

# **The Holy Spirit Given & Giving**

*Spiritual Gifts and Their Use*

*David Gooding*

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



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## Contents

1	<a href="#">The Gift of the Holy Spirit Himself</a>	3
2	<a href="#">Spiritual Gifts—Their Use and Regulation</a>	16
3	<a href="#">Spiritual Gifts—Practical Implications</a>	28
4	<a href="#">Spiritual Gifts—Practical Directions</a>	42
	<a href="#">About the Author</a>	57

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the English Revised Version (1885), the *King James Version*, or are Dr Gooding's own translations or paraphrases.

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## [The Gift of the Holy Spirit Himself](#)

### **Introduction**

My dear friends, it is a delight to be with you, and I thank you for your kind words of welcome. I congratulate you on the fact that you seem to have so many friends that are prepared to come and support you as you listen to your preacher! We shall begin our studies by reading a short phrase or two from the Gospel by John.

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *even* the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall bear witness of me: and ye also bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning. (John 15:26–27)

The topic that you have asked me to consider with you in the course of these four weeks is the topic of spiritual gifts, with special reference to the way that topic is dealt with in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapters 12–14. My approach will be to take those chapters and, as carefully and exactly as we can, to trace Paul's arguments, steadily taking them one by one in their own sequence, so that we shall come not only to what Paul says, but the general flow of the argument in what he says. We shall try to consider what he says in all its parts, giving proper and proportionate weight to those parts of the argument where Paul places his emphasis. If you are intending or able to come in subsequent weeks, it would be a great comfort and encouragement to me if you could have managed to have read again those familiar passages in 1 Corinthians 12–14, so that we shall all of us be prepared to listen to the detail of the arguments in those chapters.

The topic of spiritual gifts, glorious as it is, has not been without its difficulties in our modern world. Many and various are the interpretations that are put upon these things. Our task will be, as best we can, to examine objectively what holy Scripture says, remembering that holy Scripture is itself inspired by the Holy Spirit. But because we have four weeks, I have taken the liberty to reserve this first week for an introductory study in which we shall not be so much concerned with the spiritual gifts that God has given to each one of us, but with the gift of the Holy Spirit himself, and in particular with those gracious, practical, active ministries which the Holy Spirit himself performs on our behalf.

### **God's gift of the Holy Spirit**

You'll notice from the verses that we read that when our Lord Jesus charged his apostles with their great task of bearing witness for him in the world, he did not phrase himself in this way: 'You shall be my witnesses, and in your tremendous task, pray for the help of the Holy Spirit.'

That would have been true, had he put it that way; but he chooses to put it slightly differently. He says first, 'When the Comforter is come, whom I will send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father, he shall bear witness of me.' It is the Holy Spirit upon whose divine shoulders comes the tremendous weight of maintaining witness for Christ in this world. Not to us and our weak shoulders merely, is the task given, but primarily to him. 'He shall be a witness of me'; and then in our Lord's supreme grace he allows us to have a subsidiary part therein: 'and you also shall bear witness.'

So, if we are to think in these coming weeks of the gifts that God gives us that we might fulfil our task of witnessing to our Lord, let us first think of the Holy Spirit's ministry, and what his great objectives are as he sets about his task in the world and in the church. For after all, whatever gifts may have been given to us by God himself, it is the Holy Spirit who will use those gifts, and activate and energise and direct those gifts. If our gifts, whatever they be, are to be effective for God in our day and generation, we would be wise first of all to listen to what are the stated major objectives of the Holy Spirit, so that he may use us and our individual gifts in the furtherance of his own great objectives.

Here we can take comfort from the words of the Lord Jesus. He said to his apostles a few verses earlier, 'I have not treated you as slaves. A slave does not know what his master is doing. He is ordered to go there, to do this, to do that, but a slave isn't necessarily told what the grand objective in the scheme is. He is merely told to do it and to obey. I have not treated you like that. I have treated you as friends, and all that the Father has made known to me, I have made known to you' (see John 15:14-15). In his tremendous grace, the Lord Jesus invites our co-operation, explaining to us what his objectives are, so that we may intelligently co-operate with him, and with his vicar the Holy Spirit, in knowingly, deliberately, consciously, intelligently aiming at those same objectives in the use of our gift that the Holy Spirit himself has declared that he aims at.

And so this evening, I shall cover as best I can some of the activities, the active ministries, of the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. I shall not be able to cover them all, and you may well find fault with me that I've left out your favourite ones. Forgive me in advance! And I shall not be saying anything new. I shall be stirring up your pure minds simply by way of remembrance. Sometimes in the cut and thrust of battle, in the business of spiritual tasks here and there, it is possible for us to concentrate on the thing immediately in front of us and to forget the overall big objectives. It does us good from time to time to sit down from our activities and ponder anew the great objectives that the Holy Spirit aims at, and to which he graciously uses us and our gifts for their accomplishment.

### **The primary purpose of the Holy Spirit's ministry**

First and foremost, therefore, in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the first great purpose for which he came is surely this—to vindicate and glorify the Lord Jesus. Said the Lord Jesus a little later than the verses we read,

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you. And he, when he is

come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement. (John 16:7–8)

This is the prime purpose of the coming of the Holy Spirit. You will remember the tremendous event that took place on the first day of Pentecost after our Lord's resurrection, when the risen Christ poured out the Holy Spirit and there began a new era in human history, the like of which had never dawned before. This was a world-shaking thing. This was an altogether new category of ministry: the world had not seen anything like it before.

The birth of our Lord Jesus Christ at Bethlehem was unique in all the annals of history. There had never been anything like it before—that the very Word of God, through whom the whole universe was made, should become flesh and be born of a virgin. Unique in all the annals of history was his death. Millions and millions of men and women had died before, but never had a man died like this man died—the one sinless sacrifice for sin. There had been no resurrection like his. There had been resuscitations before, but our blessed Lord, when he rose, had a new kind of a human body—flesh and bone still, but a glorified body. His resurrection, we say in the fullest sense of that word, was unique, a first in all human history.

How could we possibly describe the awesome wonder of that unique event! He who was known as the carpenter of Nazareth stood at length on the hill of Bethany, and lifting up his hands, he blessed his apostles, and as he blessed them he was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And heaven itself saw what heaven had never seen before: a human being in the very presence of God. The incarnation, the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ our Lord, are not only unique in all the annals of history and of eternity, they have changed the very Godhead. There were times when the blessed triune Godhead was none of them human, but now, for our sakes and our salvation's sake, the very Godhead has been changed; and the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, not only became human but is human still. Oh, shout with excited praise at the wonder of it, as you consider the implications of the story of the gospel.

On the day of Pentecost, when Israel was celebrating the firstfruits—bread of the new year's harvest—the Holy Spirit came down from heaven. For what purpose did he come? Well, listen to Peter as he brings to its conclusion his masterly sermon delivered before the Jerusalem crowds on that occasion. He said, 'Ladies and gentlemen, what you are seeing is what was prophesied by the prophet Joel, "And it shall be in the last days, says God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh"' (see Acts 2:16–17). And what has that got to do with Jesus of Nazareth? It is this:

Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear. (Acts 2:33)

In other words, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was an activity of the blessed Lord Jesus now exalted. It was the Lord Jesus who poured him out. Peter bids the crowd see the implication of this stupendous thing:

Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified. (Acts 2:36)

I wonder if you immediately see the connection and the flow of thought between the two. How does the fact that it is Jesus who has poured out the Holy Spirit give Israel to know that God has made him Lord and Christ? Well, consider who the Holy Spirit is. He's not some impersonal power, like electrical power that comes from the power station, and with the flick of a switch you can turn the power on when you need it; and when you no longer need it you can switch it off. You need to realise this at the very start: the Holy Spirit is not some impersonal power or influence. The Holy Spirit is God, is personal, and we need to remember it because there is an altogether different relationship between us and a mere impersonal power, and us and a person.

We use electrical power; we control it. We do not use the Holy Spirit, nor do we control him. The Holy Spirit is none less than God the Holy Spirit. Consider the stupendous wonder of this: that he who was known here as the carpenter from Nazareth has been given by God the Father to pour out none less than the Spirit of God. Who must Jesus be, if he can pour out the Holy Spirit? None ever in known human history, no matter how exalted—be they Abraham or Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah or Ezekiel, or all of them combined—none of them had power to pour out the Holy Spirit. Only one who is himself God could possibly do such a thing.

The great demonstration of Pentecost morning was aimed primarily at this: to demonstrate before Jerusalem and before the eyes of the world, who Jesus is—God has made him both Lord and Christ. My brothers and sisters, if this is the number one ministry of the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, we do well to listen. For whatever gifts God has given us, the number one objective to which he will direct all our efforts is the glorification of the Lord Jesus. We shall have to evaluate our use of gifts by asking ourselves from time to time how and to what extent the use of our gifts serves this great objective.

### **The Holy Spirit convicts of sin**

The Lord Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment, but notice in what sense the Holy Spirit does that. Our Lord explains what he means:

And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye behold me no more; of judgement, because the prince of this world hath been judged.  
(John 16:8–11)

We have heard learned and effective evangelists point out that when the gospel message is delivered in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit convicts the heart of unregenerate men and women of their sin and their rebellion against God; convicts them of their sin of drunkenness, and tax evasion, and untruth, and cowardice, and impurity, and all those other ugly things that the unregenerate heart gets up to. And in one sense, they're right. But when our Lord said that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, he had one particular sin in mind. He will convict the world of sin 'because they believe not on me'—the cardinal sin.

The gracious Son of God incarnate had lived in our world, and spoken, and preached, and healed. The world had viewed him and on the whole rejected his claim and, refusing to believe him, had ultimately crucified him. Could you imagine a more basic sin? What a thing it was when human hands took a tree of wood and nailed God incarnate upon it, lifted it up and sunk it into the earth. The cross of Christ stuck upon our earth was but the cone of a volcano out of which erupted the rebellion of the human heart of all ages against God. And what a ghastly mistake, to refuse to believe God incarnate. Now the Lord is risen and ascended to heaven; and the Holy Spirit is come to convict the world of sin primarily in this particular—that they believe not on Jesus Christ, God's Son.

### **The Holy Spirit vindicates the claims Christ made**

The very presence of the Spirit here is the evidence that Christ is in glory. The fact that Christ is in glory is evidence of this next thing—of righteousness. The Holy Spirit will convict the world of righteousness because, 'I go to the Father.' The Lord was right then after all, and the presence of the Holy Spirit here on earth is the evidence that Christ was right and the world was wrong.

You will remember the prophetic words spoken of Messiah in Isaiah,

I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. (50:6)

What an eloquent description of the insolence and abuse that our blessed Lord suffered. Who shall measure the strength of his endurance and his patience, when God incarnate stood before mere human creatures and they dared dispute his claim, blasphemed his person and rough handled his body? How did he stand it? For our blessed Lord was no Stoic, trying to pretend that he didn't feel the physical pain, trying to overlook the much deeper offence of their moral and spiritual hostility, their false accusations and their denunciations of this person. In the prophetic word the Messiah tells us, 'He is near that justifies me,' (Is 50:8), meaning that God was at his right hand.

For the moment God the Father would allow man's evil court to condemn him. God would allow his dear Son to be nailed to a cross. God would allow those proud, heartless men to strut up and down in front of his cross and mock him with his claim, 'Pah, he said he trusted in God. Let God deliver him now, if he will have him. Let him come down from the cross and we'll believe him. But it's just typical, you know: that fanatic while he was here said he would destroy our temple and build it again in three days. Oh, granted he did an odd miracle or two, a psychological effect he had, but whereas he saved others, he couldn't save himself' (see Matt 27:39–43).

All that came out of the darkness as they taunted God's Son was the cry, 'My God, why did you forsake me?' And in the shadows of the cross, as we feel the heartbeat of our blessed Lord, we know what was going through his mind. 'He is near that justifies me.' And three days later, God moved to justify him: raised him from the dead, and on the fortieth day, placed him at his own right hand in glory—demonstrating that Jesus was right and the world was wrong.

The Holy Spirit has now been sent down to promulgate in us the verdict that has been delivered by the supreme court of heaven—to prosecute here on earth the case in favour of Jesus Christ our Lord. And it is of God’s magnificent grace that whereas the Holy Spirit is the chief advocate pleading the case of God’s risen Son before the world, he allows all of us to be junior counsel for the defence, to join in the defence of the Lord Jesus, thus that his name may be vindicated. And I warrant you, as you think of those things, your heart misses a beat or two. To think that God would allow me that indescribable privilege, to be junior counsel to the Holy Spirit; and as the Holy Spirit vindicates the Lord Jesus, he will deign to use my little life, and my stammering lips, and my feeble actions, as part of that great vindication of the Lord Jesus. As we contemplate things of that proportion, it begins to put the question of spiritual gifts into its true and proper context. Oh, if that be God’s intention, God give me ten thousand gifts: they would be all too few to vindicate his dear Son.

### **The Holy Spirit convicts of coming judgment**

Not only would the Holy Spirit convict of sin and of righteousness, but also ‘of judgment, because the prince of this world has been judged.’ We live in a serious age. There were times when the great wrath of God was not imminent. Much as the Old Testament prophets prophesied that one day there would come the great day of the Lord, it was not imminent. The divine counsels had it that, before the great day of the Lord should come, God must first become incarnate, and the servant of Jehovah must first suffer at Calvary, and be raised again, and the gospel be preached.

In those days, the great day of God’s wrath was not imminent, but things have changed since Calvary and the ascension. Listen to Paul on Mars Hill: ‘The time of that ignorance before Bethlehem, in all the nations, God overlooked’ (see Acts 17:30). It wasn’t that sin didn’t matter, but God overlooked it. That is to say, he didn’t visit the world’s sin with the immediate catastrophic judgment of the day of the Lord. ‘But now,’ says Paul, ‘he commands all men everywhere to repent.’ Why the hurry now; why the change? Now he commands all men to repent, as distinct from the ages when he overlooked man’s ignorance. Why? Because, with the resurrection of Christ, the day has been fixed. Already, the prince of this world has been judged, and the day has been fixed when God ‘will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained’ (Acts 17:31). For all you evangelists, what tremendous responsibilities come on your head and on your shoulders as you use the gifts that God has given you, in line with the objectives of the Holy Spirit, to convict this world of coming judgment.

### **The Holy Spirit’s ministry to believers**

But then our Lord indicated that the gracious Holy Spirit has a special ministry not only to the world, but to the believer. I remind you of those subsequent well-known verses where our Lord said that when the Comforter would come:

He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare *it* unto you. All things whatsoever the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he taketh of mine, and shall declare *it* unto you. (16:14–15)



To see those lovely verses in their proper context, in the frame that will set them off to most advantage, let us once more remember that when he spoke them, he spoke them as the lowly Jesus of Nazareth on his way to Gethsemane and Calvary – with not two pennies in his pocket, about to lose even his one splendid robe as they stripped it off him and played dice for it. And he said, ‘Gentlemen, when the Holy Spirit has come, he shall glorify me, for he shall take of mine and shall show you.’ And then he thought he’d better explain what he meant by saying, ‘He shall take of mine.’ ‘Mine’? What had he got? Says he, ‘All that the Father has is mine’.

Lovely, touching words, repeated over and over again in those last moments before our blessed Lord went up to Calvary. I have no right to go beyond my authority, but I fancy to myself that in Caiaphas’s court, and as he stood before Pilate, and as he hung in excruciating pain on Calvary’s cross, there came a surge through his heart – what he’d told the disciples over and over again, ‘All that the Father has is mine.’ Think of it, my brother, my sister. Stripped naked in all his shame upon Calvary’s tree, and comforting himself and his apostles with this tremendous thing, ‘All that the Father has is mine.’

And when the Holy Spirit came, that is indeed what he gave himself to do – to impress upon the apostles, and through them upon the generation of believers, the wondrous glory of the Lord Jesus. One thinks of passages like Hebrews 1 or Colossians 1, and who can take it in, for we’re told that all this vast universe which belongs to the Father, is all Christ’s. It was made in him, and through him, and for him. All that the Father has is his. Away with poverty – what wealth is here! To be honest, sometimes I find it difficult. I go out at night-time and look at the stars, as is my hobby, and see the two hundred and fifty billion suns that form the Andromeda galaxy – so far away they look but a faint smudge of cotton wool against the dark background of the sky. It’s so full of galaxies, by the billion, and I say to myself, ‘Is it possible, does it begin to be credible, that the maker and the owner and the goal of it all, came and died for you, Gooding? Is it true that whereas all that the Father has is his, it is also written that we are heirs of God and joint heirs of Jesus Christ, our Lord?’ The Holy Spirit has come to glorify the Lord Jesus before our very eyes!

