Law. Taking into account the context of the Isaiah passage (Is. 28:7-13), the Lord says to Israel that he had told them where to find rest and refreshing but they would not listen. So, he will speak to them in another tongue, a language which they do not understand, and bring judgment on them.

14:22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.

When the Holy Spirit uses someone to speak in tongues to unbelievers, it is a sign that they are in fact unbelievers who are under judgment, just as Israel was. Prophesying, however, is a sign given to believers (and to those who will become believers, as we shall see in vv. 24-25) that they are not under judgment.

14:23 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those who are* uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

This verse is sometimes used to justify the banning of speaking in tongues in a church service. After all, there might be an unbeliever in the service. If today's churches

met in homes as they did in the first three centuries of Church history, then we would not have to guess if an unbeliever was in the service: we would *know*. Even so, Paul is not saying that speaking in tongues should be banned. In just a few more verses, he will give the instruction on how to use tongues properly in a service. Also, near the end of the chapter, he says, “Do not forbid to speak with tongues” (v. 39). What he is saying here is if *everyone* in the service spoke in tongues (whether one at a time or all at once), the uninformed (those who are not mature in understanding) and the unbeliever will think that everyone is crazy. Not only will they not understand what is happening and what is being said, they will most likely reject anything else anyone else has to say, even if the believers speak in a language that the uninformed and the unbeliever understand. Hence, they will remain uninformed and unbelieving.

14:24-25 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

Since prophecy is given in a language that the unbeliever or the uninformed understands, he or she will immediately recognize that the believers are saying things about him or her that they could not possibly have known unless God had told them. He or she will then acknowledge that God is truly at work in the believers and perhaps become a believer also. Again, Paul is emphasizing that prophecy is better than speaking in tongues alone. Speaking in tongues alone will drive unbelievers away but prophecy may lead them to become believers.

14:26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

The instructions Paul is about to give apply whenever the church has a formal service. Each man has something to contribute to the service, which means that every man should come to the service ready to contribute. The contributions include (but are not limited to) a psalm (song), a teaching, a tongue, a revelation (prophecy), and an interpretation (of a tongue). No one person has all of these gifts. Each man should contribute the gift he has been given. If a man does not, the church will suffer for it.

Notice that Paul does not say that the contributions have to be in this order at every meeting, that is, the psalm does not always have to precede the teaching. Nor does he say that each contribution must be made by the same person at every meeting. For example, the teaching does not have to be done by the same person at every meeting. Of course, if someone has been given the gift of teaching, most likely that person will contribute the teaching. But occasionally the Holy Spirit may give the teaching for a particular meeting to someone else. Nor does the person who has the gift of singing have to pick which songs to sing every time. Someone who does not have the gift can still suggest songs which can be led by the person who has the gift.

For the fifth time, Paul reminds the Corinthians that the reason for using the gifts is to edify the church. He has already pointed this out in verses 3-5, and 12 of this chapter. The motivation for using the gifts is not to draw attention to oneself but to benefit others. And ideally, the use

of the gifts is motivated by love for the people of the church (chapter 13).

14:27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.*

Not everyone in the congregation gets to speak in a tongue. Only two or at the most three are permitted to do so. Nor is everyone to speak in a tongue at the same time. The two or three are to speak in turn, one at a time. And each tongue should be interpreted. Paul does not mean that the same person should do all of the interpreting. He means that after every tongue, *someone* should interpret (meaning that an interpretation should be given before the next person speaks in a tongue) because, again, a tongue without an interpretation does not edify the church.

14:28 But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.

Despite what I said above, it is possible for the Holy Spirit to regularly use the same person to interpret tongues. If that person is not in the meeting, or if the Holy Spirit tells the person who wants to speak in a tongue that an interpreter is not present, then that person should keep silent.

