Spiritual Gifts Week #2 – 28 Gifts of the Holy Spirit

An explanation of the 28 Spiritual Gifts

[ Alternative Sermon Series Title ~ ‘A new view for a new you’ ]

9.30a.m. Sunday 22 January, 2017

Key Bible Passages ~ Matthew 6:33; Ephesians 4: 7-16 (or 11-16); Romans 12: 3-8; 1 Corinthians 12: 4-12, 18, 27-31.

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Opening Illustration

After the usual Sunday evening service, usual in that it was rather dull and boring, a young boy walked to the rear of the church with his father. Mounted on the back wall of the church was a large bronze plaque. Somehow, it had never caught the boy’s eye before. When he asked his father about it, he was told, “It’s in memory of those who died in the Service.” After a moment’s thought the perceptive youngster asked, “Which one, the morning or the evening?”

What a shame, what a sin, that people are bored with the truth of God! Christ’s Body, the most dynamic organization in the world, is crippled because gifted people are either being wasted or misused.
One of our highest priorities as leaders in the Church is to help our members identify and develop the spiritual gifts God has given to them. These gifts are an important and vital part of their Christian life.

Given a blank piece of paper, I would suspect that many of us would have difficulty listing our own spiritual gift or cluster of gifts. Being quite truthful, many of us would probably have to admit that we’ve never given it much thought at all.

But just what are our spiritual gifts?

How do we discover them?

How do we go about identifying them in the people in our congregations? (All of them have gifts.)

Last Sunday I introduced the topic of Spiritual gifts. When I use the words ‘Spiritual gifts’, I mean gifts given by God’s Holy Spirit, or Gifts of the Holy Spirit (just to clarify).

**Summary of last week’s message:**

SPIRITUAL GIFTS – are special abilities that God gives you to accomplish His work.

- **Definition - A spiritual gift is a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the Body of Christ, according to God’s grace, for use within the context of the Body.**
- Given to every man to profit spiritually. Given to each believer ‘for the profit of all’. (1 Corinthians 12:7)
- Never given for selfish pursuit, or public advantage/exploitation
- They are for the building up of the whole body of Christ, and will also build the individual experiencing them.
- Given by God, never merited. So there should be no bragging about this gift, or no jealousy about this gift that someone else might have. We have them by grace alone.
• We receive them at the moment of salvation (the invasion of God’s Spirit within us – a deliberate and conscious decision to allow God’s Spirit to come in)
• The source → “All these are the work of the one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.” (1 Corinthians 12:11)
• Spiritual Gifts - We don’t ask for them; we long for them with great anticipation; they joyfully celebrate our life; they are given by someone who loves us.
• Every Christian person who is committed to Jesus and truly a member of His Body has at least one gift, or quite possibly more. (1 Peter 4:10)
• God has not entrusted any human being to give spiritual gifts.
• We need to know about Spiritual Gifts if we want our Church to grow.
• No one is rewarded with a gift due to their own ‘hard work’.
• Your PURPOSE in the Body (of Christ) is determined by your spiritual gift or combination of gifts. Our ‘self esteem’ escalates when our purpose is known.
• The Gift process → Discover ... Develop ... Use.
• Benefits of using gifts – GROWTH, God is glorified: we find our place in the Body.
• Attitude when using our gifts – humility, value each other’s gifts, being different from others is OK; encouraged to use our gift diligently. (Romans 12:1-16)
• Common reasons for not using our gift – fear/ignorance/scared of getting hurt or we just don’t like the gift we’ve been given.

The process of identifying your own spiritual gift is one that is to be initiated by prayer. This step is so obvious we often overlook it.

Remember, the Bible tells us to pray about everything. So that’s the first place to start. And also remember to follow up each of the other steps with prayer.

Keep in mind that the One who answers prayer is the same One who gives us our Spiritual gifts and gives us the power to develop and use them.

That’s a quick summary from last week. Let’s pray and then we’ll get into more about Spiritual gifts ...
Father, We do desire to know more from you. You are the Giver and source of all good gifts. As part of your Body speak to us concerning the gifts from your Holy Spirit for each one here. Remind us again that you give them to us for the sake of your Kingdom coming here on earth, as it is in heaven. Teach us this morning. Give us insight & understanding. May we serve you King Jesus with our gift, and bring glory to you every day of our lives, till you come again for your Bride.