### **Using our gifts to glorify Christ**

My brother, my sister, if you would use your spiritual gifts effectively, seek that you keep before you this glorious objective which the Holy Spirit has, when he empowers you, to glorify the Lord Jesus. What a marvellous thing it is to be used by the Holy Spirit to bring into the life of your fellow believer something of the unimaginable wealth of the Lord Jesus. They who know me best, feel so very often that they must use their spiritual gifts gently to chastise me, and rebuke me, and exhort me, and correct me. They’re very wise, and I’m sure the Lord has given them the gifts for that purpose, and they ought to persist in that ministry. I value them, of course I do: I ought to value them more. In truth, I have a kind of a natural preference for those whose gift it is to be used of the Holy Spirit to bring a little of the wealth of God and of the risen Lord into my humdrum life. Life is full of its pains, its problems and its difficulties; and sometimes we allow our Christianity to degenerate into a mere practical how-to Bible that settles our little problems.

I was away in a country, be it nameless, and I was asked to meet some young people in a newly-formed church. There were about two or three hundred, so I was told, but I was asked to meet some of their leaders. They'd not long been converted, dear souls. Eventually they turned up, and they had questions to put to me about how they should run their assembly. One man said, 'I've got a broken leg, as you see, and I'm off work.' Another man said that his wife wasn't feeling absolutely well; and then the other chap had difficulties at work. They had so many difficulties, and what would I advise? Perhaps they oughtn't to start the church and get going. They couldn't work for the Lord because they had too many difficulties.

Being an unsympathetic, hard-hearted old curmudgeon of the grisly sort, I was getting a little agitated at this point and in the end I said, 'In my parents' day, they had to be at work at six o'clock in the morning, and they had to work until six o'clock at night. After they got home, if they were going to the prayer meeting, they had to walk two or three miles, and the prayer meeting lasted until half past nine, and they had to walk three miles home. They had to be at work at six o'clock in the morning, back-breaking work on minimal salary, and there was no unemployment benefit. And they didn't say, 'First, let's get over our problems and then meet in the church.' The chief job of the church, as far as they were concerned, was to glorify the Lord Jesus. It's not a bad policy, is it?

Little problems, my dear believer. Seventy-five years from now they'll not be your problems: you'll have forgotten them. And for some of you, five years from now, they'll all be over! Let some of the glory of eternity seep into your very soul now, and the sheer wealth of the riches of the risen Christ, and all of his wealth for you too. That will lift you above the mere problems, and even life's heart-breaking sorrows. It's this ministry that the Holy Spirit has come to perform. If God is going to give me any gift, I pray that he should consider giving me that gift; that I might be amongst God's people as a someone who, when you meet, fills you with a sense of the wealth of God's Son.

### **The power of the Spirit – overcoming the world**

We need it in the practicalities of life, don't we? It's alright to say, 'I believe in the Lord Jesus because he cured me of rheumatism in the little toe,' or whatever. You're not always in the most danger when you're suffering from rheumatism and you're asking, 'Why do I have to suffer all this pain?' You could be in greater danger when you're in robust physical health, and the world is smiling at you, and presenting its fair and beautiful face to you with all its innocent charms—and they are innocent, most of them—and all its delights and loveliness, and life is going swimmingly. But behind it stands that reckless, devilishly clever prince of this world, who will take its innocent, lovely things and use them to draw your love away from the Saviour. Then you'll have a battle. How will you overcome the world? It won't be enough then if some grey-headed grandfather in the faith—who never knew all the temptations that you know nowadays—rebukes you and sternly reprimands you. Mere reprimands wouldn't overcome the alluring lovelinesses of the world. What will overcome them, and help you to keep them in proportion?

Says John in 1 John 5:7, it's the Spirit who bears witness to the deity of Christ. And why should I need to know about the deity of Christ? Well, because the secret of overcoming the world is a vigorous and unmoved faith that Jesus is the Son of God (see 1 John 5:4–6). If he is

the Son of God and the whole universe belongs to him, though for his sake you lost everything here, you haven't lost anything, have you? Of course, if he's not the Son of God, you would be a fool to lose anything. You would be a fool to spend five minutes of your time for Christ. Young man, young woman, don't try to be two things at once, will you? Don't try to get by with a conversion that has given you a ticket to escape hell and get you to heaven, and that's all you want; but until the door is opened for you to go, you want the world to the full. If Jesus is the Son of God, what a consummate fool you'd be not to sacrifice for him. Is he the Son of God? You say, 'Yes, I believe he is.' Do you mind if I ask you a question? How do you know he's the Son of God? You say, 'My mum told me.' Well, good old Mum. That's a very good and solid reason for believing it, but you'll need to have other, stronger reasons as well, won't you?

### **The equipping of the Spirit—effective advocates of the deity of Christ**

I was recently at a place, let it be nameless, and in the afternoon I was surrounded by eager and intelligent young men and young women, and this question of overcoming the world came up. At this juncture we were talking to one another about the secret of overcoming the world—believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And innocently, as always, I asked, 'Why do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God?' There was silence for a moment, and then one volunteered, 'Because the Bible says so.' I said, 'That is excellent.' And, twice as innocent, I said, 'And what makes you think the Bible is true?'

So why do you believe Jesus is the Son of God? Have you got six real good reasons that, if you were challenged by your friends at work, and they asked you, 'Why do you believe Jesus is the Son of God?' you could say, 'For this, this, this, this and this reason'? Have you got it, young man, young woman, at your fingertips? You'll need it in the battle of life—a real, solidly-grounded faith that knows its reasons and can give its reasons for believing that Jesus is the Son of God. The Holy Spirit has come, the Holy Spirit bears witness, along with the water and the blood, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

My brother, my sister; mother in the home; teacher in the Sunday school; you who are the teaching elders in your assembly, what a magnificent gift God has given you. But if he gives you the gift to witness to the younger folks in your church, and to supply them with the evidence that Jesus is the Son of God, may I ask you elders when you last put on a series of instruction lessons for the young folks in your church? Real, solid reasons for believing that Jesus is the Son of God? Or did you take it for granted that everybody in the church would believe, and so you didn't tell them why they should believe it? If our young folks are going to face this modern world, and as this age draws to an end, they will need more than ever—and the churches need it—to know why they believe that Jesus is the Son of God. If this is one of the major objectives of the Holy Spirit, then it follows that, as we use our gifts, however directly or indirectly, they ought to be aiming to contribute to this great end.

### **Other active ministries of the Holy Spirit**

Here, then, may I just list, in the manner of nothing more than a list, some of those other delightful active ministries that the blessed Holy Spirit maintains.

*The life of Christ*

He brings before us the life of the Lord Jesus here on earth. In John 14:25–26 and 16:13 our Lord says that, ‘When the Holy Spirit comes, he shall guide you into all truth. He shall bring to your remembrance everything that I have told you, and he shall declare to you things to come.’ The promise, as originally given, was given to the apostles. They had heard him say thousands of things, and saw him do hundreds of things while he was here on earth. How should they ever remember all those things, and remembering them, be enabled to write them down so that we in our day and generation could read them and profit thereby? Our Lord promised and gave his guarantee that their memory would be assisted by the inspiring Holy Spirit to bring before their memories everything that he had told them. Here is the guarantee of the reliability of the Gospel records of the life of our blessed Lord Jesus. And if the Holy Spirit inspired them to remember correctly, so that we might know the certainty of these things pertaining to the life of our Lord Jesus, how necessary it is that we constantly survey that lovely life.

Sometimes, because the Epistles are easier to get through in church discussions and Bible readings, the church concentrates on Epistles for generation after generation, and gives scant attention to the Gospels. That’s a pity, for in the Gospels we have that all-glorious life. We feel and sense the thrill of it when John tells you from his pen, ‘The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us, and we beheld his glory’ (John 1:14). And he says, ‘Would you believe it, we touched him, and handled him, and saw him, and watched him, and contemplated him’ (see 1 John 1:1–3). And the Holy Spirit has come to bring to our remembrance too, those lovely things of that perfect, sinless life here on earth, that we might intelligently have something in our mind to which we would conform, and come to be like the Lord Jesus. How should I do it, unless I know what he is actually like?

*The love of Christ*

And then the Holy Spirit delights not only to remind us of the life of the Lord Jesus here on earth, but loves to expound to us his death upon the tree. I think now of that beautiful passage in Romans 5 where, according to Paul, we are told that the Holy Spirit takes God’s love for us and pours it out into our hearts by expounding to us the logic of the love of God, as expressed at Calvary. Learning the love of God, it is not necessary to be filled with all kinds of romantic feelings. Behind the love of God there is a divine and eternally consistent logic, and the Holy Spirit argues the case thus:

While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him. (Rom 5:8–9)

Oh, what a lovely, delightful ministry of the Holy Spirit. I travel from time to time into eastern countries where, because of the vagaries of history, many of God’s people have not only suffered physical privation of extreme kind, and on top of it persecution, but many of them have yet to learn that, in the love of God, they can be completely secure. They live in doubt, fearing at last they may be lost. It would break your heart to stay among them. To think how much we are blessed in this favoured country we know; and God has not only blessed us with such immeasurable spiritual blessings, but piled on top his material blessings as well

and relieved us of persecution. Oh, my brothers, my sisters, if it be true that to him who much is given much would be required, what shall God require of us who have been given so much and have suffered so little, when others have received so little and have given so much? Again, lurking underneath many a blue suit or a pretty pink dress, even in Ulster, there are believers who from time to time become uncertain of their salvation. What a delightful ministry God gives to you, my brother, my sister, to be used of God's Holy Spirit to take the love of God and pour it out in their hearts, until their hearts are rooted and grounded in the security of utter assurance of the unchanging love of God.

### *The resurrection and the 'deep things' of Christ*

The Holy Spirit reminds us of the life of Christ and of the death of Christ. He tells us also about the resurrection of Christ, and that we're seated with him in heavenly places. He makes possible our worship of the Father—that we worship him in Spirit and in truth. And he reveals to us the deep things of God. Says Paul, 'While we preach a message that to the unconverted is foolishness, amongst those who are mature we preach the wisdom of God, not the wisdom of this world. For none of the princes of the world knew it, for if they had known God's deeper wisdom, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. But we speak the deep things of God' (see 1 Cor 2:6-8).

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. (1 Cor 2:9 KJV)

You say, 'I'm looking forward to getting to heaven so that I shall begin to enjoy all those deep things of God.' So you will, but you don't have to wait until you get to heaven before you start enjoying them. Of those deep things of God, listen to what Paul says: 'He has revealed them to us.' 'Careful, Mr Preacher,' say my seniors, 'now please, tonight, don't go into deep things!' Well, I know what they mean. But with all the intemperance and impatience of youth, like a puppy on a lead, I want to strain at the lead. Why not go into the deep things? If you were invited to Buckingham Palace, would you be content to examine the fur of the sentry in the sentry box outside? Well, stay there and do it along with the tourists, if you like! I should like to go into the Palace and see the Queen's collections of oil paintings, and the silver, and the deep things of her Majesty.

What of the deep things of God? You say, 'That's too much for us, how could we understand them?' Ah, but God has thought of your difficulty. He has given us his Spirit; says Paul, 'for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God' (1 Cor 2:10). Have you ever thought why there has to be a Holy Spirit in addition to God the Son and God the Father? God makes himself known through the Lord Jesus, but then why do I need the Holy Spirit? Well, for this reason. God makes himself known perfectly in the Lord Jesus, but how would I ever grasp all that there is in the Lord Jesus? And so God gives me his Holy Spirit so that the Holy Spirit, coming alongside my spirit, can help me grasp the things of God. It's not left to me.

I have a secret little interest in physics and cosmology, and the other year I had such a lovely experience. I was at a Christian camp away out in Japan, and there I found a real live physicist! I couldn't resist the opportunity, and when the formal part of the meeting was

over—he was a good Christian man, and he expounded Scripture very well—I went up to him with all my barrage of questions about cosmology and big bangs and black holes and goodness knows what other things. He looked at me benignly and smiled, and then said, ‘That’s not a very helpful question you’ve asked.’ Here was me in my ignorance, I knew so little. I didn’t even know the right kind of questions to ask: I’d asked silly questions apparently! That’s what comes when you’re not an expert. Oh, how would I begin to know the questions to ask about the deep things of God? The physicist in Japan had done the research so he knew what questions to ask, and he could lead me to fathom some of these deep things. Oh the wonder of it, my brother, my sister, God has given you his Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit fathoms the deep things of God, and is able by the genius of his skill to make them real to you. What a magnificent person, and what a marvellous ministry!

*The Holy Spirit’s transforming power*

Finally, he is the great power that is in our lives, that we should live holy lives.

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would. (Gal 5:17)

The old flesh has its desires. When they would rise, then the Holy Spirit raises his desires in my heart, and I am supposed to co-operate with the Holy Spirit, so that his desires win.

I have a shower-bath in my bathroom and, like me, it’s antiquated. I’ll tell you a secret about this shower, if you wouldn’t mind my now descending into pathos at the end of these solemn considerations! When of a morning one goes to take a shower, the water out of the hot tap eventually becomes so hot it would scald the skin off you. So then you adjust the cold tap, and you think you’ve just got it right, and you’re just getting under it and enjoying this marvellous thing when out comes water as cold as the Arctic Ocean. When I put that little problem to an expert in these things, he shook his head and he said,

‘You see, Gooding, the hot water comes out of the tank.’

‘Yes, reasonable enough.’

‘The cold water comes direct out of the mains.’

‘What’s that got to do with it? Where else would it come from?’

‘Ah but, when the hot water comes and presently the mains comes, the mains has got such force that it overcomes the hot water.’

‘Oh, is that so?’

So now I know why it happens, and that’s as far as I’ve got!

You see, my desires are not enough. My spirit has desires, but with all its old unregenerate powers that would move me to do all kinds of things. But then, by God’s grace, the Holy Spirit too has desires, and his desires are far stronger. God give me the grace—because I’m not a machine nor a shower tap in the bathroom but a human personality—God give me the grace to submit to the desires of the Holy Spirit within, that his desires may overcome the desires of the flesh. And if that’s his ministry, then if God has given us gifts, let us pray that God will use our gifts, however directly or indirectly, for the achieving of this other great objective of the Holy Spirit’s ministry.

**Subsequent studies**

Oh how much I've left unsaid, and how poorly I have said what I have said, but you would have caught the purpose of it all. Next week, God willing, and in the following weeks, we shall be considering the gifts that God has given us, which the Holy Spirit seeks to energise and use. Tonight, we have been seeking to put them in their greater context, to think of their great objectives, as we find them in the person and active ministry of the Holy Spirit himself.

Shall we pray.

And now, Father, we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus, that thy Holy Spirit who has thus inspired thy word that we have been studying here this evening, would now take this word and make it real, make it meaningful, and help us to grasp the great objectives of the Holy Spirit that we may use our gifts to those same objectives. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Spiritual Gifts – Their Use and Regulation

Let us begin this evening by reading two brief references in 1 Corinthians:

Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. (12:1)

Brethren, be not children in mind: howbeit in malice be ye babes, but in mind be men. (14:20)

As you will remember, the topic that you have set before me in these four weeks is the topic of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, their use and regulation. In order to put this topic into some kind of context, we thought together last week about the Holy Spirit himself, and that glorious ministry which has been committed to him by God on the behalf of God's Son. We thought about the great objectives that the Holy Spirit has as he carries on his active ministries. We saw how wide those objectives were, how many and how glorious. We thought about them at length for this practical reason: that now, as we come to think about the gifts that God has given us and how we ought to use those gifts, we might have a clear picture in our minds of the objectives that we too ought to be aiming at in the use of our gifts.

To witness to Christ in this world is not left primarily to us, thank God. The Lord Jesus observed that, when he went away, the Holy Spirit would come and it would be the Holy Spirit's responsibility to conduct, throughout the whole world, God's witness to his glorified Son. Thank God that the weight of that responsibility does not rest primarily with us, but primarily with God the Holy Spirit. And thank God for the glorious record of the centuries, the heart-stirring way that the Holy Spirit has fulfilled his great commission and carried on the witness to the name of the risen Christ. Starting from the secrecy of the upper room in Jerusalem, he has spread the name of Christ throughout the length and breadth of our planet. 'But,' said our Lord Jesus, 'you too shall witness' (Acts 1:8). Ours is a great and glorious privilege of using whatever gift God gives us to aim at the same glorious objectives as the Holy Spirit himself aims at.