The Greek word used here (*sigao*) literally means “keep silent.” The word also occurs in Acts 15:12 where it says that “the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul.” Here, what Paul means by “keep silent” is that the person should not speak loud enough for anyone to hear but can still speak in the tongue to himself and to God. Back in 14:2, Paul said that he who speaks in a tongue speaks to God and in 14:4, he said that he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself. Therefore, a person who is

prompted by the Holy Spirit to speak in a tongue when there is no interpreter can still speak in a tongue as long as no one else can hear him.

14:29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.

Again, not everyone in the congregation gets to prophesy. Only two or three are permitted to do so. “Judge” (*diakrino*) means “to separate, to determine, to give judgment.” A judge’s main job is to separate the oppressor from the oppressed, to separate the perpetrator from the victim. But before he can do so, he must determine whether the alleged oppressor or perpetrator is in fact doing something wrong. He then gives judgment depending on his determination. The purpose of judging the prophecies given in a church meeting is to separate the congregation from falsehood, but to do that, it must first be determined whether the prophecy is true. It is not the job of the prophet to judge whether his prophecy is true. That is the job of everyone else in the congregation. This is one area in which the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and the discerning of spirits would be useful.

What if the congregation determines that the prophecy is incorrect? Perhaps it contradicts the Scriptures or the predicted event does not come to pass. Should that prophet be banned from prophesying ever again? Should that prophet be disfellowshipped? After all, the Old Testament prophets had to be 100% correct because a false prophet was supposed to be killed. But that was under the Old Testament law, from which we have been redeemed. Jesus said that lusting after a woman was the same as committing adultery, and according to the Old Testament law, adulterers were supposed to be stoned to death. Should

we therefore stone to death a Christian man who lusted after a woman even once? Instead of banning the prophet, we should lovingly correct him and let him learn from his mistake. If he continues to give incorrect or outright false prophecies, then yes, perhaps a false prophet has crept into our midst and should be disfellowshipped. Again, this is where wisdom and discernment would be useful.

14:30 But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.

Paul is saying that prophecies should be given one at a time, as with speaking in a tongue. If a man is given a prophecy and is about to speak but another prophet begins to speak first, then that man should keep silent. Paul again uses the Greek word, *sigao*. Of course, the man can give his prophecy once the other prophet is done (as long as he is not the fourth prophet).

14:31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.

When Paul says “you can all prophesy,” he is not contradicting what he said in 14:29. He means that the gift of prophecy is available to everyone in the congregation. He had said back in 14:1 that everyone should earnestly desire the gifts, especially that they can prophesy. He will say it again in 14:39. Everyone should be desiring to prophesy, but only two or three can do so in any given meeting. The purpose of prophesying is to teach and to encourage the people in the congregation.

14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

The prophet can control when he speaks. Just because he has received a revelation (a prophecy) from the Holy Spirit does not mean he must speak it out then and there. He can wait until the appropriate time.

This is also true of the other gifts. The Holy Spirit distributes the gifts as he wills, but he will not override your free will and force you to use a gift. You control when you use the gift.

14:33 For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

“Confusion” (*akatastasia*) means “instability, disorder.” Peace occurs when everything is in order, that is, everything is in its proper place and everyone is doing what they are supposed to do. God is the God of peace, that is, order, not the God of confusion, that is, disorder.

Since God is the God of peace in all of the churches, these instructions apply to all of the meetings of every church. Any church meeting that is disorderly is not being led by the Holy Spirit.

14:34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says.

Saying that these instructions concerning the gifts apply to all of the churches made Paul think of a similar instruction that also applies to all of the churches: the women should keep silent. The Greek word here is again *sigao*. Just as the one who wants to speak in a tongue should keep silent if there is no interpreter and just as a prophet is to keep silent if another prophet is speaking, so too the women in the congregation are to keep silent. That is, no one else

should be able to hear them. This applies not just to the Corinthian church, but “in the churches,” that is, all of the churches. Instead, the women are to be submissive (to their husbands and to the church leaders). There is no specific commandment in the Old Testament law that says that women should be submissive, but Paul is probably referring to Gen. 3:16, which says that as a part of the curse on the woman, her husband would rule over her.