Amen

Last week we also had a quick look at the 28 gifts of the Holy Spirit. There is a list of them on the screen now.

**THE most basic step for a Christian in discovering God’s plan for life is to discover his/her spiritual gifts.**

DISCUSS - What I’d like for you to do for about 60 seconds or so is to discuss with the person next to you (or around you) the following:

*Spiritual gifts work. They actually produce effective ministry. When they do not, something is wrong with the health of the church (Body). A Church will only grow when it is healthy.*

**Examples of Spiritual Gifts:**

There are 3 key chapters in the Bible to use as a major reference point to find ‘lists’ of Spiritual gifts.

- Romans 12
- 1 Corinthians 12
- Ephesians 4

So let’s have a closer look at those passages.
Romans 12 mentions –
1. Prophecy (preaching/inspired utterance);
2. Service (ministry)
3. Teaching
4. Exhortation (stimulating faith, encouraging)
5. Giving (contributing, generosity, sharing)
6. Leadership (authority, ‘ruling’)
7. Mercy (sympathy, comfort, kindness)

1 Corinthians 12 adds/mentions –
8. Wisdom (wise advice/wise speech)
9. Knowledge (studying, speaking with knowledge
10. Faith
11. Healing
12. Miracles (doing great deeds)
13. Discerning of Spirits (discrimination in spiritual matters)
14. Tongues (speaking in languages never learned, ecstatic utterance)
15. Interpretation of Tongues
16. Apostle
17. Helps
18. Administration (governments, getting others to work together)

Ephesians 4 adds/mentions –
19. Evangelist
20. Pastor (caring for God’s people)

Ephesians 4 mentions ‘offices’ rather than the underlying gifts. The 5-fold ministry of Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors & Teachers.

One of the greatest obstacles to growth in Churches today is that so many Churches assign members to vacant Church positions on the basis of their ‘availability’ rather than their ‘giftedness’. This needs to be changed. It is unscriptural!
Completing the MASTER list of gifts:

Scripturally, there are 3 Primary lists that mention 20 gifts specifically. **BUT … there are at least another 5 gifts that are mentioned in the New Testament.**

21. Celibacy  
22. Voluntary Poverty  
23. Martyrdom  
24. Hospitality  
25. Missionary

3 Final Gifts by observation of Church Life and Ministry:

26. Intercession  
27. Deliverance  
28. Leading Worship

**4 Areas that need special attention:**

Be careful not to confuse Spiritual gifts with

- **Natural gifts** (they may be linked, but maybe not). Atheists have natural talents! Spiritual Gifts are given by God and cannot be cloned by anyone.

- **Fruit of the Spirit** (Galatians 5:22-23). Fruit of the Spirit NOT given by God as a gift for some, but to ALL believers. Normal expected outcome of Christian growth, maturity, holiness, Christ-likeness and fullness of the Holy Spirit. Fruit are not discovered, they are developed. Fruit define what a Christian ‘is’. Whereas Spiritual gifts define what a Christian ‘does’.

  Question – Was the Corinthian Church problem with their ‘gift’ or with the ‘fruit’ of the Spirit?  
  Another Question – Why is love not to be thought of as a Spiritual gift?  
  Answer – look at 1 Corinthians 13.
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Christian Roles – don’t confuse gifts with roles. The most obvious spiritual gift that is also a Christian role is FAITH. ‘Without faith it is impossible to please God’ (Hebrews 11:6). But the gift of faith is so much more than the ‘fruit’ of faith, or the ‘role’ of faith.

**Question** - Can you think of some Christian Roles that might operate alongside spiritual gifts?

**Example** - **Giving** - all are instructed to give cheerfully (as per 2 Corinthians 9:7)

However, the Spiritual gift of giving is the special ability God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to contribute their material resources to the work of the Lord liberally and cheerfully, above and beyond the tithes and offerings expected of all believers.

Examples of the Spiritual Gift of Giving:
- Widows Mite (Mark 12:41-44). Jesus said ‘she gave more than all the rich people’.
- Christians in Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1-2) ‘who gave out of their poverty’.