Last week we studied those objectives, and tonight we're to come to think about our own spiritual gifts, how to control them, how to use them, our attitude and our motive towards them, and our evaluation of them and their results. Let me make one or two preliminary observations as we come to study these chapters. What I propose to do tonight and next week, God willing, is to work through these three chapters, 12, 13 and 14, and to examine them quite closely and as rigorously as is in my powers to do. They are long detailed chapters, full of very close logical argument. Therefore we must attempt to bring out the very best powers of attention we have and to apply them with all due rigour and concentration for the hour or so that we are together. The toil of doing it will keep our brains warm in this cold temperature!



We shall notice that, in the course of making his statements and arguing his case, the Apostle Paul very often uses two-sided arguments—arguments with two parts to them. When we first meet them, he will seem to be just repeating himself. We shall have to take the trouble to see that he's not repeating himself. In masterly and balanced fashion, he is putting two sides to the question. That will once more involve me in a great deal of very close argumentation.

We shall attempt to follow these arguments in the order in which they come. We shall try to resist the temptation to say, 'I know what chapter 12 says, but what about chapter 14?' I shall try to resist that. I shall attempt to come at them with you as the Corinthians would have come at them when they first heard these chapters read in their church, taking the arguments as they come, noticing their order, what Paul puts first, and what he puts in the middle, and what he puts at the end. And then we shall try to notice the proportion of his arguments—which arguments he gives a great deal of space and time to, so that we may concentrate on them in particular. So all I can promise you is hard work, both tonight and in the nights that shall follow!

Perhaps some of you might be tempted at this point to protest. 'Mr Preacher, you are now giving evidence that you are wrong-headed. The topic of spiritual gifts, above all topics in the whole of the Bible, is meant to a topic full of verve, and fervour, and spiritual elation, and shouts of 'Hallelujah!' Is it not a complete travesty, a grotesque misrepresentation of the whole topic, to reduce it to a couple of hours of long, and learned, and logical, rigorous argument and detail?' And if that's how you feel, then I think I understand your heart, and I shall have to say a few words in defence before we proceed.

I could wish that these chapters were full of verve, and fervour, and exaltation, and elation, and that they would have you shouting 'Hallelujah!' But I wasn't allowed to write the first Epistle to the Corinthians! It was the Apostle Paul who wrote it and if I would be faithful to what he has written, I must simply repeat and expand upon what he said. But to my rescue at that point come two or three observations.

The first is this. If you're talking about spiritual gifts, could you find for me a bigger spiritual gift than that which the Apostle Paul had? I rather fancy he had half a dozen gifts. He was a preacher of the gospel, a teacher to the Gentiles, an apostle and an evangelist. If ever a man had a plethora of spiritual gifts, it was Paul. Most of us wouldn't be sitting here tonight had Paul not first brought the gospel to Europe and used his gift for the evangelization of us out-of-the-way Gentiles. And here the gifted Paul is using his spiritual gift, particularly his gift of teacher and pastor. If you want to see an example of a spiritual gift being used at the level of teaching, then here we have it in front of our very noses. These three chapters are the result of an inspired apostle using his spiritual gift to teach us.

That's my first line of defence, and my second is this. I'm sure you'll agree with me that beyond this great Apostle Paul as he teaches us, is none other than the Holy Spirit. And if I want to know about spiritual gifts and how they should be used, and what spiritual gifts I ought to be seeking, and what my motives and objectives ought to be in seeking those spiritual gifts and in using them, to whom could I possibly go who would be better or more authoritative than the gracious Holy Spirit himself? It is he who tells us here about the spiritual gifts he has given and the spiritual gifts that he would empower us to use.

My third line of defence is as follows. Around about Christmas time, my car, being a very venerable jalopy, broke down. It was a minor complaint, arthritis in the works somewhere! When the hours of Yuletide were gone by, I called my motor mechanic. He is a bright young man, and when he arrived in all his kindness, he came up in a splendid motor car. It made my jalopy blush for shame! I cast an envious eye and said, 'That's a beautiful car' and he said 'Yes, I got it second-hand.' I gently inquired how much they would cost, for I had notions in my head! He told me what they cost but then, looking at me straight in the eye, he delivered a warning. He said, 'It's not everybody's car to drive: the thing is so powerful that, if you weren't careful, you could put your foot down and the back would come twizzling round to meet you in the front.' That would never do for me, for I wouldn't know what to do if the back came round to the front, so I said, 'Ah, pity, yes, I understand,' and we went about our business.

But you see the point. The car was very powerful, but it couldn't be entrusted to an incompetent driver like me: I wouldn't know how to drive it properly. It wouldn't be the fault of the car, it would be my fault. I could do a lot of damage to myself and other folks if I didn't learn patiently how to control this very powerful car. I'm not denying that God's gifts, these spiritual gifts, can be exceedingly powerful. But the more powerful your spiritual gift is, the more you will need to seek the instruction of the Holy Spirit on just how to use that gift, so that you may use it to your own profit and to the profit of the church, and not do damage to yourself and others; and not damage yourself by seeking spiritual gifts that are not within your competence to use, and which the Holy Spirit has never designed to give you.

### **Testing the gifts**

So then we start upon our task, and we come to the very first statement that Paul makes here about spiritual gifts, and let's read it together. You'll need to check on me tonight and in these coming weeks, because in some things, perhaps in a number of things, you will be inclined to disagree with me at the first. You may still be inclined to disagree with me at the last, but that's another story! At least give me the opportunity to point out that what I'm attempting to expound is what is here written in holy Scripture. And the very first thing that Paul is led to mention when it comes to the topic of spiritual gifts is this:

Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that when ye were Gentiles *ye were* led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever you might be led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking in the Spirit of God saith, Jesus is anathema; and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit. (Acts 12:1-3)

So the first thing that the Holy Spirit guides Paul to say, and the first thing that Paul feels led to urge upon the believers, is that any spiritual gift must be tested to see whether it is a genuine gift of the Holy Spirit or not. Why does it need to be tested? Paul gives us one hint here in verse 2. Many of the people to whom he was writing were Gentiles. Before they became Christians, some of them, most of them perhaps, had been involved in pagan religions of various kinds. Some of them, he says, were led away to dumb idols, and the verb he uses is

very interesting. He says they were led away, as though some power got hold of them and led them away—not ‘they went after them’ but ‘they were led after them’.

Idolatry has a great fascination for many people, but in addition there were some religions in the ancient world that were what you might call ecstatic religions. Let me just mention one example to you. The worship of Dionysus, which came from Asia Minor across into Greece and from Greece into Rome, was the worship of a god who was thought to be the deification of wine, and the deification of ecstatic experience. Wine, actually, served a very small part in the worship of Dionysus. The form it took in Greece was this. Womenfolk, and it was generally women in Greece rather than men, would band together in a group. They would have, as their leader, a young man—preferably good-looking and one whose hair was allowed to grow long.

At a certain time in the year this band of women, led by their young man, would leave their homes—leaving their household chores and even leaving their babies in their cradles—and off they would go up the mountains to celebrate the worship of Dionysus. The women would dress themselves up in fawn skins—fawns as in the young of deer. They would carry a fennel reed in their hands, suitably adorned with tufts of material that were thought to have magical powers. As they followed their leader, they came to believe that this young man was the god incarnate. As they followed him, they hoped that the spirit of the god would enter into them and give them wonderful, ecstatic experiences. When they got up the mountaintop, they would very often sit down comfortably on the cushion of the leaves and nurse the young of animals, and cuddle them peacefully. Then at times they would start singing in the spirit—a weirdly beautiful kind of music, according to the reports of those that heard them—weird, almost supernatural music, like somehow a power coming upon them so that they sang in the power of this spirit, whatever it was.

Of course, there were other sides to their ecstasy. Presently, they would rise up like a pack of wolves, run down the mountainside, and coming across a heifer or a bull, they would attack it and, by sheer brute force, these women would tear the animal limb from joint with a power that was certainly more than normal in human beings. And they would dip their fingers in the raw flesh, and eat the raw flesh; and in their ecstatic state it would seem to them that the bull they had torn to pieces represented the god, and as they ate it, the god was going into them. In Greek, they called their experience *éntheos*, meaning ‘God in you’. The elation and the ecstasy that accompanied it, they called *enthousiasmós*, from which we get our English ‘enthusiasm’. Then they would run down the mountainside to the next village, enter into the homes of the people, snatch little babies out of their cots, for instance, and put them on their shoulders, and go dancing away without holding them, and the babies would stay put on their shoulders, such was their sense of balance. And when the farmers came out to protect their homesteads and flung spears at them, the spears would pierce their flesh but no blood would come.

It isn’t just in Christian circles that you meet ecstatic experiences, or singing in the spirit. The great Greek tragedian writer Euripides wrote a magnificent play on this very topic of this ancient worship of Dionysus, and its ecstasies and its beliefs. It is very necessary, therefore, that Paul should first remind the believers at Corinth—some of them mixed up in the pagan cults of the ancient world—that they were to test their experiences to make sure that what they now had as Christians was the real thing, and not a deception.

### The test of sound doctrine

By what test, then, would you test a spiritual gift to see whether it is genuinely a gift from God, and not some counterfeit? Here we come to the second very important thing. The first and foremost test of a spiritual gift is the doctrine that is conveyed by that gift. Says Paul, 'No-one speaking in the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is anathema".' What he means is this. He's not talking about an ordinary, everyday statement or conversation. He's talking about what a person would say when they came under the influence of this spiritual power and spoke in some kind of ecstasy; or when somebody got up and professed to be a Christian teacher, and to be led and empowered and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and proceeded to teach the Christian congregation. Then what does the man say? His gift is to be tested according to its doctrinal content – what it says about the Lord Jesus.

An evil spirit will refuse to acknowledge the unique deity of Jesus Christ, our Lord. They may talk about Lord, they prefer to talk about Jesus, but they will not admit that Jesus is the sole and only Lord. You say, 'Are you not now delving into remote things that are not likely to trouble us here? My great, great grandmother and her great, great grandmother were all of them Christians. Have you not mistaken your congregation, to warn us of these things?' Well, I hope I have, but we're moving into a changing world. Up and coming, sweeping America and sweeping the continent, and soon you'll know it here in Ireland, will be the tenets of the New Age movement. That New Age movement is a mixture of all kinds of religion, and a great part of it is Hinduism. There was a little crude smattering of it some years ago. I remember seeing the lorries go through Belfast all decorated up with garlands, and they called themselves the *Divine Light Mission*. They were rather an amateur crowd. Their leader came from India, and they made a lot of money eventually. But then his mother at home in India decided he wasn't the Messiah after all, his brother was, so she called him home and sent his brother. It's nice to have somebody in control!

I remember one afternoon distinctly. There came a knock on my door and outside was a dear young lady, and she was canvassing for this aforesaid *Divine Light Mission*. She informed me that she'd been to London and she'd seen the light. Marvellous experience it was, she said, and I think she wanted me to go to London also and see the light; and what did I think of that? And I said, 'My dear, I've no doubt at all but that you've seen the light. My question would be, which light?' She said, 'What do you mean?' 'Well,' I said, 'holy Scripture tells us that Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light, and his minions do the same. So we have to distinguish between that false light of Satan and his minions, and the true light of the world. Which light did you see and how do you know which one you saw?'

As we stood talking, her leader came up, and he began to get rather angry about us narrow-minded Northern Irish people. (I thought that was a compliment, being an Englishman myself!) 'We all believe the same,' he said. 'You narrow-minded people wanting to make differences between religions, we all believe the same and believe that Jesus is the Messiah, just like you do. But I also believe that this good Indian man is the Messiah too.'

I said, 'Where is he at the moment?'

'In Boston, in the States.'

'That proves he isn't the Messiah, because our blessed Lord said that if anybody came to you and said, "Look, the Messiah is in New York," or Boston, or somewhere else, that was

sheer straight evidence that he wasn't the Messiah at all. You don't believe that Jesus is the Messiah, do you?'

'I do,' he said.

'No,' I said, 'you don't.'

There happened to be two milk bottles on my doorstep, and pointing to the milk bottles, I said, 'There are two bottles here, aren't there?'

'Yes.'

'Suppose they were both filled with milk. Would you refer to them as "two milks"?''

'No, of course not.'

'It's one and the same substance, isn't it, in both of them?'

'Yes, well that's how it is. So what?'

Well I said, 'Now, I'll tell you what you believe. You don't believe that Jesus is the Messiah, really. The Messiah, to you, is the great world spirit, and you really believe that, at one point in history, the great world spirit came and filled Jesus of Nazareth, and used Jesus of Nazareth for his task, and when that task was over, Jesus of Nazareth went off into the world beyond, to some sixth or seventh degree of heaven. Then eventually your man came along and the same great world spirit filled your man. Isn't that what you believe?'

'Well, yes, actually. If you push me, that is what I believe.'

'I thought so. So, there are two bottles, Jesus of Nazareth and your guru. Neither of them was the Messiah, they were just receptacles into which the great world spirit who, according to you, is the Messiah, was pleased to dwell for some period when they were on earth.'

'Well, if you want to be theological, that is what I believe.'

I said, 'Now let me read you a verse from the Scriptures.' And I read him that famous verse from 1 John 2:22. 'Who is the liar, save he that denies that Jesus is the Christ—the Messiah?' Jesus wasn't filled with the Christ, he *is* the Christ, and you'll see the seriousness of the matter from the strength of John's language. Here is the difference between heaven and hell. Here is the difference between loyalty to the blessed Lord Jesus or fundamental disloyalty and treason to him. And the test we are to apply to all spiritual gifts is the test of its doctrine, and in particular what it says about the Lord Jesus. And you will perceive, from the difficulty I had on my own doorstep, that we have to be prepared to be rigorous in our analysis, for the powers of deception are exceedingly cunning.

Over the centuries of preaching the gospel here in Ireland, we have been protected. But as the age proceeds and many people, whose Christian faith has only been nominal and virtually non-existent, are attracted to all kinds of new movements and so-called spiritual movements, we shall need grace and clarity of thought to test so-called gifts, whether they be of God or not. There are other tests prescribed in Scripture. I may not spend more time on them, so you have only to notice one implication. If we have to test a gift by the doctrine that it conveys, we must know what the person says, mustn't we? And that will have particular application to those who claim to speak in tongues. The validity or otherwise of their gift is not to be decided upon simply by the fact that it seems to be supernatural. The validity or otherwise of the gift depends on what is being said, and for that purpose you must know exactly what is being said. You couldn't afford to be put off with mere paraphrases.

## The source of all gifts

So then, that is the first thing, and I put it first because Paul puts it first. And with that, we go on to two arguments—this is one of those occasions when Paul has a double statement, putting two sides to a question.

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord. And there are diversities of workings, but the same God, who worketh all things in all. (12:4–6)

What Paul emphasizes here in his first statement is that whatever differences there are among the gifts—there are all kinds of gifts geared to do different jobs, and therefore their actual practical use is different and the technique they use is different—every gift has this in common, that it comes from the blessed and Holy Trinity. The man who is gifted to do a healing has his gift from the Lord. The man who preaches the gospel likewise has his gift from the Lord. The man who is a dreary old painstaking pedestrian teacher, believe it or not, has his gift from the Lord! Sometimes we fall into the trap of making false distinctions.

Many years ago now, more than I care to remember, I had been entertained in the home of a good man who placed a great deal of emphasis on spiritual gifts, and he was enquiring whether I would be prepared to come and speak to the particular group he was associated with. I said to him, ‘Would they really welcome me?’

When he thought a moment, he said, ‘Well, perhaps they wouldn’t. You are not charismatic.’

I said, ‘I am.’

‘No,’ he said, ‘you’re not.’

I said, ‘I am, pardon me.’

For all these gifts, if you want to be very learned, you’ll have the Greek for it! One gift is *chárisma*, and two gifts would be *charísmata*. If you want an adjective in decent English, then it’s charismatic.

Well, of course, the gift of tongues is charismatic; but please, ladies and gentlemen, so is the gift of a teacher. It is a *chárisma*. And so is the gift of an evangelist. It is a *chárisma*. For the whole point and purpose of the verses that we’ve just read is this: that whatever your gift is, if it is a gift of God, it is a *chárisma*. There are not some gifts of the Spirit that are charismatic and some gifts of the spirit that are not charismatic. That’s a false notion. The very verses are telling you the opposite. All gifts, whatever their kind, come from the blessed Lord himself, the gifts of the risen Christ, and are worked by the Holy Spirit of God. All of them are *charísmata*, all of them are charismatic. We needn’t spend any time on that, for it’s obvious.

## The distribution of the gifts

But now we come to the next verses.