14:35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

“Shameful” (*aischros*) means “filthy, dishonorable.” It is the same word used in 1 Cor. 11:6 when referring to women whose hair has been shorn or shaved.

Paul is not saying that women cannot ask questions, just that they should do so at home, not during the church meeting. And they should ask “their own” husbands. This does not mean that a wife cannot learn from other husbands or other men (otherwise she could not attend a church meeting where teaching was taking place), but that the first person she should seek out is her own husband. This means that the husband should know God and the word of God better than his wife does so that he can teach her and answer her questions.

Nor is Paul saying that women cannot use the gifts. He mentions in 1 Cor. 11 that women can prophesy as long as they wear a head covering. That statement does not contradict what he says here in this verse because the context of 1 Cor. 11 is not the formal church service. The women are prophesying outside of the formal church service. Women can use the gifts, just not during the formal church service.

14:36 Or did the word of God come *originally* from you? Or *was it* you only that it reached?

This is a roundabout way of saying, “Do you think that you are so special that you are exempt from these instructions? Do you think that you know better than I do?” Paul is reminding the Corinthians that their church is no better than the others and so, just like the others, they are subject to these instructions.

14:37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.

Paul once again emphasizes the point that the churches are expected to obey these instructions, for they are not Paul’s commandments but the Lord’s.

14:38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.

Paul started this whole discussion of the gifts of the Spirit back in 12:1, where he says, “Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant.” The Greek word for “ignorant” (*agnoeo*) is not the same word for “uninformed” (*idiotes*). Both mean that a person lacks knowledge, but “uninformed” usually refers to someone who is illiterate or uneducated (but can learn), while Paul apparently uses “ignorant” to mean “willfully ignorant and unwilling to learn and to change his mind.” Paul does not want the Corinthians to be unwilling to learn about the gifts of the Spirit.

The commentary by Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown explains 14:38 the best:

38. if any man be ignorant--wilfully; not wishing to recognize these ordinances and my apostolic authority in enjoining them.

let him be ignorant--I leave him to his ignorance: it will be at his own peril; I feel it a waste of words to speak anything further to convince him. An argument likely to have weight with the Corinthians, who admired "knowledge" so much.

14:39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.

This is the third time that Paul uses the Greek word, *zeloo*, "earnestly desire." He used it in 12:31 and 14:1. Here, he says that we should "desire earnestly to prophesy," and furthermore, even though prophesying is better than speaking in tongues alone, "do not forbid to speak with tongues." If only the churches today would heed this commandment.

14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

Paul again states that the church should not run amok when using the gifts. The church cannot be edified if it does. The gifts should be used decently and in order so that the church can be edified.

Chapter 5

Earnestly Desire the Best Gifts

The famous chapter on love, 1 Corinthians 13, is wedged between chapters 12 and 14, the two passages in which Paul talks extensively about what the gifts of the Spirit are and how to use them properly in a church service. Paul's point is that the use of the gifts is supposed to be motivated by love. Since "love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own" (1 Cor. 13:4-5), the use of the gifts is not intended to draw attention to the one using the gift or to prove to others how spiritual that person is. Rather, the use of the gifts is intended to benefit others. In doing so, the person using the gift helps to edify the Church.

This ultimate purpose for the gifts of the Spirit was so important to Paul that he says so several times:

But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.... Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual *gifts*, *let it be* for the edification of the church *that* you seek to excel (1 Cor. 14:3-5, 12).

With this sentiment, the leaders of the Early Church agreed. Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons, wrote this around 180 AD:

Wherefore, also, those who are in truth His disciples, receiving grace from Him, do in His name perform [miracles], so as to promote the welfare of other men, according to the gift which each one has received from Him. For some do certainly and truly drive out devils, so that those who have thus been cleansed from evil spirits frequently both believe [in Christ], and join themselves to the Church. Others have foreknowledge of things to come: they see visions, and utter prophetic expressions. Others still, heal the sick by laying their hands upon them, and they are made whole. Yea, moreover, as I have said, the dead even have been raised up, and remained among us for many years. And what shall I more say? It is not possible to name the number of the gifts which the Church, [scattered] throughout the whole world, has received from God, in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and which she exerts day by day for the benefit of the Gentiles, neither practising deception upon any, nor taking any reward from them [on account of such miraculous interpositions]. For as she has received freely from God, freely also does she minister [to others].