Counterfeit Gifts (not to be confused with Spiritual gifts)

Jesus said, ‘For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.’ (Matthew 24:24)

Examples of Counterfeit Gifts:
- Pharaoh’s Magicians in Egypt (Exodus 7-8)
- Those who prophesy and cast out demons in His name, but in reality turn out to be workers of iniquity (Matt. 7:22-23)
- 1 John 4:1 - tells us to ‘not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God.’
- False gifts of - faith, miracles, healing, tongues, interpretation - may be produced by Satan.
- The counterfeit of the Spiritual gift of Discerning Spirits → clairvoyance.
Finding your Spiritual Gift – 4 Pre-requisites:

1. You have to be a Christian
2. You have to believe in Spiritual gifts
3. You have to be willing to work
4. You have to pray - ‘If any of you lacks wisdom, let him/her ask of God, who gives to all liberally.’ (James 1:5)

5 Steps (the 5 E’s) to Discovering your Spiritual Gift:

1. **Explore the Possibilities.** Study the list of gifts from Scripture. Keep in mind as you look at or study this list that you have at least one gift.

2. **Experiment with as many as you can.** Start with the gifts that seem to appeal to you the most. After all, that’s how you discovered your natural talents.

   Try the ones you like. But don’t stop there. Keep trying as many as you can.

   You may find that in some areas you may not have the gift at all. Keep trying, because you may find later on that you may be very gifted in some other area that you never thought you could be.

3. **Examine your feelings.** After trying each gift think about how you felt as you tried the gift. Did you enjoy it? Did you find some satisfaction in doing it?

   Or did it make you feel totally uncomfortable or frightened every time you attempted it? What is God saying through all this?

4. **Evaluate your effectiveness.** When you’ve tried a gift, give yourself an honest self-evaluation. If it is in an area in which you are gifted, the Lord will confirm it by the ability you display.

   Keep in mind that you will need to be patient with this step. Just as natural gifts usually take some time to develop, it’s the same way with spiritual gifts.

   Don’t make premature judgments about yourself. Watch for some improvement. Sure and steady progress will be a reliable indicator of a gift.
5. **Expect confirmation from the Body (congregation/leaders).** This is a very important step. Gifts are not given for our own personal profit, but “for the common good” (I Cor. 12:7). It is the right and responsibility of our fellow Christians to judge our abilities.

More than that, Scripture tells us, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). We may think we are very gifted in some area when really we aren’t.

A professor (from Bible college, speaking about his students) once noted, “It’s so strange to meet so many who claim to have the gift of preaching when no one has the gift of listening.” (interesting, hey?)

We may also think that we have no gift at all in a different area, when in all reality we just might have it. Listen to the honest evaluation and criticism of others. There are many times when they can see us even better than we see ourselves. Frank discussion with our fellow Christians may help us to identify the gifts we have or don’t have.

It has been our experience that many times other people who know you and have served with you can easily identify what your spiritual gifts are.

Talk to your Pastor, to Christian friends who have served with you, and to your family.

"For waging war you need guidance, and for victory many advisers" Proverbs 24:6.

**An explanation of the gifts:**

On Powerpoint on the screen – listed at the end of this document.

**3 FINAL IMPORTANT POINTS (Kingdom seeking principles):**

1. **Seek theGiver, not the gift(s)**
   If there is one place where many of the more Pentecostal/Charismatic groups have fallen into gross error it is this: They have become so obsessed with the gifts themselves (especially the sign gifts) that they have made the Giver of the gifts, the Saviour-God and His Son, Jesus Christ, of secondary importance. As a result, they have lost the truth of
the Gospel. In identifying and developing the gifts of our members it is of utmost importance that we continually hold the cross of Christ before them. Again, without that, all our efforts directed at identifying and developing their gifts will be misguided and fruitless.

2. Don’t just love your gift - Give your love!
The love of Scripture is not emotion merely but an activity of the will: it purposes the good of the one loved, expecting nothing in return (hence, the translation, "charity"). We must always be aware, then, that body function does not depend on spiritual gifts but on love. And while spiritual gifts are important, they are not so important as love. This is the message of I Corinthians 13. Verses 1-3 mention gifts without love. Verses 4-7 speak of love apart from gifts, which, if you had to choose, is much better. You see, if I really love the people whom God has given me to shepherd, I will teach them, exhort them, help them, encourage them, and so on. The emphasis of the gifts is service, and that stems from love. On the other hand, the most gifted person in the world (the imaginary character of verses 1-3) apart from love accomplishes nothing (verse 1), is nothing (verse 2), and gains nothing (verse 3). But love, whether gifted or not, will reach out to meet any and all the needs of the body. Love is the fulfilling of the law.

