

## A Survey Of God'S Gifts To Us

Spiritual Gifts

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In our public schools today there is a program called "The Gifted and Talented Program." Its purpose is to place "academically superior" students in a more challenging and advanced program than the average student—or, so they would have us believe. From what I have heard and read about it, these "Gifted and Talented Programs" are actually programs that brainwash our children. Any of you who have children in the "Gifted and Talented Program" should be aware of this.

In fact, from what I have read, at times when children come home (after being in the program) the parents find that their children are more defiant than they had been before. And so more and more is coming out about these "Gifted and Talented Programs," and how wrong they are in the way they teach.

Logging on to the "Gifted and Talented website," it was interesting to see what the educators are promoting and what they look for in a "gifted" child. Quoting from their website: "Using a broad definition of giftedness, a school system could expect to identify 10-15% or more of its student population as gifted and talented."

They list six traits that the educational system should be looking for to show which students are gifted, and which are not. One of the traits they look for is the general IQ scores of the children. For example, if you have 130-144 IQ, then you are 'gifted'. 145-159, you are 'highly gifted'. 160 and above, you are 'profoundly gifted'. You can see how they categorize children, whom they isolate to see who should go into these elite programs.

And there are other criteria that educators use to see if a child is gifted, or should be in the "Gifted and Talented Program." They look at creative and productive thinking. It is interesting that under this trait they mention openness to experience and setting personal standards. What they are saying is that children who are *setting their own standards* are the ones they want in their "Gifted and Talented Program."

Under leadership ability, they want people who are self-confident and have a tendency to dominate. These people they call "gifted." So you can see how the world views a gifted person. It is a person who has something that can be used by this establishment to further the ends of, in a sense, "one world government"—or the government that a humanly-reasoning mind comes up with.

The 'educational experts' believe that only a very small percentage of the population is gifted. So they look very carefully at each one, to put them in this elite program—so that they can come up with a "superior race," so to speak, that will get the earth out of its crisis. That is, the crisis it has allowed itself to get into—where the earth is spewing us out. Of course, the way that they approach this is in defiance of God.

In sharp contrast, *all* human beings receive gifts from God. While Paul was giving advice on marriage, he mentioned that ***everyone is gifted***.

**I Corinthians 7:7** For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another after that.

Now some gifts that are given by God are *physically oriented gifts*. What I mean by that is that they are natural tendencies, or abilities, that God has given us through the spirit in man. And some of the gifts that are given (only in the church, actually) are *spiritual gifts*. Those are imparted through the Holy Spirit.

A spiritual gift does not conflict with what God has bestowed naturally on an individual. It may, at times, even build on the natural gift. But the natural gift should not be confused with those spiritual gifts that are given within the church. All gifts belong to God, and should be used for His glory. That is the purpose of spiritual gifts. In I Peter 4:11, Peter explains this principle regarding the use of the gifts.

**I Peter 4:11** If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If any one ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Now, in I Corinthians 14:1, the apostle Paul tells us that we should *desire* spiritual gifts. And in I Corinthians 12:1, he says that he does not want us to be ignorant about them. Obviously, they are important; and that is why Paul spends a significant portion of his letters expounding on them.

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

So, obviously, we should know (1) what spiritual gifts are. We should know (2) how to use them and (3) when they are used—because they are a very important part of the *unity* in the church, and of the *edification* of the church.

So what are spiritual gifts, and what is their purpose? The New Testament term "spiritual gifts" is literally "the spiritual supply of gifts." The word "gifts" is the English rendering of the Greek noun *charismata*. From this, some groups (that is, charismatic groups) get their name. It is formed from the Greek word *charis*, which means "grace." So there is a very close association with grace here. The *gifts* are the physical manifestation of grace, visibly seen in a person's action and in their mind.

Spiritual gifts are extraordinary endowments given to members of God's church for the benefit of the whole church. They are given by the grace of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Hebrews 2:4** God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, and with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will.