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal. For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom; and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit: to another faith, in the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healings, in the one

Spirit; and to another workings of miracles; and to another prophecy; and to another discernings of spirits: to another *divers* kinds of tongues; and to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as he will. (12:7–11)

The first statement was saying that though there are many different kinds of gifts, they all come from the gracious persons of the Trinity. But you may ask who decides who gets which gift. Who decides whether you'll be an evangelist, or a help, or have this or that gift? The verse says 'all these are the work of the one and the same Spirit'. He not only empowers them, but he distributes 'to each one as he wills.' The decision lies in the sovereign choice of the Holy Spirit of God. He decides.

You say, 'Mr Preacher, are you not forgetting that a later chapter says that we are to seek spiritual gifts, and that if the occasion is appropriate, we may ask to be given a spiritual gift?' I thank you for the reminder, but I hadn't actually forgotten! Yes, it is open to us in a given situation—where there is obvious and pressing need—to ask whether the Lord might, in his goodness and wisdom, give us such and such a gift. But even as we ask, we should bear in mind that the Holy Spirit is sovereign, and we must be content to leave it ultimately to the sovereign choice of the Holy Spirit. It's he who decides. And presently, as we shall see, there is tremendous comfort and psychological health in observing this thing.

I have to confess that I always wished I hadn't been a teacher but an evangelist. The evangelist gets up and preaches, and over the space of ten years he can point to a hundred and twenty five people here, there and everywhere that he's brought to the Lord. You say, 'Mr Teacher, there's no reason for you to be green with envy because all these converts need teaching, don't they?' I know they do, but then listen to Paul talking to the Corinthians, 'You can have ten thousand instructors in Christ but you've only one father' (see 1 Cor 4:15). What wouldn't I have given to be an evangelist like that—to able to say to a whole church, 'I'm your spiritual father.' But I'm not an evangelist and if I don't learn my lesson, I shall make myself very inefficient, and eat my heart with all kinds of jealousies and wrong ideas. I must come to see and accept and praise God for who it is that decides which gift I shall have. The decision lies with the sovereign Holy Spirit of God, and here I can rest.

### **How are gifts obtained?**

How do you get a gift, anyway? By what process? To explain these things, Paul moves on to give us an illustration based on the human body.

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is the Christ. (12:12)

Paul has been talking about the fact that there are a variety of gifts, but they are all given and worked by the one and the same Trinity. God is building a body, the body of Christ; and you may see how the body of Christ works if you contemplate for a moment an ordinary physical body. If you can bear it, there's one standing in front of you now! You will perceive that this body is one body, but it's got many members. This old body in front of you is not a

monolith: it has a variety of members and therefore a variety of gifts. Although there are many members and many gifts, there is only one body. Well, that's simple enough, and Paul draws the analogy. He says, 'So also is the Christ.' Note, not 'Christ' but in the original Greek, 'the Christ' — meaning not only the Lord Jesus himself personally, but the Lord Jesus and all those who believe on the Lord Jesus who, together with the Lord Jesus, form the body of 'the Christ'. He is the head and we are the members.

That's how we come by our gifts, actually, by being in the body of Christ. So our first question now is: how do we get into the body of Christ? You won't have a gift at all unless you can first get into the body of Christ. How do you think my body was put together? Do you suppose my parents went to all the second hand shops they could find in Ipswich and collected a few odd feet that were no longer required, went up to the local hospital and said, 'Have you got a decent head to put on this thing here?' No, it wasn't done like that. You'll say, 'How did you get your ability to push a pen?' Well, it isn't that they managed to find up in Harrods a special pair of hands that were good at it. Bodies aren't made that way. I got this pair of hands because I was born a body and found out afterwards — it took me some while — that I've got a pair of hands. It took me a lot longer to know how to use them, and what could be done with them, and what shouldn't be done with them.

From where do we get our spiritual gifts? By first of all being incorporated into the body of Christ. My good friend, you'll never urge your unconverted friends to try and get their gift, will you? I've known folks to try and urge upon unbelievers to come and get the gift of prophecy, or the gift of speaking in tongues. What a perilous thing that is to do. They may get something or other but it won't be the genuine thing. Our Lord himself has warned us that you could speak prophecies and not even be a child of God.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out devils, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you. (Matt 7:22-23)

It is getting the cart very seriously before the horse to urge unconverted men and women to try and get some Christian spiritual gift.

### *The body of Christ*

How then is the body of Christ formed? Paul goes on to explain.

For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit. (12:13)

Many people have found this verse complicated, and I beg you now to have patience with me as I spend my last ten minutes trying my best to explain what Paul is saying. How do we get into the body of Christ? By two great operations involving God's Holy Spirit. The first is: 'in one Spirit were we all baptised into one body'. Operation number two is: 'and were all made to drink of one Spirit'. That's how the body of Christ is formed. That's how you get into it. Two operations. Baptism in the Holy Spirit, being baptised in the Holy Spirit, and being made to drink of the Holy Spirit.



In the first operation, let us notice it is not *'by the Holy Spirit'*. The verse does not mean that the Holy Spirit took you and the Holy Spirit baptised you. If it had meant that you have been baptised by the Holy Spirit, the Greek would have used a very different preposition. As it is, what he is saying is not that you were baptised by the Holy Spirit or with the Holy Spirit; the Greek has *'in the Holy Spirit'* — *'in'* being a preposition of instrument and not of agent. (Don't bother about that if you don't care for grammar!)

Let's take a reference that will illustrate it and put it beyond doubt. The first person in the New Testament to talk about baptism in the Holy Spirit was John the Baptist. You will remember the occasion and the context. He was baptising people, calling on them to repent, and thousands were coming to his baptism. The religious officials came to him to enquire, 'Who are you, making all this splash here out in the wilderness? Are you Moses, or Elijah?' 'Oh, no,' he said. 'Well, are you the Messiah, then?' And he said, 'No, I'm not the Messiah. I baptise you in water, that's all I can do. There comes one after me who is mightier than I. The same shall baptise you in the Holy Spirit' (see Matt 3:1-11).

### **In the Holy Spirit**

We do well to pause there to grasp the significance of what is being said. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not some little incidental thing that, among others, happens to you when you trust the Saviour. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is that ministry of the Lord Jesus that marks him out as unique among all the prophets that ever have been, be they Moses or Elijah, or Isaiah himself, not to speak of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel and Obadiah. Great men of God but, inspired though they were, they fade into their true insignificance in the sight of Jesus Christ, God's Son. What's so different about him? Well this, to begin with. He can baptise people in the Spirit. We said it last week: let's recall it. The Holy Spirit isn't just so much stuff, and he's not merely so much power, like electricity is. The Holy Spirit is God. Think who Jesus must be if he can take you and put you in the Holy Spirit. This is one of his unique glories.

To help us see what the Lord Jesus does, we can take an analogy from what John did. John baptised in water. So, this is you, and you come to John, and he baptises you in water, with water. John does the baptising, meaning he puts you in the water, and you get baptised. Then John says, 'I baptise you in water but there stands one among you and he shall baptise you in the Holy Spirit.' Do you see the parallel? When you come to Christ, Christ takes you, Christ does the baptising. Christ baptises you in the Spirit. He puts you in the Spirit. Oh, magnificent part of our salvation. This is not some little extra, some icing on the cake, a little candle to decorate your Christian birthday cake. This is the very basis of the gospel; hold your humble head at the wonder of it. Because you've met Christ and trusted him, the incarnate Son of deity has not only forgiven your sin and pardoned your transgression, he's taken you, a worm of the earth, and put you in the Holy Spirit. Never let the glory of it depart, never let it reduce to some little, minor ecstatic experience.

### **The Holy Spirit in you**

But even that, glorious as it is, wouldn't be enough. You noticed that there are two operations to form the body of Christ: in one Spirit you were baptised, and you were all made to drink

of one Spirit. You say, 'What's the difference, and why do you need two?' Well, let me illustrate that again. Here's me standing in front of you, about to baptise myself in water. Well, I can't do the whole lot, so take this finger as part of me; this finger here, I'm about to baptise it in this glass of water. Watch what happens to the finger. Here it goes. It's about to be baptised in water. What happens? 'Well,' you say, 'that finger goes into the water.' Yes, that's baptism in water. Now, I'm going to give myself a drink of water. You watch what happens to the water. And this time it's not me going into the water, it's the water going into me. That is vastly important—I in the water, the water in me.

Why do you need both? Because, to have a body at all, you must have both. Take a little fish: it's different from us humans, it can't live on land. If the fish is going to live, it's got to be in the water, and the water in it. If the fish is in the water, but the water doesn't get into the fish, then the fish dies. And if there's some water in the fish, but the fish isn't in the water and is out on the bank, it will gasp its last and die. And when it comes to our human bodies, the same is true, only our element is not water but air. To be a body, to be alive, you need two things and two things simultaneously. You have to be in the air and the air has to be in you. You can't have one without the other and still be a workable human body.

If you were to come to me and say, 'We're going to do an experiment' and you put your hands round my neck: I would be in the air, but the air wouldn't be in me. No use, is it? If you keep that up for long, I shan't be alive at all. You say, 'We're now going to do another experiment. We're going to sit you on the outside of a rocket and send you up into space. So take a deep breath, because there's no air outside up there aloft, so you'll need a lot of air with you. Take a deep breath.' And you rocket me off into space, and what happens then? Well, I'm just going to pop, that's all, because the air is in me, but I'm no longer in the air.

To be a viable human body, you've got to have the two things simultaneously: you've got to be in the air and the air has got to be in you. And to be a member of the body of Christ, you need two things, and you must have them simultaneously: you have to be in the Spirit and the Spirit has to be in you. There is no such thing as receiving the Spirit within you and not yet being baptised by the Holy Spirit. You must have both simultaneously, or you're not in the body of Christ at all. And Paul puts the point quite plainly in Romans 8:9. Talking to every believer, he says, 'You are not in the flesh. The flesh might be in you, of course, still a lot, but you, the real you, since you found Christ, you are not in the flesh. You are in the Spirit, if the Spirit is in you.' That's a glorious part of our salvation, isn't it?

### **For 'Members only'**

Were we talking about gifts? We'll come back to that, God willing, next week, but here is the very foundation of our being given gifts, and becoming gifts, and operating truly in the body of Christ. The first absolute *sine qua non* is that we must be members of the body of Christ. How do we become members? The answer to that is our very basic Christian gospel and salvation. We become members of the body of Christ by being taken by the blessed Lord Jesus and baptised in the Holy Spirit, and then by that same Lord Jesus, being given to drink of the Holy Spirit, so that from then onwards and forever, we are in the Spirit and the Spirit is in us. Next week, God willing, we shall have to consider the implications that come from this.

But now we've reached the end of our study, and our minds are tired. Let's pray that God will help us remember what we have seen, and help us, as we perceive its glory, to be ever more grateful to him for this wonderful salvation.

Let us pray.

Oh God, we praise thee, as the wonder comes upon our spirits this evening, that for our salvation thy Son came to our world and became human. That, in Jesus Christ our Lord, God was and shall be forever with us, 'veiled in flesh the Godhead see'. And oh Lord, if that were not wonder enough, we bless thee now, and our hearts bow down in worship before thee, for this other wonder, that thou has not only forgiven us but taken us mere creatures of time and put us in God the Holy Spirit. Lord, this is almost more than we can bear. It is certainly going beyond all that we could understand. It goes beyond our very words to thank thee sufficiently for it, but in the name of our Lord Jesus, thank thee we do, and from our very hearts. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Spiritual Gifts—Practical Implications

Let us begin our study this evening by reading from 1 Corinthians, beginning to read from chapter 12 verse 27.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, *divers* kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all *workers of* miracles? Have all gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But desire earnestly the greater gifts. And still a more excellent way shew I unto you.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have *the gift of* prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love suffereth long, *and* is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall be done away; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part: but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I have been known. But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love. (12:27–13:13 )

In these studies, we are considering together the Holy Spirit and the gifts which he imparts and empowers in his people. On our first occasion we spent time together considering the Holy Spirit himself, and the mission that he was given as he was sent forth by the risen Lord Jesus from the Father to our world. We considered the glorious objectives that he has in his gracious practical ministry. We did so in order that when we turned to considering our own gifts, we might have clearly before our minds the great objectives that the Holy Spirit pursues; that we might use the gifts that he gives us in pursuit of those same objectives, and thus to please him who has given us these gifts.

Last week we began the study of chapters 12–14 of 1 Corinthians, in which the Holy Spirit inspires the Apostle Paul to speak to us in practical detail about the gifts that he has given us,

and how we should evaluate them and how we should use them, so that we might use them intelligently for the great objective that the Holy Spirit has. Our aim in these chapters is to take the arguments that Paul uses and the statements he makes, in the order in which he uses them, and try to consider them in due proportion as he has given them to us, noticing the many very balanced arguments he uses to urge us to use our spiritual gifts in an intelligent fashion to the glory of God and to the benefit of the body of Christ.

Last week, as we began chapter 12, we noticed that the first thing the apostle is led to tell us about spiritual gifts is that they must always be tested to see whether they are genuine spiritual gifts, or whether they are not genuine and due to some other source—psychological or spiritual or fleshly. We noticed that the first and chief test that the Holy Spirit lays down for the testing of spiritual gifts is the doctrinal content of what is said by means of this spiritual gift. No-one speaking by the Holy Spirit says, ‘Jesus is anathema.’ No-one likewise, under the impulse of an evil spirit, will consent to say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ in the full sense of that term ‘Lord’—the sole, sovereign, unique, transcendent Lord.

And we noticed that if we are to test spiritual gifts by their doctrinal content, we must know clearly on each occasion, beyond a shadow of a doubt, what is being said by that gift and the person who is employing it. If we do not know what is being said, we cannot judge whether it is of God or not. We ought not to say ‘Amen’ if we have not understood what is being said.

Then, from verses 4–11, we notice that Paul makes two complementary statements. The gifts that the Holy Spirit gives are many and various, and because they are different, they will employ different methods of use and be used in different circumstances, some public, some private, and so forth. But whatever the nature of our varying gifts is, they are gifts of God. Then we are given first to understand that all of them come from the blessed Trinity. Each one of them is administered by the same blessed Trinity for the glory of that same Trinity.

Though the gifts differ in their nature and in their use, nonetheless each equally comes from God, each equally is bestowed by the Holy Spirit. Each gift, therefore, is in the technical sense charismatic. We noticed last week that the Greek term for a gift is *chárisma*, and the adjective is *chárismatica*. All gifts of whatever kind are equally charismatic, and to help us in our thinking, it is good to abide by scriptural terminology and not to fall into the trap of calling some gifts charismatic and others not charismatic. I hope all of us here tonight are charismatic—but in the Biblical sense, as you will understand. All the *charísmata*, therefore, come equally from God.

The second part of that statement addresses the question of who decides who gets which gift. Who decides whether this man is an evangelist, and that man over there a teacher, or whatever? And the answer given in verse 11 of that chapter is that ‘these are the work of the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one as he wills.’ It lies with the sovereign prerogative of the Holy Spirit himself to decide who gets what gift. In his graciousness he allows us, if need require, to request that we be given a gift for special purposes, but ultimately the decision rests with the sovereign Holy Spirit himself.

At the end of our session last week, we fell to discussing that marvellous matter of how we get our gifts. By what process is it that we get our gifts? We noticed Paul uses the illustration and analogy of the human body. The ordinary human body is made up of many

members, and each of those members has a gift, has a function to perform, and yet for all that there are many members and many gifts, there's only one body. So it is with the body of Christ, says Paul. So that we see our individual gifts in relation to all other gifts, and in relation to the great work of redemption that the Lord Jesus has accomplished, we have to think now of this unique thing, the like of which never existed before Pentecost. This thing that has come into God's universe, utterly new, utterly unique.

Since the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven, heaven itself has changed. Never before was there a human being with a glorified human body in the very presence of God. The wonder of the Lord Jesus, and the way that he has accomplished our salvation, is that the very Godhead itself has been changed. Whereas there were uncharted eras when the second person of the Trinity was not yet human, nor had a human body, since Pentecost heaven itself has seen with never-ending awe and wonder that there is now in the presence of God a human being with a glorified human body.

### **Many members but one body**

If that were not enough, ponder again the wonder that salvation itself has performed. The risen Christ has baptised all his people into one body, a spiritual body now, of which he is the head and all his people are members—a wonderful reality. It is of course one of the secrets why heaven will be heaven. You observe, surely, what an ambiguous thing individualism is. Who would want to live in some totalitarian state where individuals are mere numbers in a computer—just a grey, undifferentiated mass of human ciphers. Anything destructive of individual personality must by definition be wrong. What an ugly world it would be if our personalities were repressed.