Nor does she perform anything by means of angelic invocations, or by incantations, or by any other wicked curious art; but, directing her prayers to the Lord, who made all things, in a pure, sincere, and straightforward spirit, and calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, she has been accustomed to work

miracles for the advantage of mankind, and not to lead them into error.³

Now God shall be glorified in His handiwork, fitting it so as to be conformable to, and modelled after, His own Son. For by the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit, man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the likeness of God. Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a part of the man, but certainly not the man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God. For this reason does the apostle declare, “We speak wisdom among them that are perfect,” terming those persons “perfect” who have received the Spirit of God, and who through the Spirit of God do speak in all languages, as he used Himself also to speak. In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the Church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit the hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of God, whom also the apostle terms “spiritual,” they being spiritual because they partake of the Spirit, and not because their flesh has been stripped off and taken away, and because they have become purely spiritual.⁴

Origen, who grew up in Alexandria, Egypt, and was an elder of the church in Caesarea, testified around 228 AD:

³ Schaff, Vol. 1, p. 409.

⁴ Schaff, Vol. 1, p. 531.

For as the power of the Egyptian magicians was not similar to the divinely-bestowed grace of Moses, but the issue clearly proved that the acts of the former were the effect of magic, while those of Moses were wrought by divine power; so the proceedings of the antichrists, and of those who feign that they can work miracles as being the disciples of Christ, are said to be lying signs and wonders, prevailing with all deceivableness of unrighteousness among them that perish; whereas the works of Christ and His disciples had for their fruit, not deceit, but the salvation of human souls. And who would rationally maintain that an improved moral life, which daily lessened the number of a man's offences, could proceed from a system of deceit?⁵

...we, if we deem this a matter of importance, can clearly show a countless multitude of Greeks and Barbarians who acknowledge the existence of Jesus. And some give evidence of their having received through this faith a marvellous power by the cures which they perform, revoking no other name over those who need their help than that of the God of all things, and of Jesus, along with a mention of His history. For by these means we too have seen many persons freed from grievous calamities, and from distractions of mind, and madness, and countless other ills, which could be cured neither by men nor devils.⁶

In a document called *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* (also known as *Apostolic Constitutions*), which was anonymously compiled around 380 AD, we find this statement:

⁵ Schaff, Vol. 4, p. 451.

⁶ Schaff, Vol. 4, p. 473.

It is not therefore necessary that every one of the faithful should cast out demons, or raise the dead, or speak with tongues; but such a one only who is vouchsafed this gift, for some cause which may be advantage to the salvation of the unbelievers, who are often put to shame, not with the demonstration of the world, but by the power of the signs; that is, such as are worthy of salvation: for all the ungodly are not affected by wonders; and hereof God Himself is a witness, as when He says in the law: "With other tongues will I speak to this people, and with other lips, and yet will they by no means believe." For neither did the Egyptians believe in God, when Moses had done so many signs and wonders; nor did the multitude of the Jews believe in Christ, as they believed Moses, who yet had healed every sickness and every disease among them. Nor were the former shamed by the rod which was turned into a living serpent, nor by the hand which was made white with leprosy, nor by the river Nile turned into blood; nor the latter by the blind who recovered their sight, nor by the lame who walked, nor by the dead who were raised. The one was resisted by Jannes and Jambres, the other by Annas and Caiaphas. Thus signs do not shame all into belief, but only those of a good disposition; for whose sake also it is that God is pleased, as a wise steward of a family, to appoint miracles to be wrought, not by the power of men, but by His own will.

Now we say these things, that those who have received such gifts may not exalt themselves against those who have not received them; such gifts, we mean, as are for the working of miracles. For otherwise there is no man who has believed in God through Christ, that has not received some spiritual gift: for this

very thing, having been delivered from the impiety of polytheism, and having believed in God the Father through Christ, this is a gift of God....