So the spiritual gifts are extraordinary endowments given to members of God's church for the benefit of the whole church. They are given by the grace of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit. And in Romans 12:5, Paul tells us that (even though we are members) "we are one Body, and every one members one of another." He continues:

**Romans 12:6** Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us. . .

So a gift is given to an individual according to the measure of his personal capacities. Depending upon the need, the Spirit infuses entirely new "powers" in an individual, or stimulates those already existing to a higher power and activity.

The purpose of the spiritual gifts is primarily *the edification and unity of the whole church*, and secondarily *the conviction and conversion of **future** prospective members for God's church*. Turn with me to I Corinthians 14, and we will look at this first primary purpose of gifts—for the edification and unity of the whole church.

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

**Edify** means to enlighten, or to improve, to illuminate, to uplift, enhance, or to educate. All of these things are for the edifying of the church.

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

So we see that the primary purpose of the spiritual gifts is to uplift and edify the church of God.

Now, Paul's goal in I Corinthians 12 is to stress the essential unity of the church. This is where the overall context is found. The church is the Body of Christ. The characteristic of a healthy body is that every part in it performs its own function for the good of the whole body.

But unity does not mean uniformity. Unity in the Body does not mean that everything is perfectly uniform. And therefore, within the church there are differing gifts and differing functions. But every one of them is a gift of the same Spirit, and designed not for the glory of the individual member of the church—but for the good of everyone.

In the middle of the main listing of the spiritual gifts (in I Corinthians 12), Paul emphasizes that the "gifts" work together as the different body parts work together—in unity, by one Spirit. And although we may not notice a spiritual gift in someone, he is actually a vitally functioning part of the Body of Christ, though he might not be as noticeable as someone else is.

In our own physical bodies, the muscles are not seen; but they are vital. And the respiratory system, for example, functions reliably for most of us without being noted; but it is vital to our well-being. The circulatory system carries nutrients to all the parts of the body; but we do not really notice that it is doing that, when it is doing it. Still, it is a very important part of the entire body; and its work is done unseen. So that is the way that many of the spiritual gifts are, as well. If you will turn with me to I Corinthians 12, we will see the same thing described by Paul.

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

**I Corinthians 12:24-27** But our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

Since there is one Body with many members, the individual members must be concerned about the health of the other members. In the church, there is no such thing as an individual doing something and it not affecting others. Whether it is good or it is bad, the actions still affect others.

Since there is one Body and many members, we need to understand that we are not all the same. The gifts that are given are different. So we are not all going to function the same. We are going to be functioning differently, *but* we should be functioning in unity!

**Ephesians 4:7-8** But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He said, When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.

So He gave gifts to *all* men, but to the members of the church He has given **spiritual gifts**. *Why* did Christ give spiritual gifts to the church? We did touch on that earlier—with the edifying of the church—but here in Ephesians 4 you see some detailed reasons for it.

**Ephesians 4:12-16** For the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, and cunning craftiness, of deceitful plotting, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part [each one of us] does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

So each and every individual has an impact on the church in the use of the spiritual gifts. The primary purpose of the gifts is for the *edification and the unity of the whole church*.

The second purpose of the gifts is for the *conviction and the conversion of future prospective members*. (Not generally for the world, although the gifts of miracles have been used as part of a witness to the world.) Most of the spiritual gifts are primarily for the church.

**I Corinthians 14:21-25** In the law it is written: With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; and yet, for all that, will they not hear Me, said the LORD. Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers, but for those who believe. Therefore if the whole church be comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed, or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is truly among you.

But what about the *specific individual gifts* that we receive from God? God gives different gifts, according to the many needs of the church; and to every member He gives specific gifts as a share in His service. Remember that Paul told us in I Corinthians 7:7 that "every man has his proper gift of God."

Every man has his proper gift! Although Paul spoke of different gifts, he does not give exhaustive lists. He is more intent on emphasizing the need for exercising the gifts in the right way than he is in the specific gifts themselves.

Romans 12 and also I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 contain Paul's lists of the spiritual gifts. These lists are obviously incomplete, since we find other gifts individually mentioned throughout the Bible; but they give us a good overview of the extent to which God is involved in His church.