This was the basic problem in Corinth -- not a lack of gifts, for they had them all (I Corinthians 1:7). Their problem was a lack of love. Love would have dissolved or even completely avoided every one of their problems, including their abuses of spiritual gifts!

Mark it well: love will not only prevent the misuse and abuse of gifts, but it will also ensure the accomplishing of their intended purpose -- service to others.

So much better, then, not to merely search for a spiritual gift but rather to seek to exercise a gift in love -- to seek to help and to edify. Only that will fulfill the intended purpose of the gifts and meet every need of the body.

*Check your motive. The Corinthian believers failed to check their motives and as a result, they abused their gifts. We can check the nature of our inner motives by simply asking*
the question, why? Why did I give? Why did I lead? Why did I show mercy? Was I trying to shine my own light? Was I impelled by duty or guilt, or was it truly love?

3. Don’t save it up, serve it up!!
Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30)
Too often we have ‘served it up’ (in a bad sense) when we have used our gifts. But that’s not what I’m talking about here.
Having a gift is all about investing, but it’s not about saving!

CONCLUSION:
I really believe that the problem of not knowing our spiritual gifts is not a basic problem. More basic is the problem of not desiring very much to strengthen other people's faith. Human nature is more prone to tear down than it is to build up.
The path of least resistance leads to grumbling and criticism and gossip, and many there be that follow it.
But the gate is narrow and the way is strewn with obstacles which leads to edification and the strengthening of faith.

So the basic problem is becoming the kind of person who wakes up in the morning, thanks God for our great salvation and then says, "Lord, O how I want to strengthen people's faith today. Grant that at the end of this day somebody will be more confident of Your promises and more joyful in Your grace because I crossed his path."

The reason I say becoming this kind of person is more basic than finding out your spiritual gift, is that when you become this kind of person the Holy Spirit will not let your longings go to waste. He will help you find ways to strengthen the faith of others and that will be the discovery of your gifts.

So let's apply ourselves to becoming the kind of people more and more who long to strengthen each other's faith.

Let’s pray …
Father God,
Show us the gift that your Spirit wants to grow in us. Forgive us for just ‘paying our rent’ each week and ambling on. By your Holy Spirit, give us eyes to see the potential for your Church to thrive and grow and mature. Give each of us a conviction that you want us to buy into this life you died for. Allow me, through your Spirit to seek to understand the gift that is for me, the gift that is inside me. Help me to understand it and to use it to build your Church. Let me be radical in its use as it fits into your plan for your Church here. Amen

Closing Song ~ How great Thou art

Major Scripture passages on Spiritual Gifts:

- 1 Corinthians 12
- 1 Peter 4: 10,11
- Ephesians 4: 7-16 (or 11-16)
- Romans 12: 3-8
An Explanation of the gifts:

1. The Speaking Gifts

**Apostleship:** First on our list is the apostolic gift. The word apostle occurs approximately 75 times in the New Testament, in 19 of the 27 books. Because it refers to an office that died out when the apostles passed away, many exclude it from the list of gifts. On the other hand, many believe the gift did not die out. If “apostle” has a two-fold sense, in its restricted usage, the office has finished; in its broader sense, the gift still functions. Officially the apostolate ended with the apostles; unofficially, the apostolic gift persists to our day as the missionary gift.

The dictionary describes a missionary as a person sent by a church into an area, especially a newly-settled region or foreign country, to carry on evangelism or other activities. A missionary, then, is one sent to minister transculturally with church-planting goals. Linguistically, missionary and apostle are equals. Both are “sent” ones (Latin and Greek, respectively).

The **missionary gift** never comes alone. Other gifts are needed for effective overseas service, like teaching and evangelism and helps. But the missionary gift will enable the person to use these gifts transculturally. If no missionary gift exists, the person will have to employ his gifts in his own familiar culture. To witness competently across cultural lines mandates the missionary gift. Wherever a cultural gap exists, the missionary gift is needed if that person is to survive the strange environment, remain on the field, and do an effective piece of work.