Incidentally, my brothers and sisters, it is no intention of God to suppress people's personalities, but to bring them out. That's why we are to be exceedingly careful in our education of children, if an old rusty bachelor might say so! It is not God's intention to destroy the personality that he himself has made, but to redeem it, sanctify it, and develop it. Personality is an exceedingly wonderful thing, and the God who never made two snowflakes alike, nor two daises alike, has not made two personalities alike. He knows his sheep by name and loves to call them—Mary, Martha, Simon—because he knows us and our individualities. He died for us each one individually and has an inheritance individual for us, and that eternally.

But that said, there's a downside to individuality—how to get all these charming personalities, with their rugged individualism, to work together in harmony. And let me remind you, in case you haven't noticed, that even the redeemed of the Lord—God bless every one of them—while as yet they're on this globe, sometimes find it hard to work together in harmony! One of the secrets of heaven will be the harmonious place it is—we shall all remain individual, but not just individual. We are being formed into the body of Christ, a marvellous entity beyond our powers to describe it. Our body's head is our blessed Lord Jesus, and every believer a member of it. So we shall not be just individuals each going his and her own way, and striving for our own individual objectives, we shall exercise our personalities and gifts in complete harmony for the good of the whole, under the headship of the blessed Lord Jesus.

You say, 'How can it be, Mr Preacher, that you can keep your individuality and personality and yet be members of one body?' Well, I hesitate to use analogies that spring from beyond my experience, but I have been told by good authority that when a child is born, he spends the first eighteen years growing up very much under the shadow of his parents—scarcely distinguishable from his mum or his dad. But he grows up little by little, and by the time he's got to eighteen, he's standing on his own two feet. By the time he's twenty-one, he's a fully developed, individual, separate personality, and the parents wisely are letting him go his own way. And do you know what happens after all those twenty-one years of hard slog developing his own independent personality? He goes and gives up a lot of it to some young lady. Well, it's beauty that does it, and charm and whatnot, and I'm not finding fault with him! And there are those who tell me that that next state, in which both parties have agreed to cede a little bit of their individuality, and the two become one, is a higher state of life than the separate individual state, and I bow to their wisdom! The glorious purpose is not that we shall be just redeemed individuals. We shall retain individual personalities, but God's idea is that we shall be incorporated into the body of Christ, under his headship, working in harmony the universe through.

We then encountered the question of how we get into that body, and we noticed that it is by the double work of the risen Lord Jesus. He baptises us in the Holy Spirit, and we therefore go into the Holy Spirit; and he causes us to drink of the Holy Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit enters us. Now, we move on tonight to consider certain practical implications that come out of this glorious fact. You cannot find a believer nowadays that hasn't been baptised in the Spirit or made to drink of the Spirit, for if they lacked one or the other, they wouldn't be in the body of Christ. For a human body to live and breathe and work, it has to be in the air, and the air in it. For a believer to be a living member of the body of Christ, then the Holy Spirit has to be in the believer, and the believer in the Holy Spirit, and both simultaneously. The experience that holy Scripture describes as baptism in the Holy Spirit is an experience common to all believers. Each and all, says Paul, have been baptised in the Holy Spirit and made to drink of the Holy Spirit, thus are you in one body.

### **Our attitude to spiritual gifts**

If that's how we got in, there come these practical words of advice, and encouragement, and exhortation, and correction. In typical Pauline fashion, they're addressed first of all in verses 14–20 to those who might feel that they are in some way inferior and not as good as other people; because in their estimation the gift they have isn't a very good and striking gift, and so they feel inferior. Then in verses 21–26, practical words are addressed to any who might be tempted to feel superior, because the gift they have received is a brilliant and very public gift. Both attitudes, of course, are false.

### **Advice to those feeling 'inferior'**

I suspect that most of us come into the first category. The kind of feeling that now and again comes over us that, 'I'm not very good,' and, 'What is my gift worth?' and, 'If I were like this great lady missionary then I should feel a bit more secure in my heart,' or 'If I could preach

like that eloquent evangelist, then I could be sure I was in the body,' and so forth — the old inferiority feeling. What is its cure? Says Paul in verse 15, 'If the foot shall say, "Because I am not the hand, I am not in the body"; is it therefore not of the body?' Consider poor, miserable inferiority complex foot. He can observe that he isn't the eye, but he's not the hand either. And he marks how many beautiful, wonderful things the hand can do, and how he, as the foot, is a very humble affair, and can't do very much at all. Therefore he gets it into his head that because he isn't a spectacular hand, he's not even in the body. Well, if you're not in the body, you're not even a believer, are you?

This comes down to a very profound matter. I know one good lady, a keen servant and disciple of the Lord Jesus, but in her heart, though she was striving to lead some of her fellow students to the Lord Jesus that they might be saved, she lacked that real confidence that she was herself saved, that she was a child of God. On one occasion she prayed to the Lord, 'Oh Lord, help me now to lead one of my fellow students to Christ. If only you would help me lead my fellow student to Christ, I would be certain that I was saved myself.' It was very brave of her to confess that, because that is the feeling that some people have. 'Now, if I were a Billy Graham, I could be sure I was saved.' 'If I were an evangelist, if I were a great teacher, I could be sure I was saved, but I'm not. I don't seem to have much gift at all, so am I saved?'

That leads us to consider together how you suppose God went about making the body of Christ. Did God say, 'Now, first in the body of Christ, there will have to be hands. Now, let me see. Are you a good hand? Do you think you will work with your hand? Yes? You are a good hand. Right, I recruit you. You? You're not a hand. What are you then — a little toe, or something? Oh, I'm not looking for little toes, I've got millions of little toes. So no, sorry, I don't want you in the body of Christ.' How do you get into the body of Christ? Do you have to be a jolly good, super-duper foot to get into the body of Christ? It isn't that way round, so let's not confuse things.

It's not by being a superb gift, but simply by coming as a bankrupt sinner to the Saviour, trusting the Saviour and allowing him by his magnificent grace to put you in the Spirit of God and to put the Spirit of God within you. Thus you become a member of the body of Christ, and being a member of the body of Christ, one of these days you'll wake up to find that you have a gift that was given you by the Lord himself when he incorporated you into his body. So, you don't have to be a Billy Graham, or a Mary Slessor; and you don't have to be a David Livingstone or a C. H. Spurgeon in order to feel secure and accepted, and to be sure you're a member of the body of Christ. Isn't that delightful?

God doesn't want slaves. We don't earn our position and our entry into the body of Christ. And if the ear shall say, 'Because I'm not the eye, I am not of the body,' is it not therefore of the body? Silly old ear, it wouldn't be an ear unless it were first in the body, would it? How does a baby's body grow? It doesn't grow by a collection of ears and feet all stuck together with glue. It grows as the body grows, and presently there comes an ear. In the body first, and then the gift is developed.

We can all see it in our calmer moments, can't we? In spite of what the foot and the ear say, if the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole body were hearing, where were the smelling? Everything would be grotesque. If all the body were teachers, there would be nobody to be taught, and there would be no need for teachers, so we should all go



home to heaven—perhaps that would be a good thing! But for the time being, there have got to be different gifts in the body.

### **Pleasing God**

But now look at what verse 18 says: ‘But now God has set the members, each one of them in the body, even as it pleased him.’ Have you never felt, my brother, my sister, a certain frustration—that you wish you were somebody else? You wish you had the gift of an evangelist. Fancy being a great evangelist and being able to point to fifty-six churches that you’ve planted, or something like that. So many souls you’ve brought to the Lord. Marvellous! Have you ever felt, ‘I wish I were one of them, and I wish my personality were different. I feel so inhibited, and I’ve not got the big gifts that the others have.’ Yes, we’d like to be somebody else.

There was a programme on the BBC once, I forget what it was called, and people were asked that famous question, ‘If you weren’t you, who would you like to be?’ Well, I pondered that, not that I have any chance of getting on the BBC, but I pondered it for a while. ‘Now, Gooding,’ I said to myself, ‘if you weren’t you, who would you like to be?’ And, after thinking a while, I said, ‘I’d like to be me.’ Yes, there have been moments when I’d like to have been you, but on sober thought, I decided I’d like to be me! And I’ll tell you why. This verse says ‘now has God set each member in the body as it pleased him.’ Ah, that’s the thing. Why would I want a gift at all? What do I want it for? Because that would make me feel better, if I had a big gift? This is better, isn’t it? You’re set in the body ‘as it pleased God.’

See that little violet blushing in the grass and scarce noticeable? How did it come to be a violet and why wasn’t it an oak tree, or an almond tree full of blossom? Why is it still a mere violet? And the answer is, it pleased almighty God. What a thing it is, my dear sister, my brother. Just now, this moment, in your heart of hearts, raise your spirit to the Father himself. As to your gift, you are what pleases God you should be. You don’t have to be a John Wesley to please God. Take the very first apostle, add to him the biggest deacons that you can manage to meet, and put them all together in one bundle, and at the end of the day what have they done, save to please God? In that, you and they are equal. God gave you your gift as pleased him.

There’s no greater goal in life, there’s no greater *raison d’être* than this glorious thing: to please God. He put me in the body as pleased him. I’ll be a daisy for him, I’ll be a Pekingese dog. Let anybody else who wants, be an Alsatian or an elephant. I’ll be a Pekingese, if it pleases God. When we all get home to heaven, and many gifts have long since disappeared, this shall be our eternal joy that we, each one, pleased God. Consider what a dignity it gives you. Your gift, whatever it be in the routine and the humdrum things of life as you may count them, God has put you in the body as pleases him.

### **Advice to those feeling ‘superior’**

But then Paul puts the other side, in having a word in the ear of those who think, or sometimes are tempted to feel, that they are superior. Gently he chides them, and he says in verse 21 ‘I cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” or again the head to the feet, “I have no need

of you.” Very much rather those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary.’ It can happen sometimes that people with superior gifts, or greater gifts, fall into the notion that they don’t need other gifts. That’s quite faulty, isn’t it? And I ask you to remember the context of this—that long list of gifts that we read at the end of chapter 12. Bearing in mind that’s what Paul is talking about, you must not say that you don’t need any one of those gifts. Ponder that well. You must not say of any gift, ‘We have no need of you.’ That is inspired Scripture. All gifts given by the Lord himself are given by his deliberate intention. We must not take it upon ourselves to say that we don’t need them. Indeed, those feeble parts of our body, the parts that seem to be more feeble, are not tolerable but necessary.

I’m not an anatomist but when occasionally I’ve allowed myself to dip into books of anatomy, I’ve often pondered what the vermiform appendix is for. When I was a boy and science was in its primitive stages, even the learned decided that vermiform appendices were no use whatsoever, and they would happily cut them out. Now, the more learned have found out that our vermiform appendices do have an actual function in the body. They are not the survivors of evolution: they have a real, practical function in the body. And Paul is making the point here that even the weaker members of the body, the things that seem feeble, are necessary.

That helps me with my little gift. You might fall into despondency and discouragement. I don’t have to apologise for myself. What am I? I am necessary! Woe betide any fellow member of the body of Christ that dares to think they don’t have need of me, or of you: all are necessary. When it comes to the human body, some of our more beautiful parts, that generally belong to the face, seem to be there largely for decoration; and others that are not so beautiful, we naturally defend their weakness and adorn them the more. So has God tempered the body together. God help us to lose that sense that we can be independent of our fellow believers and we don’t need them. We do.

And thirdly, we are to value each one and to honour each one. As the Lord’s people, we are to do what God does and bestow on them more honour. For it is the fact, whether we sense it or not, that just as with our human body, if one member suffers, the whole body eventually is involved in the suffering. So it is with the body of Christ. If one member suffers, all are thereby suffering and to some extent suffer loss.

Paul now comes to sum up this part of his subject. ‘Now,’ says he, ‘you are the body of Christ, and individual members thereof, and God himself therefore has set various gifts and people in the body. Are all apostles? No, of course not. Are all prophets? No. Are all teachers? No. Are all workers of miracles? No. Have all gifts of healings? No. Do all speak with tongues? No.’ Pray notice that as we go by, he doesn’t say, ‘Do all have the gift of tongues?’ The answer would still be no, but he says, ‘Do all speak with tongues? No. Do all interpret? No.’ Our gifts are different. You mustn’t say that one of them is not necessary. God has placed them in the body as he wills. We need them. We need the variety.

### **All necessary, but not all equal**

But with that, you will notice a big change that now comes over Paul’s discourse. While all gifts are necessary he says in verse 31, ‘desire earnestly the greater gifts.’ Now we have a new concept, and we must be patient with it. All gifts are necessary. We cannot say of any one, ‘I

don't need you.' All are necessary. Each has its divinely-given function, but there are some gifts that are greater than other gifts. Chapter 14 is going to turn on this distinction, so we ought to spend some careful time now considering in what sense he means 'greater'.

We should start with the illustration of our human body. Every member is necessary to a complete body. If you're going to have a complete body, it must have four fingers and a thumb on one hand and four fingers and a thumb on another hand. But there's no good hiding the fact that whereas my little finger is necessary to a complete body, there are some members of my body that are greater than my little finger in their function and the importance of their function. You could cut off my little finger and I should still be alive, and mostly shouldn't notice it. The little finger is a very important member of my body, of course. It is the finger on my hand that is more powerful to grasp things than any other finger, perhaps. You put your hand in the way of a little baby's hand and he'll get his hand round that finger, won't he, and you'll feel the cunning of a baby. That little finger is the one that grips, so it is necessary. But you could cut off my little finger and I should still survive. You can't cut out my brain—well, perhaps you can!—but you can't cut out my heart and it make no difference. My heart has a bigger gift and a more important function than my little finger.

We have to face this in the body of Christ. Some have gifts that are bigger and more important, and therefore, when it comes to seeking gifts, we are now told to desire earnestly the greater gifts; and again, at the beginning of chapter 14, 'desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but rather that you may prophesy.' We shall come back to that later—the practical effect that is going to have on my use of the gift that God has given me, and in my seeking of that gift. I am to covet the greater gifts. Before Paul gets on to talking about that, he brushes that aside for the moment to speak of the principle which supremely, above all other principles, is to be our guide both in seeking gifts and in using gifts. Look at verse 31 again. 'Desire earnestly the greater gifts, and a still more excellent way I show unto you.' That more excellent way is the way of love.

### **'Love'**

Now I shall not need to convince you that chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians is an exceedingly delightful chapter where Paul, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, allows free rein to the praise of this glorious virtue and activity that is love. It is quoted all the way round the world. You'll see it on calendars, you'll see it in books of poetry—the praise of love, the greatest thing in the world, as Henry Drummond called it. Some, though, have felt that Paul here, like the bad preacher such as one that stands before you, suddenly got an idea in his head, and it was such a marvellous idea, this idea of love, that he forgot what he was talking about, and he wandered all over the place, and went pursuing love. And only after he had wandered a long way did he come back to what he was meant to be preaching about! There are preachers like that, of course, but not Paul. Though he spends a whole chapter on this matter of pursuing love, he has not wandered from his topic.

This lies at the very heart of our subject. You're seeking a gift, my dear brother, my dear sister. Pray tell me, why are you seeking it? What do you want it for? If you want that gift out of any motive other than love, you are offending against the basic principle of Christian living. 'What do you mean?' you say. Well, why would you want a gift? Take the gift of evangelist,

why would you want the gift of an evangelist? You say, 'I think it's marvellously good. I'd love to preach. I'd enjoy standing up there and preaching. I feel it would do me a lot of good.' Well, it would certainly do you a lot of good. Or, if you were a teacher, it would do you a lot of good, teaching the word of God. Sometimes when I myself am studying the word of God and the Lord shows me some delight of his word, I can scarce bear to sit still on the seat; and I want to come to the congregation and let everybody know. And do I do it just because I enjoy it? You can't be useful to God to preach the gospel effectively, and folks come to the Saviour, without it doing you an immense amount of good. But why should I want the gift of evangelist—so that it will do me good?

No, that's very clear. You don't have to have the gift of an evangelist to get saved. You don't have to have the gift of teacher in order to learn the word of God. Any dear believer could learn the word of God. The gift of evangelist is given that we might help other people. The gift of teacher is given that therewith you may teach other people. You'll need the gift of an evangelist to preach the gospel publicly to people so that they get saved. In a word, the prime purpose of having a gift is that you may use it for the benefit of other people, and that's what love is.

Why is love the supreme motive? Because the motive that ought to guide us in seeking gifts and in using gifts is love of the other person. What's the good of having a gift of evangelist if I'm just up there in my bedroom, and you come up the stairs and you hear this row going on behind my bedroom door. What is Gooding doing? And you hear this, 'Flee from the wrath to come, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.' You wonder who he's preaching the gospel to. You knock on the door and there's no reply, and so you open it, quietly looking. There's just me, and nobody else there, and I'm holding forth with tremendous gusto.