Looking at these spiritual gifts, it is amazing—His intricate working in each and every one of us, to unify His church.

So let us quickly read *Paul's three lists of **spiritual gifts***. We will read through them very

quickly, and then I would like to touch on them.

**Romans 12:6-8** Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teaches, on teaching; Or he that exhorts, on exhortation: he that gives, let him do it with simplicity; he that rules, with diligence; he that shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

**I Corinthians 12:4-11** Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another diverse kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these work that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally [individually] as He will.

**I Corinthians 12:28-30** And God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

Well, no—not everyone has all of the spiritual gifts. To each **one** individual member is given **at least one** spiritual gift—and, in many cases, more than one.

**Ephesians 4:11** And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.

So there is the third list that Paul gives of the spiritual gifts.

Now let us just briefly run through the spiritual gifts and just very, very briefly touch on each one. I think that this will help you to really see the amount of involvement that God has with the church—and what He is working here in the edifying of the church, and

unifying it.

Now, there are two main categories of spiritual gifts (at least, the way that I have listed them here). The "gifts" fall most simply into two main categories—and those are (1) those that qualify their possessors for the ministry of the word and (2) those that equip the ministry and the lay-members for practical service.

The first main category of the spiritual gifts is the *ministry of the word*, and most of the gifts in this category involve speaking. (Not all of them, but most of them do.) The gift of apostleship is an obvious one. You will find that one in I Corinthians 12:28, and also in Ephesians 4:11. Of course it literally means, "one sent forth." It was not only given to the twelve apostles, but also to Paul—and, in a restricted sense it was given to Barnabas, Andronicus, Junias, Silvanus and Timothy.

We know that the special meaning of the word—"one sent forth"—gives us the reason why an individual, or minister, is given the gift of apostleship. And this, of course, is a rarely given gift (as you know). And it is only given after other gifts—such as preaching, wisdom, and knowledge—have been active for a while.

Then the next gift, the gift of prophecy, is found in Romans 12:6; I Corinthians 12:10; and Ephesians 4:11. This gift is primarily directed to the church in the way of preaching. Its primary function is to convey divine revelation of immediate significance to the church on what it needs to know and do under special circumstances at the time. This is primarily for the edification, the exhortation, and consolation of the church. It includes, occasionally, authoritative declarations of God's will regarding special cases—and, in very rare cases, predictions of future events. This is primarily talking about "preaching" rather than actually "foretelling."

Now, a true prophet, or minister, must live close to God—knowing His mind and His will, and able to make them known to everyone. So he has to be close to God and know exactly what he is preaching on. His function is two fold: (#1) The prophet, or minister, brings rebuke and warning—telling us that our way of action is not in accordance with the will of God. (#2) The other function of a minister is that he brings advice and guidance—seeking to direct us in the way God wants us to go.

So prophecy is primarily preaching, and very rarely does it entail foretelling.

The next one is *the gift of discerning of spirits*, which is found in I Corinthians 12:10 and in I Corinthians 14:29. This is the ability to distinguish between different kinds of spirits. Within the church, it is not only used when listening to the preaching that you hear; but it

is also used when interacting with others. The sermon is given to everyone who has the Holy Spirit. And as we are listening to someone try to convince us of another (let us say, false) doctrine, the Holy Spirit gives us the discernment to be able to tell whether something is wrong or not.

But this gift is a spiritual gift in addition to that which the Holy Spirit automatically gives to someone who is converted and baptized in the church. This gift is above and beyond that. It enables leaders, ministers, and apostles to be able to discern spirits and to tell whether a spirit is evil or whether it is good. And it is also given to each member, but to differing degrees.

Turn with me to I Corinthians 2. This gift can also be considered "a gift of understanding."