**Prophecy:** A prophet of God was God’s spokesman. The Old Testament includes the writings of prophets, from Moses to Malachi. These men didn’t merely foretell the future, but rather did forth-tell God’s message, which concerned past and present as well as future. In the first century AD, before the New Testament writings were completed, revelation and special messages containing predictions concerning coming events were given people with the prophetic gift. But what about since the apostolic message has been recorded in Scripture for us?

God’s revelation has been finished. The Bible is our all-sufficient guide today. Until the completion of the New Testament, during the apostolic age, prophets gave necessary special revelations and reliable guidance. Since the completion of the Bible, in which divine revelation is once-for-all written, the gift of prophecy is now identified with proclamation based on God’s Word.
After the apostles founded the churches, the gift of prophecy was vital in the continued edification and correction of the church. Thus, it is not surprising to find apostles and prophets linked. A prophet proclaims the revelation of God’s Word.

**Evangelism:** Though all believers are to witness, the gift of evangelism is a special ability in communicating the Gospel message in relevant terms to unbelievers. Though the evangelistic gift should be distinguished from the teaching gift, true evangelism must embody some teaching. There must be a doctrinal content to the evangelism. This gift is not restricted to the pastor or the professional. Philip, the only person called an evangelist in the Bible, was a deacon.

**Teaching:** The gift of teaching is the supernatural ability to explain clearly, and apply effectively the truth of the Word of God. The gift will find outlet in a variety of ministries. Some will be able to teach the little children. Other will be able to rap with teen-agers. Some communicate best with adults.

Since growth in truth is so basic, so vital, and so continually essential for all believers from the newest to the most mature, it would seem the gift of teaching must be given to many believers. Teaching and prophecy are the only gifts listed in all three catalogues of gifts.

**Exhortation:** The word exhort in the original does not imply being bombastic, vociferous, thunderous. It may be translated comfort, console, entreat, beg, implore, counsel. In essence, it is encouragement. The gift of exhortation involves the supernatural ability to come alongside to help, to strengthen the weak, reassure the wavering, steady the faltering, console the troubled, encourage the halting. The ability to exhort is a gracious ability. It uses not so much sharp admonition as healing words. It works with compassion, not throwing a confessed sin back in the confessor’s face. Without condoning the wrongdoing, the possessor of the gift of exhortation will help the victim see how he can overcome. The gift is not so much exercised through public discourse, though this may be involved, as through personal counselling when one is called alongside in moments of misery. It may take time to encourage new believers, comfort the ill, counsel the perplexed, and strengthen the backslider.
**Word of Knowledge:** The gift of the word of knowledge is the gift which enables the believer to search, systematize, and summarize the teachings of the Word of God. Through it, the Christian is enabled to acquire deep insight into divine truth. Since knowledge helps others only when communicated, Paul speaks of the word or speaking of knowledge. This ability is closely related to the gift of teaching. However, in the gift of teaching, emphasis is on communication or utterance; in the gift under discussion, emphasis is on knowledge.

**Word of Wisdom:** Knowledge stored in the mind is useless unless it is applied. This principle pertains to divine knowledge, too. It’s not enough to be able to grasp and systematize the deep truths of God’s Word. Also needed is the ability to relate those truths to the needs and problems of life. This is the area in which the gift of the word of wisdom operates. The ability to apply knowledge to difficult situations, to weigh their true natures, to exercise spiritual insight into the rightness or wrongness of a complex state of affairs calls for the gift of wisdom.

Four major areas are suggested in which wisdom uses knowledge to achieve proper ends.

1) **Defense before hostile courts.** When Stephen disputed with Jewish leaders, “they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake” (Acts 6:10). Later before the Sanhedrin, his defense was characterized by such wisdom that the only answer the council could give was stoning.

2) **Answer to unbelievers’ arguments.** All believers are commanded to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). However, some have a special ability to meet attacks and to refute the arguments of unbelievers. Ability to answer critical attacks helps remove stumbling blocks which might hamper non-Christians from serious consideration of the claims of Christ. This discipline is called apologetics. The field of apologetics, which helps Christians subdue doubts, may have more value for confirming the church than for converting the world.

3) **Solution to problem situations.** Though all who lack wisdom are told to ask for it (James 1:5), some have special ability to resolve dilemmas. When Solomon was faced with the dilemma of choosing which of the two women was the rightful mother of one surviving baby, he certainly required the divine wisdom with which God had just endowed him.
4) Application to practical conduct. Both knowledge and wisdom do not necessarily reside in the same person. A person may be able to perceive the system of truth in the Word of God, yet lack the ability to apply these insights to life. Wisdom involves the gift of putting knowledge to work in daily experience.