You say, 'Gooding, what are you doing?'

'I'm preaching the gospel.'

'Whatever for? There's no unconverted here.'

'I don't mind whether they get converted or not. I enjoy it so much: it helps me.'

Well, you'll say, 'He's gone a little bit odd, but he's a good brother nonetheless, he's necessary!'

If we love, then we shall see to it that in our seeking of gifts and in our use of gifts, our prime motive is to love other people, and use it for the good of other people.

So true is that, that Paul has three very serious things to say about those of us who use our gift, or seek it, without that motivating love to serve other people. Says he, 'If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am become mere sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal'—just noise, and unpleasant noise at that. For all the good it does, just noise. Oh, how I've got to take heed to that. If I'm using my gift, even tonight, without loving you, my brothers, my sisters, I'm just making a lot of noise. And if I have the gift of prophecy, know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains—spectacular gifts—but have not love, I am nothing. As far as the body of Christ goes, it is as though I were nothing at all and have no gift, a mere cipher. Why? Because if I don't have love, and I use my gift without love, I'm not helping others. I'm not helping the body of Christ.

And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. You'll notice how exact Paul's words are. He doesn't say that it doesn't profit the poor, because if you give the poor all your goods, it will profit them, I suspect. It won't profit *you* anything. I wonder how far that principle extends to all our service. If I do it without love, then it profits me nothing, and shall not profit me in the hereafter when I stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Oh, God help me that in all the use of what gifts God has given me, I learn to use it out of love for others, lest in diverting it to myself I seek to gain here, but find when I stand before the judgment seat of Christ it has profited me nothing.

I shall not now attempt to go through the lovely description of love that is given us here in those next verses. These are things to be prayed over in the presence of God, surely. But I come to the final verses, where Paul is telling us from verse 8 onward that many a gift will disappear, whereas the permanent thing that never fails and never shall fail is love. Says he 'For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away, but love never fails.'

### **Love lasting when other gifts are done away—two views**

Now, I took a risk that, at this late hour in the meeting, I could give you a simple explanation of these verses, but honesty forbids it. For when it comes to this matter of love lasting whereas certain gifts are done away, there have been two major expositions and interpretations of what the apostle says. Since both interpretations have been held and advanced by godly and able teachers of the word, with all sincerity, it would perhaps be impertinent of me to say that one is right and one is wrong, and simply give you the one that I personally think is right. I shall tire your patience, therefore, this next ten minutes, by putting both views. Each view has, of course, many subdivisions and permutations. I shall seek Christian grace not to worry you with them, but simply put forward the main two views, their pros and their cons, and leave you before God to make up your mind which you think is the correct one.

The difference stands largely on how we are to understand the words 'that which is perfect'. 'When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away', says the apostle (v. 10). What does he mean when he uses the term 'that which is perfect', and what does he mean when he says 'when that which is perfect is come'? View number one is not the view I personally hold, and therefore I shall do my very utmost to represent it as fairly as I can. Those of you who hold it and feel that I haven't done it justice, forgive me in advance!

View number one says 'that which is perfect' is the completed canon of Scripture; and the phrase 'when that which is perfect is come' means when the New Testament canon is finally complete. What is the reason for people thinking it means that? Well, consider what Paul says in Ephesians 4, where he tells us that gifts are given to the body of Christ for the work of the ministry, to get all the members involved in serving the Lord, and to build them up:

Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight

of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error; but speaking truth in love, may grow up in all things into him, which is the head, *even* Christ. (Eph 4:13–15)

In view number one, therefore, Paul is thinking about the early Christians, and as yet they haven't got the complete New Testament like we have. They've only got bits and pieces of it. Because of that, God gives special gifts—prophets, and tongues, and suchlike things, and knowledge—to help these believers who have such a little part of the New Testament. But as the New Testament is written—God inspires Paul to write his letters, and Peter to write his, and John to write his, and the Gospel writers to record the life of Christ—as gradually the canon is built up, so the early Christians cease to be mere spiritual infants, trusting the Lord but not knowing exactly what they believe, and therefore being tossed to and fro by all sorts of false theories. As the canon was built up, so the believers grew, and grew up into Christ, and became adults in their beliefs, and in their knowledge, and in their spiritual stature. And when this full canon eventually arrived, because now the believers were grown-up, adult, or at least could be if they applied themselves to the canon, then gifts like prophecy, and tongues, and knowledge, were no longer required. They were only temporary expedients that were superseded by the coming of the canon—'when that which is perfect is come'.

I want to remind you that many godly, responsible, exceedingly knowledgeable interpreters of holy Scripture have held, and still do hold, that view. I personally do not hold it. I incline to the other view, and if you feel that is a disaster then, my brother, my sister, pray use your God-given gifts, out of love for me if you can still love me, and come and help me to see the truth! Why don't I believe it? Well, in the first place, because if you're waiting for the canon to be complete, what do you mean by 'the canon'? The whole New Testament canon was not finally put together until the third or the fourth century AD. It was many years and in different countries before the believers had the whole canon. So what would that mean—that as soon as Paul and Peter had put the last full stop to the canonical books of the New Testament, then the gifts of tongues, and knowledge, and prophecies, forthwith ceased around the world, whether they possessed these books or not? Or did the disappearance of the temporary gifts only come about in each country at different times, as believers in different countries, at different stages in history, eventually received the complete canon? The question of when 'that which is perfect' came therefore carries difficulties with it of how you interpret it.

What finally convinces me are the comparisons that Paul makes at the end of chapter 13.

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part: but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. (vv. 9–10)

Here Paul is contrasting the *amount* we know—we know in part; we prophesy in part. But when 'that which is perfect is come', we shall no longer know in part: we shall know completely.

Secondly, Paul contrasts the *mode* of knowing and speaking.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now I am become a man, I have put away childish things. (v. 11)

Knowing and speaking as a child, contrasted with knowing and speaking as an adult. And thirdly, it is the *medium* of knowledge.

For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face. (v. 12)

That's not the amount, nor the mode, but the contrast is the medium through which we come to see—in a glass; face to face. Let's think of these three briefly.

*(1) The amount we know*

'Now we know in part,' says Paul. They who hold to the completed-canon theory, interpret the verse this way round: that when Paul wrote to the Corinthians the whole of the New Testament was not yet written. Indeed, he himself hadn't written the Epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians or Philippians, and therefore Paul is saying, 'We only know in part, but when the rest of the New Testament is written, we shall know in full.'

'Now I think and speak as a child,' he says, 'but when that which is perfect is come, I shall put away childish things and think as an adult.' Let's follow the implication. When Paul was in Corinth, he'd already written the letters to Thessalonica, all about salvation and the Lord's second coming. He was in process of writing to the Romans, on how we are justified, and the future of Israel and eventual conversion of Israel, and so forth, and the restoration of creation. When he wrote to the Corinthians, and presumably he preached to the Corinthians very much what he wrote in the two Epistles to the Corinthians, and taught the great truth of the resurrection and church principles, is it really enough to think that Paul, knowing all that, was merely talking as a child? That when at last he was inspired to write Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, he put away childish things and at last thought like an adult? How much did he not know of what was in Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians, when he wrote to the Corinthians?

For my own part, I think 'that which is perfect' must refer to what will be when the Lord comes. 'Now we know in part. Then we shall know even as we are known.' Oh, my brother and sister, I don't know it all. Do you? You say, 'You could do, Gooding, if you were more diligent in your study of Scripture.' Somehow, it's been my privilege to jog along beside great saints of God and marvellous, profound theologians; and the more they know, the more they'll tell you, 'We don't know it all yet, David, do we?' No, there is coming a day when we will. Oh, my brother, my sister, let's forget the argument. It is the all-glorious fact that one day we shall see the Lord and we shall see him face-to-face. We shall know, even as we are known.

*(2) The mode of knowing*

'When I was a child, I spoke as a child. When I became an adult, I put away childish things.' Here is little Tommy, he's all of five years old, and he has observed that his mother and dad live together, and it's just about dawned on him they're married. And so he informs you that he's now going to get married to Josephine. She lives round the corner. Because he knows all about marriage, does Tommy. Well, he can say the words, but listen to him and you'll discover what you already knew: that little Tommy, while he talks about marriage and he's got some idea of marrying, he's talking of it in the way a child would talk of it. Why? Because he hasn't

grown up. There are things about marriage that little Tommy will never know until a few years have gone by.

How do you know Scripture? You say, 'I'm an adult, I've been on the road for fifty-eight years.' God bless you. Do you know everything, as an adult? In our assembly, we are reading and discussing together the glorious pictures of the eternal city. We're doing our best to comprehend it. If there is anybody here that knows it absolutely and completely, I'd be interested to talk to them! I get the impression that when I try to understand what God says about heaven—I do my best to understand the words and to get some idea—the thing goes beyond me, as it must. I shall not know what those blessed words mean completely until I get home to glory. How could I understand eternity? How could I even visualise eternal life and the glory of the Saviour that shall be? Oh, but my brother, my sister, one day we shall. Tommy will grow up and find the words he used of marriage and love are true. There was no deception in it. But he shall find them brilliantly more than he ever realised or could realise as an infant. What glory it will be when at last, having poured over our Scripture and got some glimpse of glory, we get home and everything we have read will prove true—how vastly more true, how vastly greater, when with fully adult spirits we survey that heavenly scene.

### *(3) The medium of knowing*

'Now, we see through a mirror darkly,' or in a riddle. In the ancient world the ladies didn't have glass mirrors, as you know. For mirrors, they had copper beaten out very carefully so it shone and reflected their face, and a very important thing a mirror was then, as now. There was a difficulty about those copper mirrors. You couldn't get them exactly flat, so that when you looked in it, you said more often than not, 'That's never me, is it? I've got a bit crinkly.' The old copper mirror, not being beaten out absolutely flat, distorted the image a little bit, and you had to learn to interpret it. 'My nose is not really like that: it's in that general position but not quite that shape. And on the whole, I look more handsome than that!' You had to learn to interpret the riddle that confronted you as you looked in the mirror.

Now we have God's holy word. I personally believe that it is inspired, verbally inspired, all of it. Are there any riddles left, or is it all so absolutely one hundred per cent clear to you, and to the majority of God's people? There is no room for interpretation; it's self-evident what it means, and everybody agrees, everywhere? I think not, else many a Bible teacher would go out of business! And some of you will go away tonight and say, 'I didn't enjoy that, because he didn't tell us plainly. He put two views: which one are we to follow?' Why didn't I tell you one was right and one was wrong? Because of the old defects in understanding: there is room for interpretation. One day, there will be no defect in our understanding. Instead of looking through a mirror, in a little while we shall see him face-to-face. Oh, let everything else fade from our memories, so long as this is kept sight of.

### *Gifts—preparing us for glory!*

The whole purpose of gifts is for edifying the church. Your gift, my sister, my brother, is to help me, to edify me and your fellow believers, and to prepare us, each one, for a wonderful day when we shall look face-to-face upon the person of our blessed Redeemer. Then you'll no longer need teaching, you'll no longer need exhortation. All defects of understanding will be gone forever. Oh, what a day it shall be when at last I reach the purpose for which I was



created. Tell me a bigger joy, if you can, tell me a bigger objective for a human being to fulfil, than to look at last upon the face of our blessed Lord, Creator and Redeemer.

What has this got to do with my gift? Oh, my dear brother, my sister, if you've any idea of the glory that awaits me, the privilege that I shall be called to rise to, you will pray God with all your heart to be given strength to love me, and so to use your gift that I might be helped, prepared and developed for that great day when I shall be admitted to the presence, and see the blessed Saviour face-to-face. Lord, help us all to use our gifts for that end, for his name's sake.

Let us pray.

Oh Lord, we have lingered long at thy word this evening. We thank thee for it. Much that we have read will in the immediate future disappear from our memories. Grant us Lord, grace in the days to come to think further on these things, and by thy Spirit revive them in our hearts. But above all, we pray that thou will keep before our hearts' gaze that hour that comes upon us so speedily and will soon be here, when we shall see the blessed Lord Jesus; and seeing him, delight in him—when we shall enjoy him through our faculties, perfected in his presence. To this end, give us grace to use our gifts in work-like fashion, not wasting our time but getting a heart led of thy Holy Spirit that we might love the unconverted and use our gifts that they might be saved, that we might love our fellow believers and use our gifts that each may be edified, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Spiritual Gifts—Practical Directions

It has been nothing but a pleasure for me to be with you here on these four occasions. I thank you for the warmth of your friendship and for your indescribable patience, sitting so long upon the seats. If you have felt any discomfort as a result of that, I'm informed by the physicists it's due to the law of gravity! It has really done my heart good and stimulated my thinking to see what a desire for God's word you have shown over these weeks. Now, for our final session, let's begin to read some passages from 1 Corinthians.

But desire earnestly the greater gifts. And a still more excellent way shew I unto you. (12:31)

Follow after love; yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but rather that ye may prophesy. (14:1)

If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord. But if any man is ignorant, let him be ignorant. Wherefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. But let all things be done decently and in order. (14:37–40)

We are, as you know, currently studying the gifts of the Holy Spirit; those lovely and delightful gifts with which God has endowed every member of the body of Christ. Last week, we spent quite a deal of time considering the basic principle and the basic motive of love that must control us in connection with spiritual gifts—in seeking gifts and in our use and exercise of gifts. Paul has described it in chapter 13, and as we said last week, that delightful description of the quality of love is not there because Paul has wandered from the theme of spiritual gifts. Love lies at the very heart of this topic of spiritual gifts. I repeat, it must control us in our seeking for spiritual gifts. It must control us in our use of spiritual gifts. So important is it, I beg leave to read again in your ears without comment, what the Holy Spirit has to say upon this matter of our basic motivation in the matter of gifts.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if have *the gift* of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing. (13:1–3)

In the absence of love, we could have the whole totality of spiritual gifts in our possession and our use. If we had not love, it would be to no effect whatsoever.

## **Applying the principles**

Tonight we come to consider chapter 14, or that part of it which talks about spiritual gifts, wherein Paul will put before us the implications of these two basic principles. All our seeking for and using our gifts must be motivated by love. If, using these things, we are motivated by love, we should give heed to what the Holy Spirit commands. We shall seek the greater gifts. Says the Holy Spirit, 'Earnestly desire the greater gifts.'

As we go through these verses and the questions we shall have to consider, I would like you, if you would, to have your Bible in your hand. Let me just remind you what my own attitude to these Scriptures is. When I hear Paul at the end of this chapter saying, 'Let anyone who claims to be spiritual recognise that the things I write are the commandments of the Lord,' I humbly say, 'Amen.' That, at least, is what I wish to do. I believe this chapter, in common with all chapters in the Bible, to be given by inspiration of God and to come to us with the Holy Spirit's power and authority. I must recognise, therefore, that everything in this chapter is a commandment of the Lord. And I say it all in humility that I would not willingly wish to neglect any of the details of this passage. Still less would I wish, knowingly, to distort anything that is said in this passage. And still, and even less, would I dare to cancel anything from this passage. Every commandment in this passage I take to be the inspired and authoritative word of the Lord, and I must see to it that I believe it, and understand it, and obey it.

So I conceive of my task tonight to be leading you in your study of these exceedingly practical things, and I shall have to put you through a great deal of rigour, of close argumentation. If you find it wearisome and you feel that you are popping off to sleep, you have my public permission to stand up for a while, and that will prevent you going to sleep! Alternatively, if you feel you will be in danger of going to sleep, give your name to me now, and when I see you popping off, I'll call it out for you! By hook or by crook, we've got to try and keep awake, and follow as rigorously and closely as we can the arguments and considerations the Holy Spirit now puts before us.

While, as I say, I hold them to be the inspired word of God, my exposition may not in all things be absolutely correct, and certainly you should not suppose that in all things I am correct. In the spirit of a later admonition in this chapter, 'let the prophets prophesy one, two or three, one at a time, and let the others judge' (v. 29). Your task tonight is to listen to what I say, but then to judge it. Is what I say according to the Holy Spirit's mind and will in this particular chapter? Thus shall we, all of us, come by his grace ever more near to understanding his will and to carry it out the more correctly.