Let not, therefore, any one that works signs and wonders judge any one of the faithful who is not vouchsafed the same: for the gifts of God which are bestowed by Him through Christ are various; and one man receives one gift, and another another. For perhaps one has the word of wisdom, and another the word of knowledge; another, discerning of spirits; another, foreknowledge of things to come; another, the word of teaching; another, long-suffering; another, continence according to the law....

Wherefore let none of you exalt himself against his brother, though he be a prophet, or though he be a worker of miracles: for if it happens that there be no longer an unbeliever, all the power of signs will thenceforwards be superfluous. For to be pious is from any one's good disposition; but to work wonders is from the power of Him that works them by us....

We add, in the next place, that neither is every one that prophesies holy, nor every one that casts out devils religious: for even Balaam the son of Beor the prophet did prophesy, though he was himself ungodly; as also did Caiaphas, the falsely-named high priest. Nay, the devil foretells many things, and the demons, about Him; and yet for all that, there is not a spark of piety in them: for they are oppressed with ignorance, by reason of their voluntary wickedness. It is manifest, therefore, that the ungodly, although they prophesy, do not by their prophesying cover their own impiety; nor will those who cast out demons be sanctified by the demons being made subject to them: for they only

mock one another, as they do who play childish tricks for mirth, and destroy those who give heed to them.⁷

These quotes (and I could cite many more from the leaders of the Early Church) demonstrate that the cessationist position is completely wrong. As defined by Theopedia,

Cessationism, in Christian theology, is the view that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, such as healing, tongues, and prophetic revelation, pertained to the apostolic era only, served a purpose that was unique to establishing the early church, and passed away before the canon of Scripture was closed (comp. 1 Cor. 13:8-12 with Heb. 2:3-4). It is contrasted with continuationism, which is the view that the miraculous gifts are normative, have not ceased, and are available for the believer today.”⁸

Cessationism teaches that the gifts of the Spirit ceased with the death of the apostles and the completion of the New Testament canon by the end of the first century. The quotes above, however, demonstrate that the Church continued to exercise the gifts of the Spirit through at least the fourth century AD, three hundred years after the apostles died and the New Testament canon was completed. The gifts included prophecy and speaking in tongues (which, biblically speaking, are actual languages, not gibberish). These quotes also demonstrate that the apostles were not the only ones to exercise the gifts, as the cessationists like to think, but all of the disciples could exercise the gifts.

⁷ Schaff, Vol. 7, pp. 479-481.

⁸ <https://www.theopedia.com/cessationism>

Cessationism is the attempt to justify why the majority of Christians in the modern Western Church do not exercise the gifts of the Spirit. We have been commanded by the Scriptures to seek the gifts:

But earnestly desire the best gifts (1 Cor. 12:31).

Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy (1 Cor. 14:1).

Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues (1 Cor. 14:39).

If these commands are not for the modern Western Church, why did God make sure they were included in his eternal Word? According to 1 Cor. 5:9, Paul sent a letter to the Corinthians before he sent what is now First Corinthians. Why did God not have Paul explain the gifts of the Spirit in that letter if the gifts were available only to the first century Church? God did not do that because his commandments concerning the gifts of the Spirit are to be obeyed by all churches in all ages.

Yet, many of today's churches do the exact opposite: they do not desire spiritual gifts and they do forbid to speak with tongues. These churches, therefore, are disobeying the Scriptures. Justifying this disobedience is the same as saying that the Scriptures forbidding sexual immorality and divorce no longer apply because so many Christians are disobeying those Scriptures.

Some cessationists try to eliminate the gifts of the Spirit by lumping all charismatics in with the heretical charismatics, such as William Branham, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, and the New Apostolic Reformation. They are committing a logical fallacy known as hasty generaliza-

tion: since these charismatics are heretical, *all* charismatics must be heretical. Therefore, we should reject their doctrine that the gifts of the Spirit are still available today. That is the same as saying since these same heretical charismatics believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, *all* people who believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God are heretical. Therefore, we should reject the Bible. The error in this thinking should be obvious.