2. The Serving Gifts

Ministration: Helps or Serving. The gift of helps carries the meaning of assistance, lending a hand. Its verb form was used by Paul when he told us to support the weak (Acts 20:35). A form of the same word was spoken by exasperated Martha, left alone to prepare dinner, when she asked Jesus, “Dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me” (Luke 10:40). Help here means literally, “to take one’s turn with.” Martha wanted Mary to do her stint in the kitchen. The gift of helps is the spirit-given ability to serve the church in any supporting role, usually temporal, though sometimes spiritual. The gift enables one to serve joyfully and diligently wherever and whenever required. Those served have more time and energy for the ministry of prayer and preaching, resulting in the blessing of others. This gift is not for helping the poor, sick, aged, orphans, and widows (which is really the gift of showing mercy), but for lending a hand wherever it will release other workers in their spiritual ministries, and to do it in such a way that it strengthens and heartens.

Hospitality: Peter commands us, “Use hospitality one to another without grudging” (1 Peter 1:9). Amplification might read, “Gladly open up your homes and welcome each other as guests, especially those who need a meal or a room overnight - and don’t complain about the inconvenience.” The gift of hospitality is that supernatural ability to provide open house and warm welcome for those in need of food and lodging.

Giving: Paul says, “He that gives, let him do it with simplicity” (Rom. 12:8). Simplicity is an interesting word and has been translated in many ways. Literally, it means “without folds”—as a piece of cloth unfolded—and is rendered simplicity, singleness of mind, singleness of purpose, mental honesty, without pretense. When one gives from such openness of heart, one donates freely, with delight. He gives
generously, with liberality. The person with this gift will give with a single purpose. No ulterior motive will ruffle the cloth of his mind as he gives.

**Government:** This gift is the Spirit-given ability to preside, govern, plan, organize, and administer with wisdom, fairness, example, humility, service, confidence, ease, and efficiency. It is significant that the names of the major offices of the church denote service. The word deacon is the word for minister or servant. Pastor is a shepherd, who certainly serves. The title minister really means servant. Genuine Christian leadership serves, not bosses. The teaching of the universal priesthood of all believers places leader and people on the same level.

**Showing mercy:** The gift of showing mercy is the Spirit-guided ability to manifest practical, compassionate, cheerful love toward suffering members of the body of Christ. Paul included the gift in his Romans list, “He that shows mercy, with cheerfulness” (12:8). Speaking words of strength in a sick home evidences the gift of exhortation, but going into the kitchen to cook a meal displays the gift of mercy. The gift of mercy is directed toward the saint in distress, the outcast, the poor, the underprivileged, the ill, the deprived, and handicapped, the retarded, the unlovely, the shut-in, the hungry, the alcoholic.

**Faith:** The gift of faith, listed by Paul in 1 Corinthians is more than saving faith. No one can enter the Christian life without exercising genuine faith. “For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8). To continue the Christian life also requires faith. “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). However, not all believers possess the faith to remove mountains. The inclusion of mountain-moving faith in the list of gifts distinguishes it from saving faith. The gift of faith is the God-given ability to see something that God wants done and to sustain unwavering confidence that God will do it regardless of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Stephen, full of faith, was enabled to perform miracles. The possessor of this gift will limit his asking to only those things God wants. His desire will correspond with God’s desire. Faith is firm conviction that God wishes to do something remarkable. Faith thinks big—but thinks the kind of big God wants. The gift of faith cannot be demand, for like all gifts, it is spirit-given as the Holy Spirit wills. Also, the gift must be used, not boastfully, but lovingly, for though one has mountain-moving faith, but not love, he is nothing (1 Cor. 13:2).
**Discernment:** Though every believer is responsible for discerning the spirits, some have a particular power to do so. This is the gift of discernment—a special ability to distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. A person with the gift of discernment can discriminate between that which is raised up by God and that which pretends to be. He has the ability to unmask Satan’s trickery, to detect false teachings, and to ferret out false teachers. He has the ability to spot a phony before others see through his phoniness. Certainly necessary in every age, this gift helps protect the church against the wiles of Satan who in every age transforms himself into an angel of light, in the person of false teachers.