## **Greater gifts**

The Holy Spirit commands us that we are to seek the greater gifts; and love will demand us that we seek and use the greater gifts. So our first question will be this: What is meant by the term 'greater'? Every gift in the body, every member in the body, is necessary. We mustn't say of any gift or any member, 'I have no need of you.' But while all gifts are necessary, some gifts are greater than other gifts, and it is the Holy Spirit's express preference that we are to seek the greater gifts. What does he mean by saying that some are greater, and which are those gifts that are greater than others? The Holy Spirit has not left us to guess. At the beginning of

chapter 14 he puts before us two gifts: the gift of tongues on the one hand, and the gift of prophecy on the other. He tells us explicitly that he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues.

Now I would have you all speak with tongues, but rather that ye should prophesy: and greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying. (14:5)

So here, at least, are two explicit examples, tongues and prophecy, and prophecy is greater than tongues, and therefore when the Holy Spirit says, 'I would prefer that you seek the greater gifts,' here is an immediate example. He is telling you, 'Go for prophecy, and not for tongues.'

### **What is 'prophecy'?**

But we must pause just a moment and ask ourselves what 'prophecy' means in this context. Some people, when they hear the word 'prophecy', immediately think of a message that foretells the future. Well, certainly, there were New Testament prophets like Agabus, who did from time to time prophesy future things, but that is not necessarily the main or the more important function of prophecy. Prophecy in this context has been defined for us, and that is the definition and description I shall be thinking of this evening.

But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men edification, and comfort, and consolation. (14:3)

To prophesy in this sense is to bring a message from the Lord that edifies God's people. It could be talking about the past or the present, or the future for that matter, but it will be a message from the Lord that gets to our hearts and edifies us in our most holy faith; and encourages us, as a general would encourage his troops; and then comforts us in our sorrows and tribulations. A message, then, from the Lord.

Secondly, we ought to notice what this gift of prophecy is not. We should not confuse the gift of prophecy here mentioned with the ministry of what you might call the 'classical prophets'—the Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, for instance. Paul notes in Ephesians 2 that the church is built upon the foundation of the holy apostles and prophets, through whom God revealed by his Spirit the great doctrines upon which the church is built. Paul tells us in his Epistle that, at the time he wrote, the faith—that is, the great body of Christian doctrine that we as Christians are required to accept and upon which the church is founded—had already been given to the saints, delivered once and for all to the saints. Now there was nothing to be added. The doctrines were given. What we have to do subsequently is to guard and to keep them.

I submit to you that when Paul talks about prophets here, he is not talking about those kinds of prophets, as you'll see from the advice he gives towards the end of the chapter. We have already mentioned it. 'Let the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others discern' (v. 29). That last clause, 'let the others discern', 'let the others judge', will be a key to understanding what kind of prophecy he's talking about. If you come to Isaiah the prophet, or Jeremiah, in the course of your reading of holy Scripture, or if somebody gets up in the

church and reads Isaiah 53 or something, it is not for us as Christians to sit back and say, 'Now, I wonder if Isaiah's got that right exactly. Is what Isaiah says according to Scripture? Let's investigate whether it is or not.' Of course, you would never dream of doing anything like that. Isaiah is a prophet in the classical sense, one of those great men of God who spoke direct from God, being borne along by the Holy Spirit, giving us thereby the inspired and unchallengeable word of God. And similarly, when Paul preaches to us, he says, 'if anyone is spiritual or thinks he knows anything, let him recognise that the things I command are the commandments of the Lord.' We are not supposed, as Christians, to come now to Paul's word here, in the inspired word of God, and say to ourselves, 'Now, I wonder if Paul's got it quite right here?' Of course not. This is the inspired word of God.

But prophets such as Paul is talking about here, he tells you straight, when they have functioned in the church, it is the duty of other members of the church to consider what they have said, and to scrutinise it, and to examine it and say now, 'Well, that was a good word, my brother, but is what you have said exactly according to holy Scripture?' The others are to discern, and though I'm not a prophet, but an old pedestrian teacher, you would take the same attitude to me. You don't say, 'Well, Gooding said this, and if he said it, it must be true.' The all-too-great possibility is that it wasn't true, and you must judge it, and criticise it, and compare what I say with God's holy word, to see whether what I have said is in accordance with inspired Scripture. That is the kind of prophet.

### **Revelation?**

The next thing you should notice in connection with the prophets is that the word 'reveal' is used. For instance, in verse 6: 'But now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation'; or again, verse 30, 'But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence.' That term also frightens some people, afraid that by 'revelation' it is meant some added doctrine that is now forbidden by the terms of Scripture itself, but we needn't think so. Listen to Paul writing the Epistle to the Ephesians—one of the last of his writings, when the canon was now nearly complete. He is praying to the Father of glory that he would give you to be strengthened by his spirit in the inner man, that he would 'give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him' (Eph 1:17). My dear brethren and sisters, there is such a thing still as the plain, straightforward teaching of the word of God, as a schoolmaster would teach it to his pupils. There is a slightly different thing, and that is when the Holy Spirit of God will take up a brother to expound the Scripture, and as he expounds it, you feel in your very heart of hearts that through that feeble human vessel the living God has spoken to your heart. Yes, that is according to one of those delightful hymns that we sing:

O Lamb of God, we lift our eyes  
To thee amidst the throne;  
Shine on us, bid thy light arise,  
And make thy glory known.

Yet we would prove  
Thine instant grace,  
Thy present power would feel;  
Lift on us now thy glorious face,  
Thyself, O Lord, reveal.<sup>1</sup>

I submit to you tonight that it would be a sorry thing if we lost that element in the life of the churches. It says here that if one is prophesying and something be revealed to the man sitting nearby, number one is to keep quiet, and number two is to have a go. Now, don't tell anybody I ever said this, will you, because it might get to the wrong circles! But I have been in meetings and in conferences sometimes when folks have gathered to hear the word of God, and a good man has been preaching from the word, and I've been sitting there full of joy of heart and saying, 'Marvellous, what he's saying is marvellous.' And as I've been sitting there, the Lord has suddenly shown me something about that part of the word of God that I have never seen before, and I said, 'Isn't that marvellous. Now go on, Mr Preacher, you say it.' Of course, I'm saying that under my breath. 'Go on, say it, man.' And sometimes he does, but sometimes he doesn't, but I've never had the courage to do what the Scripture says and ask him to sit down and let me carry on. Of course not, but I felt like it!

What a thing it is when the Lord, by his grace, shows you something in his word, and above all when he shows us himself. Wasn't it thus when the two walked to Emmaus, and the stranger began to take them through the Old Testament passages that very often they had heard read, and maybe had thought about. But as this stranger preached them, they saw this, and they saw that, and their hearts began to burn and they said, 'How did we not see that before?' Oh, my brothers and sisters, I say again, God save us from ever coming to a point when we've lost that from among the people of God, and all we have is just straight, pedestrian teaching. That's marvellous, of course, but it shouldn't let us neglect the other, for the other will depend on our coming to the assembly with hearts open to the Lord. Not to come because it's some supposedly famous preacher preaching, but to come to wait on God, and seeking that God would reveal himself to us through his word, and through his servants.

### **Why is prophecy greater than tongues?**

Now I'll come back to the point! We were beginning with question number one. We're told that we must seek the greater gifts, and we're told that prophecy is greater than tongues, and we've thought about what prophecy is. Now, why is prophecy greater than tongues? Let us look at the answer that is given and study it in some detail. As we read it you may care to notice that Paul has two arguments here, not just one.

For he that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God; for no man understandeth; but in the Spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men edification, and comfort, and consolation. He that speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. (14:2-4)

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Stewart (1843-1923) 'O Lamb of God, we lift our eyes.'

Why is prophecy greater than tongues? You have two arguments and two comparisons. The first comparison is, do you speak to God or do you speak to the church? And the second comparison is, do you set out to edify yourself or do you edify the church? Which would you do, if you had the choice? Let us remember that Paul is giving instructions here for what should be done in the church, when the whole church comes together. He's not talking about what you do in your study or your bedroom. He's talking about what we should do when the church comes together. Let's consider, then, the first two. If you have the choice in the church to speak to God or to men, which would you choose? You'll say, 'Well, fancy asking us that question. I mean, the answer is obvious. Given the choice to speak to God or speak to men, you speak to God, surely? I'm a very godly chap, and I would think that speaking to God is the more important thing.'

You would? Well, you've got it wrong then! Look what it says: prophecy is greater than tongues, 'for he that speaks in a tongue speaks not unto men but unto God'. He that prophesies speaks unto men, and the greater thing is speaking unto men. I didn't write it, my brethren: this is the inspired Holy Spirit of God. He says, if you have the choice, then prophecy is greater than tongues because he that prophesies speaks unto men 'for edification, and comfort [encouragement], and consolation' (v. 3). God needs none of those things but men surely do; and prophecy is greater than tongues because it speaks to men. Consider what I say. Have I got the right end of the stick, is it what Scripture says?

The other comparison is 'He that speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he that prophesies edifies the church' (v. 4). Which would you do, if you had the choice? And once more remember, it's in the church gathering, not in your bedroom. So in the church, if you had the choice, would you edify yourself or would you set about edifying the church? Here you have no real choice, because your intention is to be a true believer, surely; and a true Christian, as Paul tells us, must ever be motivated by love. Love is not love of ourselves but love of other people. If you've got the choice whether you edify yourself or whether you edify the church, there should not be a split-second of hesitation. Love will demand that, in loving the others, you put their needs before your own and you edify the church.

That is very important. Paul is not saying that my own personal edification is of no account, and doubtless it is true to say that if I would edify the church I must myself somehow be built up. I cannot give to others what I don't have. But in church, love demands that we set about not edifying ourselves but edifying the others. Incidentally, you may hear some folks say, 'I'm not going to that place again, I didn't get much out of that.' You didn't? Did you give much? What's our motivation in coming to church? To get or to give? Love would say that edification of others must be the first thing.

We come now to the preference, once more expressed. We notice that verse 1 says 'Follow after love, but desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but rather that you may prophesy.' Here is the Holy Spirit himself expressing a preference. Says the Holy Spirit, 'rather this than that.' So in verse 5, 'I would have you all speak with tongues, but rather that you should prophesy'. The situation is that there were in Corinth people who spoke with tongues, rather a lot of them, and Paul is saying, 'I'm not carping at you for doing that, but I have a preference. I would rather that you prophesy, for prophesying edifies the church.' Preference, then, and I repeat, a preference expressed by the Holy Spirit. Tell me, my brothers and sisters, is it thinkable that,

as believers in the Lord Jesus, we should ignore or go against the express preference of the Holy Spirit? It's unthinkable, isn't it?

Gentlemen, I beg leave to talk to you for a moment, not that I'm an expert on these matters, but you wouldn't dream of going against your wife's preference, would you? As you're rushing out the door one of these Monday mornings, your wife says to you, 'Do you know what day it is?'

'Oh yes,' you say. (You've really forgotten, but never mind!) 'Yes, it's your birthday, my dear. What would you like for your birthday? A lovely bunch of flowers, for instance — would you like roses?'

And your dear wife says, 'Well, not really roses. I don't like them. I don't like the smell they give anyway. What I would like is begonias.'

'Righto my dear, you shall have your every wish. Begonias it shall be.'

And you come home that night, and you've got something behind your back, and then you proudly present your present: a big, big bunch of roses, and your wife's face falls a little.

'Roses?'

'Yes, aren't they nice, my dear?'

'But weren't there any begonias?'

'Oh yes, there were lots of begonias. Why do you ask?'

'Well, if you remember, I said I preferred begonias.'

'Well, I myself like roses, my dear, so I bought roses.'

Well, you wouldn't do it, would you? Or if you had done it, my good man, look out for lumps in your porridge on Monday morning next!

And what shall we do with the Holy Spirit's expressed preference? There was an occasion when David was being hunted around the countryside, and one night, weary with his toil, he let escape from his lips what he thought nobody else heard. 'Oh, that somebody would give me of the water of Bethlehem' (2 Sam 23:15). Three of his army officers heard it, and at the risk of their lives, they broke through the Philistine fortifications, got him his water and brought it back to him. He poured it out to God as a sacred offering, for it had involved the danger of those men's lives. So keen were they, that his merest wish would be their command. My brother, my sister, it is the Holy Spirit's expressed preference — not just a wish uttered under his breath — his expressed preference. Not tongues, rather prophecy. What shall our response be?

I must confess to you, as I have tried to watch the broad Christian scene over these twenty years, one thing has puzzled me beyond my powers to explain it. How has it come that, in these last twenty years, in spite of the Holy Spirit's expressed preference, 'Not tongues, but prophecy,' millions of professing Christians have been encouraged to seek tongues? How has it come about? It can't be of God, can it? The Holy Spirit doesn't say, as you observe Paul now, that the use of tongues is evil. 'But I have a preference,' says Paul, 'so does the Holy Spirit, and I wish you rather to seek this.' Why? Well, because of the goal in view.

### **What is a tongue for?**

Let us turn to thinking now of verse 6.



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

You say, 'That verse is a little bit strange. He starts off by talking about tongues. How does he then go off and talk about revelations and prophesyings and teachings and knowledge and things? I thought they were different gifts?' Well, Paul is now turning us to think about what the purpose of tongues is anyway. Let's forget supernatural tongues and take the ordinary, physical tongue that you use to speak pure, beautiful Irish or whatever it is you speak. The purpose of a tongue is not just to make a noise: the whole purpose of having and using a tongue is to communicate some information. 'And if I come to you speaking in a tongue,' says Paul, 'what good will it do unless I use that tongue for these four things?' This could be by way of revelation, that is to communicate something God has revealed to me; or to tell you knowledge that God has given me; or to prophesy or teach. So far as it goes, the tongue is just a mechanism for communication, and if God chooses to use that particular mechanism, well and good; but, if it communicates nothing, then it is precisely useless.

So if that be true, let's look at verse 7 onwards. If a tongue has got to communicate information, what are the requirements? And here Paul once more talks of two sides of the problem, and I'm going first to read the verses with you. There must be certain requirements met by the one who speaks. What are those requirements? Says Paul,

Even things without life, giving a voice, whether pipe or harp, if they give not a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain voice, who shall prepare himself for war? So also ye, unless ye utter by the tongue speech easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? (14:7-9)

If the message is going to be communicated, condition number one that must be fulfilled is that the one who speaks must transmit a clear message. The other condition that must be met if communication is going to take place, is that the one who hears must understand the message. Paul explains that in the next verses:

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and no *kind* is without signification. If then I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be to him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh will be a barbarian unto me. So also ye, since ye are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek that ye may abound unto the edifying of the church. Wherefore let him that speaketh in a tongue pray that he may interpret. (14:10-13)

We see the two sides to this question. If God's truth—his comfort, edification, encouragement—is going to be communicated to the believers, the person who speaks must speak in a language that's clear. Secondly, the person who hears must be able to understand that language. If either of those two things isn't granted, then no communication takes place. Now, this is so important that I want to spend a little time on it. Sometimes when I listen to discussion about the modern phenomenon of speaking in tongues, people will argue that the sounds that are made by those speaking in tongues are not earthly languages, they are the languages of angels.

So what would you deduce from that? Well, one thing you mustn't deduce is that heavenly languages are so much mumbo jumbo that they could not be translated. Let's think what language is. Forget the gift of tongues, ordinary language—good old home-spun English, or German, or French, or whatever. Now, if I may ask you, what is the difference between language and noise? Here you are in your beautiful country house for the weekend, hoping to have a rest from the din and clatter of Belfast and the shipyards. As you settle down at night in your cosy feather bed, presently you hear a grunt and a groan and a creaking, and then it develops into a banging. It's a westerly gale on the shores of Donegal, and it's blowing the barn door outside your bedroom window, all night long. Would you confuse that with a language? Of course not, it's just noise. It's communicating nothing—except perhaps a warning to the farmer that it's about time he oiled the hinge!

There's a difference between noise and language. Noise is random. Language is an ordered sequence of sounds, deliberately and intelligently ordered sounds, to convey a message. You can have language without words, of course. Paul uses an example when he talks about pipes, or harps, or trumpets. A trumpet, a bugle, can speak a language: or at least a bugler through the bugle. There are no words. When, for instance, a squad of soldiers surround the grave of their loved and lost comrades, and one of them steps forward and takes his bugle and plays the Last Post, though there are no words, it isn't just noise. That plaintive sound of the Last Post, as a soldier plays it on his bugle, is a deliberately ordered sequence of sounds designed to convey a message. Here are soldiers in their grief paying their last respects and saying their farewells to their fallen comrades. It's a language more expressive than words, perhaps. It's a language nonetheless, because it's ordered.