**I Corinthians 2:12-16** Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him: nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

In this society, where religion is free and open, all kinds of false beliefs are common. This includes the beliefs of some that attend God's church. And we have to distinguish between what is true and what is merely false hype, and the Holy Spirit helps us to do that. But the spiritual gift of the discernment of spirits, as spoken of here, is not just at that level. Rather it is a greater level, and more powerful than that.

Now under the category of the ministry of the word is *the gift of teaching* as well. Romans 12:7; I Corinthians 12:28; and Ephesians 4:11 show that as a gift. The gift of teaching differs from prophesying in that it is not characterized by speaking fresh truths given by the Holy Spirit. The author of the book of Hebrews wrote, at the end of Hebrews 5:11, "seeing you have become dull of hearing." And then in verse 12:

**Hebrews 5:12** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and have come to need of milk, and not of solid food.

He is telling the Hebrews there that they have attained such a low level of spirituality that they are still in need of milk, rather than strong meat. And so, how could a person who is at that level of understanding be given the gift of teaching? Well, they cannot! The gift of teaching is given to those who have studied, and worked hard to understand and know God's truth.

Now, it is not only given to ministers. It is also given to individuals. (But it is primarily given to ministers.) Teaching requires a good knowledge of the Word of God. The teacher expounds and applies established Christian doctrine, and his responsibility is primarily confined to the local church. But by extension, the gift of teaching flows into each member's home, when the father and mother teach their children.

**Deuteronomy 11:18-19** Therefore shall you lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, and when you rise up.

Teaching involves imparting the knowledge of God with some specific, individual attention to the learner. It is given on a lesser level to fathers and mothers, in teaching their children. But, in the way of a spiritual gift, it is given on a much greater and more powerful level to those in the church who need to be able to teach.

The next gifts under the ministry of the word are *gifts of kinds of tongues* and *interpretation of tongues*. These are found mentioned in I Corinthians 12:10, 28, and 30. Many people in mainstream Christianity have interpreted this gift of "tongues" to mean someone falling into an ecstasy and pouring out a torrent of unintelligible sounds in no known language. So we find the charismatic circles believing that this is what the "kinds of tongues" are.

But Paul tells us in I Corinthians 14:33 that God is *not* the author of confusion, but of peace. So the gift of tongues is not this ecstasy. It is not this babbling. The gift of tongues is the God-given, miraculous ability to speak in a human language that one has not learned in any normal way—and to be able to understand that.

In I Corinthians 14, Paul explains that preaching is preferred over speaking in tongues because preaching is understood and it edifies the church; whereas, speaking in tongues does not (except in special cases).

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

So rather than speaking in tongues, it is much better to prophesy (or, preach) in a known tongue—in a known language—so that each and every one can understand what's being said.

So the "gifts" that we have just touched on fall primarily under the category of the ministry of the word. But the second main category of spiritual gifts is *gifts for practical service*. This is the area where the average member sees more gifts being used on a non-ministerial level (more so, of course, than the gifts of the ministry of the word).

A fault of the church, in modern times at least, is that it has interpreted the idea of special gifts far too narrowly. It may have actually limited their use. Quite often, when the church has mentioned "spiritual gifts" it has been with the assumption that the special gifts consist of things like speaking, praying, teaching, or writing. Just for a label, these are the more "intellectual" types of gifts.

But we have to realize that the "physical gifts" of those who can work with their hands are very special gifts as well. They are not spiritual gifts, but they are physical gifts. The carpenter, or the electrician, or the painter, or the landscaper, or the plumber—all have received special gifts *from* God; and they can be used *for* God. Take these more physical gifts and add to them the spiritual gifts of service, and we have more powerful tools for the edification and unity of the church—especially when every member is *utilizing* his gifts (both the physical gifts that he is given, and the spiritual gifts).

Under the category of gifts for practical service, there are four main *types* in categorizing them. The reason I have categorized them like this is to show you how **extensive** God's hand is—in each and every one of our lives, and in the unifying and edification of the church. He is so much **involved!** He is so much involved in the details of the workings of the church that it is just incredible. How can we ever think that He is not with us?

So under the main category of gifts for practical service, there are four main *types*: gifts of (1) understanding, of (2) power, of (3) sympathy, and of (4) administration.