3. The Signifying Gifts

**Miracles:** The definition of a miracle as the term is used in scripture would be an event of supernatural power, palpable to the sense, accompanying the servant of the Lord to authenticate the divine commission. Our definition of a miracle, which involves the setting aside of the laws of nature by supernatural power, is quite restrictive. In this limited, technical sense, miracles seem a rarity today, though we admit their possibility any time God wills. However, the denial of miracles as customary today by no means rules out wonderful occurrences, remarkable answers to prayer, extra strength, abundant provision, and timely protection. These marvelous happenings cannot be considered miracles in the narrow view because the laws of nature are not upset. But in the broader sense we call them miracles because of unusual and timely providential interference in human affairs.

Let us remember that the Lord’s dealings in the spiritual realm are much more significant than his workings in the natural domain. Calming the sea was remarkable, but not so important as stilling the tempest that storms in the heart of an anxious soul. Feeding the 5,000 was wonderful, but how much more beneficial to feed the multitudes the Bread of Life. Giving sight to a blind man was marvelous; but how much more exciting for a sin-blinded man to see. Raising the dead was amazing, but beyond description is the joy of seeing a person dead in trespasses and sins receive eternal life.

Jesus’ promises to his followers, “They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mark 16:16-18) were fulfilled in the miracles of apostolic days. But Jesus’ promise that his disciples would do “greater works than these” (John 14:12) is being fulfilled today. The deaf-to-the-Word begin to hear. The lame start to walk in paths
of righteousness. The purposeless become motivated to fruitful Christian living. The selfish make sacrifices. Those who wronged others make restitution. Those of whom it is said, “It would be a wonder if they ever believed,” find Christ. These are the greater miracles.

**Healing:** This gift is the ability to intervene in a supernatural way as an instrument for the curing of illness and the restoration of health. The topic of healing receives minimal mention in the epistles. If we were obligated to seek this gift of healing which Jesus and the apostles had, certainly the New Testament writers would have so informed us in their letters. The gift was witnessed in the days of the apostles since it authenticated their ministry.

Certainly worse than body sickness is soul sickness. One can afford to live and die with an ill body, but to go out into eternity with a sin-laden soul is tragic. A body with crutches thrown away or wheelchair discarded is great. But a soul with sins gone, removed as far as east is from the west, is much greater.

**Tongues and Interpretation:** Tongues are referred to three times in Acts and also in 1 Corinthians. In Acts, tongues seem to refer to a foreign language. Many, who would agree that tongues in the three episodes in Acts refers to definite languages, hold that tongues-speaking in Corinthians is of a different nature. Many think these tongues to be ecstatic utterances which do not correspond to any known language. Scholars differ on the issue.

The gift of interpretation, when the tongue was a foreign language, would be the ability to translate by someone who did not know the language. In the case of ecstatic utterance, the gift would be to interpret the non-linguistic sounds.

The major purpose of glossolalia (speaking in tongues) in Acts seems to have been evidential; that is, to authenticate the Gospel messengers. At Pentecost tongues-speaking attracted a crowd, provided a springboard for Peter’s sermon, and helped win 3,000 souls. After the Gospel was preached to Jews at Pentecost, the next major step in its spread was preaching it to Gentiles at Cornelius’ house. This major innovation needed divine authentication. Tongues were used to convince the skeptical Jewish believers that the Gospel was for Gentiles too.

Again at Ephesus when Christ’s finished work was declared to the dozen followers of John the Baptist, who had heard only of the forerunner, tongues offered evidence of the reality of Paul’s new message. Tongues, “*a sign, not to them that believe, but to*
them that believe not” (1 Cor. 14:22), gave divine endorsement to this new line of apostolic action. Thus, tongues deserve a place among the sign gifts.

However, if at Corinth tongues were ecstatic speech, their value was directed inward, toward the speaker, for others did not know what was said. To qualify as a gift a Spirit-given ability must be directed outward, to others, edifying the church. Thus, uninterpreted tongues-speaking, though some sort of a spiritual exercise, falls short of being a gift, for it, edifies only the speaker. “He that speaks in an unknown tongue edifies himself; but he that prophesies edifies the church” (1 Cor. 14:4). Thus ecstatic speaking fails to reach the status of a gift, unless interpreted and thus edifying.