So, when it comes to this gift of tongues, the true gift of tongues was never just noise. To justify it as being noise that nobody could ever translate because it's a language of heaven, is an insult to the great angels. I tell you, my brothers, my sisters, that Michael the Archangel, and Gabriel, and the great angels that stand in the presence of God and speak to him and he to them, don't speak mumbo jumbo. They don't all mumble random noise. What an insult it would be to high and holy angels to suggest they did. There is no difference in this—whether it be the language of angels or men, or of a bugle—it's not noise. It's not random sound. It is intelligently ordered, organised sounds conveying a message.

Applying his lesson, Paul says to the believers, 'Now, if you get up in church only to emit a lot of confused sounds from your mouth, what use will it be? If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for battle?' Imagine one of the great generals ordering me to go out on the battlefield with a bugle and sound the attack, and I try to blow the thing. I don't know if you've ever tried to blow a bugle: it makes some very rude noises if you don't know how to blow it! Imagine me getting up and blowing this thing, and the poor soldiers wouldn't know whether it was retreat or charge, or, 'Come to the cookhouse door, boys.' All language in the church, whatever language you use, must be a genuine language that is a series of ordered sounds conveying a clear message.

The other side is true as well—the people who hear must understand. If you were a raw recruit to the army and the soldier played the retreat, but you didn't know that particular tune, you wouldn't know what to do. That would be useless. Not only must the speaker emit a clear message and clear sound, but the person who listens must be able to understand that

message. You could come and speak to me in beautiful Czechoslovakian, and you could be preaching the most elegant sermon that ever was, but it wouldn't do me any good. I don't know Czechoslovakian. For all that you may be speaking the most highly polished and sophisticated Czechoslovakian, do you know what you'll sound like to me? You'll sound to me like someone who's saying, 'Baa, baa, baa, baa.' The Greeks weren't trying to be rude when they dismissed as barbarians people who didn't speak Greek. The word 'barbarian' was just their way of imitating the 'baa, baa, baa' sound of a strange language. So, says Paul, 'You will appear to me to be a barbarian.'

Therefore, in the church, two things must happen. He who speaks must transmit a clear message, and those who listen must be able to understand the message. If they don't know the language in which it is all happening, for them it is useless. So we cannot hide behind the idea that I can speak a so-called 'tongue', but it's not translatable because it's a language of heaven. If it's a language at all, if it's a tongue at all, then potentially it must be translatable. Why is that? Why is it necessary that people be able to understand? Well, Paul goes on to tell us now.

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it, then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else if thou bless with the spirit, how shall he that filleth the place of the unlearned say the Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he knoweth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank God, I speak with tongues more than you all: howbeit in the church, I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. (14:14–19)

### **Speaking and Understanding**

We move on now to think of this all-important area—the relationship between our understanding and our spirit. Both of them, of course, are important. Listen to what Paul says in verse 14. 'If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays'. Would you notice he doesn't say, 'If I pray in a tongue, it's the Holy Spirit praying'? 'If I pray in a tongue, *my* spirit prays'. Why do I emphasise that? Because it's not necessarily the Holy Spirit. Some people imagine that if only somebody is able to speak in a tongue, that is an immediate miracle produced and supported and carried on by the Holy Spirit directly every time it occurs. That is not necessarily so, my brothers, my sisters. It is not so with any of the gifts.

If I have any gift—I'll leave you to judge in the end—but perhaps it could be I have the gift of a teacher. Does that mean, whenever I use my gift, it is always the Holy Spirit moving me? It doesn't, does it? Suppose I were to deviate into false doctrine and heresy. It could happen: God help me that it never shall, but it could. And because I have a gift of a teacher and can make it seem persuasive to people, they sit there and say, 'Wasn't that a marvellous message!' when all the time it wasn't a marvellous message, it was false. You wouldn't dare say that was the Holy Spirit moving me, would you? The fact that we've got a gift doesn't mean that every time we try to use it, we are being led of the Holy Spirit. How I blush to remember those many occasions when I sought to use my gift, but the power of God's Holy

Spirit was not with me, and the thing was a disaster, and I vowed in my heart never to preach again. Perhaps you haven't had many experiences like that, but it could happen even to you.

If somebody has a gift of speaking in tongues, it doesn't mean that every time they do it, it is necessarily a miracle of the Holy Spirit. Paul says that what is happening is that the person's own spirit prays, but his mind, his intellect, is unfruitful. So what about that, then? You say, 'Well, that's a superior position, isn't it? If you are so full of the Spirit that your spirit prays, but your mind is a blank, that must be a very holy and advanced spiritual position to be in.' No, it isn't. I will pray with the spirit, but at the same time I will pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, but I will sing with the understanding as well. Why have half a blessing when you could have the whole? It is always better, if you can, to pray and speak with the understanding, because then not only is your spirit fruitful, but your mind is fruitful. That's a double blessing.

To show that I'm not speaking in any carnal fashion at this juncture, listen to what the Holy Spirit himself says — verse 20: 'Brethren, be not children in mind'. Don't be little children when it comes to your grey matter. Think as an adult would think. 'Be grown-up in mind. In malice, be babes'. It is quite false to say that the more spiritual you are, the less you will use your mind. It came as a shock for me to read a report of a Christian teacher, now in a different land from this, addressing a great convention of Christian people, and he expressed himself like this. 'God wants to move us from our minds to our spirits. You must watch out for evaluating what is going on with your mind.' In other words, don't use your mind to evaluate things: God wants to move us away from our minds to our spirit. I have utterly no hesitation in saying that is totally false, utterly false.

How dare I say it? Because the Holy Spirit himself says it. In intellect, be men, be grown-up, be adult, use your intellect; but in malice, be babes. For it is true that if we rely simply on human intellect and seek not the grace of the Holy Spirit's illumination, we shall go to the other false extreme. Paul reminds us that only by the Holy Spirit of God do we understand the things that are given us of God. The world, by its wisdom, knew not God. We need constantly to be dependent upon God's Holy Spirit in the gatherings of the church, but it is just as wrong to go to the other extreme and say being led by the Spirit and illuminated by the Spirit means that we should leave our intellects behind. We are to use them, and as we shall presently see, if a prophet prophesies, we must use our minds to criticise.

So important is that, says Paul, that suppose you were to get up and give thanks in a tongue that nobody understood, 'how shall he that fills the place of the unlearned say the Amen at your giving of thanks, seeing he knows not what you say?' (v. 16). My brother, my sister, if you don't know what is being said, you cannot, you may not, you should not at any rate, say 'Amen'. That would be like signing a blank cheque. How shall he say the 'Amen' at your thanksgiving? You gave thanks well, maybe, but he didn't understand it. He couldn't understand it. To him, it was a foreign language. That's why he cannot say the 'Amen', and what is more, 'the other', says verse 17, 'was not edified.' Listen to that. If you don't understand what's said, you are not edified. 'Oh yes, I was. I didn't understand a word that was said, but I'm sure it somehow put something in my heart.' Well, did it really? You say you were edified. 'No, you weren't,' says the Holy Spirit. You didn't understand. You were

not edified. Pray consider it, my brothers and sisters. Am I saying what Scripture says, or have I made it up?

### **Edifying the church**

Now we come near the end, and a cup of tea is there. I see your eye glint at the thought! We're nearly through. A few more major things. Paul says, 'Look, my brothers, don't be children in intellect. Be children in malice. In intellect, think. You who desire so much to speak in tongues, tell me what is the purpose of tongues?' You'll say, 'The purpose of tongues is so that I edify myself—like verse 4 says, "he that speaks in a tongue edifies himself." That's the purpose of tongues: to edify myself.'

Would you say that is the first and prime purpose of tongues, to edify yourself? Take the gift of an evangelist. I don't have it, but suppose you invited me to come and preach the gospel for you one Sunday, and I came here, and I stood upon this platform, and I held forth most vehemently, with great rhetoric, in classical Russian, and you said,

'Excuse me sir, just a moment. What are you saying?'

'I'm preaching the gospel.'

'Yes, but what's this language you're using?'

'It's Russian.'

'We don't understand Russian. Nobody understands it here, so your preaching is all in vain.'

'Well, that doesn't matter, because it's edifying me.'

It's true that, isn't it? You gospel preachers, haven't you found it so? You, Sunday school teachers, when you've been preaching the gospel, and one afternoon, perhaps, the children are quiet for once, and they listen, and you feel the message has gone home, and it's a glorious gospel to preach anyhow, and it warms the very cockles of your heart.

Thus, preaching the gospel does edify you. But that isn't the first purpose for which the gift of evangelist is given. The purpose of evangelism is to get the unconverted saved, by communicating the gospel to them. What would be the sense of me standing on the platform and saying, 'I don't care what you say. I've got this gift of Russian, and I'm going to preach the gospel in Russian even if nobody else understands it, because it's edifying me.' Nonsense.

#### *The true purpose of tongues*

What does Scripture say the true and prime purpose of tongues is? Paul describes to us in verses 20–25 the purpose of tongues and the purpose of prophecy. Briefly put, tongues are a sign to the unbeliever, prophecy a sign to the believer. What does that mean? Well, you'll see what it means if you consider the first time tongues is reported as having been used in the Acts of the Apostles. It was used as a sign to the unbelievers. Here was this great crowd, Jews, most of them, but their mother tongues were different. Paphlagonian, and Parthian, and Arabian, and goodness knows what else. There was this great crowd of Jews, and the Holy Spirit came upon the early Christians, and they began to speak with tongues as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance; and as they spoke in tongues, presently a man from Parthia over here, his ears pricked up: 'Oh, there was somebody there speaking in Parthian.' And then this man from Paphlagonia, suddenly it caught his ear: 'There's that other chap there, he's speaking

Paphlagonian.’ And when he scrutinised the preacher, he saw that the preacher was an ordinary peasant from Galilee, who’d never learned Paphlagonian in all his life. How could he manage to speak Paphlagonian, then? He was speaking good Paphlagonian and conveying a message about the glories of God. The man from Paphlagonia could see it was a miracle, an undeniable miracle. It was a sign to the man, and when the Holy Spirit used that technique on the day of Pentecost, three thousand people of those that heard came to repentance and to faith. If you can do it now, my brother, do it. Go and speak outside the Kremlin if you would do it, or the middle of Timbuctoo, if God should so use you that it becomes an evident miracle to those that hear you. Prophecy, by contrast, is a sign to believers.

‘Yes, but,’ says somebody who’s very perceptive, ‘doesn’t Paul now proceed to contradict himself? For he says that if you’re in your church in Corinth and there comes an outsider in from the street, and he hears you all speaking in tongues, he’ll say you’re bonkers. There’s something gone wrong here. Paul, you said just now that tongues is a sign to the unbeliever, and now you’re saying if an unbeliever comes in off the street and hears you all speaking in tongues, instead of it being a sign to him, he’ll say you’re bonkers. How come?’ Well, for this simple reason. On the day of Pentecost, when they got up and spoke in these different tongues, in Parthian, Paphlagonian or something, there were people out in the crowd, unbelievers, who understood those tongues. Therefore, it became a miracle to them.

Says Paul to the Corinthians, ‘Now, you’re Greek-speaking, aren’t you? So, you’re in church one night, and here comes an old, unconverted Greek weaving his way down the street after he’s been to the tavern, and he says, ‘I wonder what these Christians do in this upper room thing. I think I’ll walk in and see what they’re doing.’ So, he’s a Greek-speaker, you are all Greek-speakers, and he knows you’re Greek-speakers, and he comes into your assembly, and you’re all holding forth in tongues. What will he say? Well, he’ll say you’re mad, absolutely mad, for he knows you’re Greek speakers, and he’s a Greek speaker. He doesn’t know any other language, and he can’t make head nor tail of what you’re saying. What will that do? I should think it would put him off the gospel forever. What is the sense of it? Whereas, if you were prophesying, and the word of the living Lord came to his heart, then the secrets of his heart would be revealed, and he would come under conviction of sin and say, ‘God is among you indeed.’

Oh, my brothers and sisters, forgive me if I’m too severe in my criticisms, but we cannot afford to play about with spiritual gifts. The battle is too serious. The task that the Lord has given us is too tremendous to waste time. We must constantly ask ourselves, with all the intellectual rigour and analysis we’re capable of, ‘What use is it, what I am now saying? What use is it to anybody? Will they understand it?’ If they don’t, well then, that’s no good. Let us use what methods they can understand, for we are commissioned to a great task to get sinners saved and the church of God edified. We shall need every ounce of grey matter that God has given us.

### **Tongues—translated or not at all**

So, in the end, what? ‘Don’t forbid to speak with tongues,’ says Paul. I dare not contradict him. And when Paul adds ‘recognise the things that I write are the commandments of the Lord’, for my part, I would not dare to cancel that out and say it no longer applies. But the

whole drift of Paul's communication in this chapter is to plead with us first to listen to the Holy Spirit's preference: 'Go for prophecy, not for tongues.' Secondly, now in the church, if a man wants to speak in a tongue, he must make sure there is a translator present, and if there is no translator, he is to keep quiet.

You say, 'I thought the Bible said there was to be an interpreter.' Well, it does. The question is, what does the word 'interpret' mean? In Greek, as in English, the word 'interpret' has two possible meanings. When I go abroad, to Hungary, or Poland or somewhere, and I cannot speak their language, I preach in English, and they provide me with an interpreter. And what does he do? Well, he doesn't expound my message. He simply translates my message. The English word 'interpret' sometimes means 'to translate', and then it can mean also 'to explain'. So, there are two sides to it. Which meaning shall we take here? If a man speaks in a tongue, the first thing you must do is to translate it. If somebody speaks here tonight in Russian, before anybody can explain what the man is saying, they'll have to translate what the man is saying. And if somebody speaks in a tongue in the church, then it must be translated, and if there's nobody who can translate it, then the message is not to be given in a tongue, says Paul. It is a matter of great concern that there has been much fanciful thinking on this topic.

Long since, some believers in America, wishing to test the reality of this thing, went to somebody who had spoken a message in a tongue and recorded it on a tape recorder. Then they took it to a person who claimed to have the gift of interpreting tongues, and he gave an interpretation. They took the same message to another person who claimed to have the gift of interpretation, and that person gave a completely different interpretation, utterly different message altogether. They took it to a third, with the same result. So the same message had been translated and interpreted three completely different ways by three different people all claiming to interpret by the power of the Holy Spirit. That is serious, isn't it? Some people, hearing that, say, 'What a carnal thing to do. Serves them jolly well right. Fancy being so carnal as to go and record a message spoken by the Holy Spirit in tongues and then getting somebody to judge it? Well, no wonder the Holy Spirit dealt with them by making fools of them.'

But wait a minute. Is it a carnal thing to test somebody who claims to have a translation, as to whether it is a real translation? What about the gift of teacher? I gather I'm being recorded. Is the gift of teaching not a charismatic gift, one of the *charismata*? Is it an insult to record me and take the tape home and listen to it again? But more than that, would it insult the Holy Spirit if as you listened you began, in Christian love, to analyse what I said, and criticised it? Far from that being unspiritual, the Holy Spirit says you must do it, my brother, my sister. You must not accept what I say simply because I say I've got a spiritual gift. The Holy Spirit says you must analyse it, you must check it, you must test it, and if you must test teaching, so you must test all that claims to be a translation or interpretation of a tongue. And if you can't test it, because you have not the means, then it must not be done in the church. That is the word of God.

## **Prophesying**

And finally, a word to the prophets. Let the prophets prophesy one at a time, three at the most, and if something is revealed to those that sit by, number one is to sit down, and number two is to be given the chance to say what has been revealed to him (see 14:29-31). For, says Paul,

'the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets' (v. 32). The fruit of the spirit is self-control. If you were to say to me, 'Gooding, it's now two minutes past nine and about time you sat down' and I were to reply, 'But I can't. I'm so full of the Spirit that I can't control it,' then it's not the Holy Spirit that's filling me, for the Holy Spirit works godly self-control. 'The spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets'.

### **Concluding remarks**

As I have kept you an inordinately long time tonight, I'm sure eventually – perhaps in two days' time when the tiredness has worn off – you'll find it in your hearts to forgive me! But these are serious matters. For my part, my brothers, my sisters, I assure you as I speak before God, I do not speak in carping criticism of others of God's people. But as a workman responsible to the Lord, we must listen to God's Holy Spirit as to how we use the gifts he has given us. We must not be infants. We must be spiritually adult, and all things are to be done calculatedly for edification of the church.

May the Lord bless his word, give us ever-increasing understanding of it, and love for all his people. For his own name's sake. Amen.



## About the Author

**DAVID W. GOODING** is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. His international teaching ministry is marked by fresh and careful expositions of both testaments. He has published scholarly studies on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John 13–17, Acts, Hebrews and the New Testament's use of the Old Testament.