The first type that we will touch on here is *the gifts of understanding*. In I Corinthians 12, Paul mentions two things that sound very much alike. That is, **"the word of wisdom"** and **"the word of knowledge."** But in reality, these are two separate and distinct gifts

*The gift of the word of wisdom* is mentioned in I Corinthians 12:8. The Greek word translated "wisdom" is *sophia*. It is, in a nutshell, "the knowledge of things human and divine, and their causes." Here Paul refers to the highest kind of wisdom—"the wisdom from above" which James speaks of.

**James 3:13** Who is a wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct his works are done in the meekness of wisdom

We see there that meekness is involved in wisdom.

**James 3:14-17** But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

In contrast, "worldly wisdom" is based on intuition and experience—without revelation. Therefore, it has severe limitations in what it can accomplish. The failure to recognize these limitations brings condemnation on all that arrogantly attempt to cope with spiritual issues by human wisdom.

Wisdom is the right use of knowledge, and there is no way that wisdom can be used without true knowledge—because wisdom is based on knowledge as well. The gift of wisdom does not come from thought or human reasoning, but from an intimate relationship with God that is submissive and humble. Without that, there cannot be real wisdom.

**Proverbs 9:9-10** Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

The next gift of practical service and under this type of gifts of understanding is *the gift of the word of knowledge*. That is found in I Corinthians 12:8. This knowledge is the practical application of wisdom to human life.

**Proverbs 1:7** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools

despise wisdom and instruction.

So we see that without the fear of the Lord—without the respect, and obedience, and proper fear of God—there is no way that we can have proper knowledge. Proper knowledge comes from God; and the fear of God is the beginning of that knowledge.

Both wisdom and knowledge are necessary. That is, (1) the *wisdom* that knows, by a close relationship with God, the deep things of God and (2) the *knowledge* that can put that wisdom into practice in the daily life—in the world, and in the church.

**Jeremiah 9:23-24** Thus says the LOORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LOORD exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth. For in these things I delight, says the LOORD.

So he that understands and knows God is he who has true knowledge. Wisdom and knowledge work together. Wisdom is the right use of knowledge, but the right knowledge has to be had to have right wisdom.

But these "gifts" that we are talking about here are wisdom and knowledge far above what the average person is given. This is a spiritual gift of a great endowment that raises the wisdom of a man for the edification of the church. One man is well known as a wise man and another as a man of intelligence and knowledge. But it does not necessarily mean that they have to have both. It depends upon the functioning within the church and what the use is at that time. Both are equally useful in their place in the church, but both gifts are not necessarily given to the same person. (However, I would think that they usually would be.)

The second type of gifts for practical service is *gifts of power*. There are three of this type: (1) gifts of faith, (2) gifts of healings, and (3) the gifts of miracles.

Now *the gift of faith* is mentioned in Romans 12:6 and also in I Corinthians 12:9, where Paul means more than what we might call ordinary "faith." It is the faith that really produces miraculous results—above and beyond what normal faith would. It is not just the intellectual conviction that a thing is true. It is the commitment and passionate belief that God is supreme and reliable. That causes us to base all that we are and have on it so that our whole bodies are put into God's use.

Even though we all have access to the gift of faith, few obtain it at the level of the faithful of Hebrews 11. God endows people with this faith to rise to the occasion at hand, and we see that in this chapter.

**Hebrews 11:32-34** And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

So the gift of faith goes far and above the normal faith that we have, but it is given at a time of need—given at a time of excess, or a time when a Christian must excel in a situation. This faith is not the normal saving faith, but a higher measure of faith by which special, wonderful deeds are accomplished.

Under practical service, another type of the gifts of power is *the gifts of healings*—which are found in I Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30. The literal translation of the Greek seems to have unusual significance in I Corinthians 12:9. It is literally "*gifts of healings*"—both words are plural.