The leaders of the Early Church did not commit this error. As the quotes above also demonstrate, they recognized that the heretics and the antichrists and the ungodly and the false Christians can also perform lying signs and wonders, but this does not mean that the true signs and wonders are therefore also illegitimate. Yes, there are churches and preachers who misuse the gifts of the Spirit. There are churches that ignore the rules of order in 1 Corinthians 14 and let the people roll in the aisles, laugh uncontrollably, and speak in tongues all at the same time, even when the pastor is trying to teach, thereby creating chaos in their services. One such church is Catch the Fire church in Toronto, Canada, and its pastor, John Arnott, has admitted that at times he has had to speak over the noise caused by his congregation.⁹ And there are preachers who believe that the gifts of the Spirit are for today but also teach terrible heresies, such as the doctrine that believers are “little gods.” But these same heretics twist the Scriptures to support their false teachings. Does that mean we should toss out the Bible because these heretics are misusing it?

For those cessationists who are committing the fallacy of hasty generalization, Origen has a piece of advice:

⁹ John Arnott, *The Father's Blessing*, 1995, p. 72.

Now it appears to me that we must lay it down as a general principle, that as, wherever anything that is evil would make itself to be of the same nature with the good, there must by all means be something that is good opposed to the evil; so also, in opposition to those things which are brought about by sorcery, there must also of necessity be some things in human life which are the result of divine power. And it follows from the same, that we must either annihilate both, and assert that neither exists, or, assuming the one, and particularly the evil, admit also the reality of the good. Now, if one were to lay it down that works are wrought by means of sorcery, but would not grant that there are also works which are the product of divine power, he would seem to me to resemble him who should admit the existence of sophisms and plausible arguments, which have the appearance of establishing the truth, although really undermining it, while denying that truth had anywhere a home among men, or a dialectic which differed from sophistry. But if we once admit that it is consistent with the existence of magic and sorcery (which derive their power from evil demons, who are spell-bound by elaborate incantations, and become subject to sorcerers) that some works must be found among men which proceed from a power that is divine, why shall we not test those who profess to perform them by their lives and morals, and the consequences of their miracles, viz., whether they tend to the injury of men or to the reformation of conduct?¹⁰

¹⁰ Schaff, Vol. 4, p. 451.

Instead of throwing out the good gifts with the bad, we should identify which ones are good and which ones are bad by testing them and testing those who exercise the gifts. The good gifts benefit others. The bad gifts benefit only those using them.

Some cessationists try to find Scriptural support for their position by pointing to 1 Cor. 13:8-10, which says,

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

The “perfect,” according to them, is the New Testament. The gifts were needed to confirm the truth of the Word preached by the apostles. But once the Word was written down in the perfectly inspired New Testament, the gifts were no longer needed and so they ceased. However, as we saw in Chapter 3, the word translated as “perfect” (*teleios*) should be translated as “mature.” Paul is not talking about the New Testament canon. He is talking about the maturity of the Church. When the Church finally becomes mature, then the gifts will no longer be needed and so they will cease. And when will the Church finally become mature? When we see Jesus face to face, that is, when we finally make it to heaven.

Until then, the gifts are needed to edify the Church, to build up the Church, to help the Church to become mature. As long as churches refuse to use the gifts and even try to justify not using the gifts, the Church as a whole will remain immature.

To summarize Paul's teaching on the gifts of the Spirit: There are various gifts of the Spirit which are available to the church. The Holy Spirit's job is to distribute them as he wills. Our job is to earnestly desire them and be ready to use them when the Holy Spirit gives them to us. But this does not mean that everybody in the congregation should use their gifts at the same time. The gifts should be used one at a time and we can do this because we control when we use the gifts. Our motivation for using the gifts should not be to draw attention to ourselves but to edify the church because we love the people in the church.

It is my hope that this commentary will encourage Christians to earnestly desire the best gifts and to use them properly.

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