These spiritual gifts of healings enable God in many different ways, out of His sheer grace, to give healing of all different kinds to different people, relationships, and even situations. So there are many different types of healings—not just "the gift of healing," but there are multiple "gifts of healings."

In Acts 3, when Peter and John told the lame man to "get up and walk" and he was healed, the people who witnessed his healing marveled at the apostles' power. But Peter set them straight, to show them that it was not *their* power.

**Acts 3:12-13** So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go.

So we see that the gift of healings does not come from an individual. It does not come from an apostle, or a minister. It comes from God, through Jesus Christ. Both Paul's teachings and James' instructions in James 5:14, to call for the elders for prayer and anointing with oil, encourage us to rethink our actions, and our reactions, to the sicknesses that we get. When we become sick, do we turn first to God? Or, second to God? Or, third to God? We should be turning first to Him.

Maintaining good health through nutrition is a requirement for each individual in the church. How can we expect to have healings happen upon us, if we are not taking care of our bodies? Both our bodies and our minds have to be taken care of, because one does not function right without the other. So for us to ask God to heal us and not be doing our part (to try to live a good, wholesome life) is asking in vain.

God is our Healer and He distributes gifts of healings through members of the Body of Christ, to those who are sick. The "gifts" are for the sick—not for those in the ministry chosen as a conduit to confer the gifts. Those gifts come directly from God, and the workings are directly from God, and He's the only one that can take credit.

Under the category of practical service, and the *gifts of power* type of gifts, is also *the gift of working of miracles*. That is found in I Corinthians 12:10, 28-29. The Greek word used for "miracles" in this chapter literally means *powers*. It is used several places in the book of Acts to cover cases of exorcism and the curing of disease (which, in Paul's list, are placed under the separate category of "gifts of healings"). But the working of miracles is distinguished from the ordinary healing gift in that, even though a person may be used with the gift of healing, they may not be significant with regard to *power*. But the *powers* (miracles) point to a more powerful gift—more properly described as "*miraculous wonders*" and bestowed upon only certain principal men in the church.

In II Corinthians 12:12, Paul speaks of the *powers* he wrought in Corinth as among "the signs of an apostle." And in Hebrews 12:4, the writer mentions the manifold *powers* of the apostles to confirm their witness. Then, in Romans 15:18, Paul refers to his *miraculous gifts* as an instrument that Christ used for the furtherance of the gospel and the bringing of the Gentiles to obedience. So these gifts of powers (miracles) are very rare in whom they are given to.

Turn with me to Revelation 11 and we will see a future couple of individuals who will receive these *powers*. (And you have already guessed who they are.) The working of *powers* (miracles) is primarily given to apostles to declare the truth of God. But, like the gift of healing, the gift of miracles is primarily a gift of practical benefit. So when it is given, God has a specific purpose in mind. And only secondarily is it given as a means

of confirming the truth, and its messengers, by way of a sign. The Two Witnesses will have the gift of working miracles. They will have the gift of "powers."

**Revelation 11:6** These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.

So we see there a future use of those "powers" (miracles). And the book of Acts gives several examples of *powers* that are different from ordinary healings. For example—the raising of Dorcas (in Acts 9) and of Eutychus, who fell from the loft (in Acts 20).

So under the major category of practical service the gifts of power that we have listed are (1) faith, (2) healings, and (3) miracles or "powers".

Now the third type of gifts for practical service is *gifts of sympathy*. This type includes (1) *the gift of helps*, (2) *the gift of exhortation*, (3) *the gift of alms giving*, (4) *the gift of mercy*, and (5) *the gift of ministry [or, service]* is found in I Corinthians 12:28 on Paul's list. The word "helps" in the Greek is literally *acts of helping*. It is help, aid, support, relief, or comfort—rendered to the weak by the strong. It is used in Acts 20, when Paul exhorts the elders of the Ephesian church to follow his example in helping the weak.

**Acts 20:35** I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

*The gift of helps* gives a person greater ability to care for the poor. It is something that each and every one of us could have. It gives the ability to care for the poor, for the sick, for strangers, for widows and orphans. The most obvious example is the office of a deacon—where a deacon is responsible for taking care of widows and orphans, and the more physical aspects of the church.

This is one of the aspects that fall under the gifts of helps. In Romans 16:3, Paul says, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila my fellow workers in Christ Jesus." So the gift of helps is not only to the poor, but it is also to the ministry and to the church of God in general.

The gift of helps gives extra ability to those who, in any way, give aid (or, render assistance) in the church. It may refer to care for the poor, or the distribution of charity. This is aid provided *from* anyone *to* anyone. Now we do not have to necessarily have the

gift of helps to be able to help somebody else. But, in the church, there are people who we see that really seem to excel and are so helpful. They are able to be there when someone needs help. For example, there are people who are taking care of the sick; and God grants them the gift of helps—extra aid, and extra help—for them to be able to excel in that. So it is not each individual that is doing it; but it is this gift of helps from Jesus Christ.

Again, under practical service—the next gift of sympathy is *the gift of exhortation*. It is found in Romans 12:8. "He that exhorts" is the translation of the Greek word *paraklesis*, which has a variety of meanings. It can mean "encouragement" or "exhortation" or "comfort"—depending on the context. All are closely related; but *encouragement* is a major thrust of exhortation. The exhorter urges people to the practical requirements of God's truth.

Exhortation should never be disheartening, but it should always be encouraging. It should never point out a person's faults or problems, but it should urge him to the joy of living God's way of life, the way he should. So the exhortation is to encourage someone to do right—not to show him where he is doing wrong (although sometimes that comes into effect). It should be a positive exhortation.

Also under the main category of practical service and gifts of sympathy, there is *the gift of alms giving*. That is seen in Romans 12:8. When it says there "He that gives," it has to do with spontaneous private generosity. It is not done openly. When someone is in need and a person sees it, they go and give aid. But it is not giving aid once, or twice. The person with the gift of alms giving is always there to help. (In the sermonette we heard about that—about how we have to be there for each other, helping.)

**I John 3:17-19** But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

So we see that this gift of alms giving relates to the public distribution of aid by the church—from individuals as well as a group—to its needy. (But, primarily, as individuals.) It is to be done *with simplicity*—that is, with singleness of heart, free of mixed motives, and without regret over having given so much. It is genuine giving from the heart, without any resentment or feeling that we "have to."

Again, under practical service and under the gifts of sympathy are *the gifts of works of mercy*. That is found in Romans 12:8, where "he that shows mercy" does not pertain to the area of forgiveness, or sparing judgment. Rather, it has to do with ministering to the sick and needy. This is to be done in a cheerful, spontaneous manner that will convey "blessing," not produce self-pity.

This gift of showing mercy refers to those who have the care of the sick, the aged, and the needy. It is not necessarily providing charity for them, but attending them in their affliction and taking care of them. It is done with cheerfulness, pleasantness, and joy—with a kind and happy temperament.

You have probably seen nurses with this type of gift. They seem like they will do whatever it takes to care for a person's needs on an individual basis. So there are some outstanding nurses out there. Well, that gift that they have is a physical gift that God has given them. How much more can the spiritual gift of *the gift of works of mercy* do in God's church?

The reason that I am breezing through these is not only for time; but I want to give you just a touch of each one—to show you how *involved* God is in His work and His church. He is there; and He is giving gifts right and left. They are not dead gifts. They are constant, and they are available.

The next of the *gifts of sympathy* (which falls under the overall heading of Practical Service) is *the gift of ministry*. That is found in Romans 12:7. The Greek word translated "ministry" means *service* of any kind. *Service [or, ministry]* is the function to which every Christian is called, and the purpose to which every one of the special "gifts" should be devoted.

It is a pivotal point. This gift is a serving of the brethren's material needs and of the external matters of the church. In this sense, a variety of brethren could give aid to the needy. That is, any variety (or, any individual) could give aid to the needy. Usually this is thought of as the responsibility of deacons, but it is not limited to them. Each individual person can have this "gift."

**Acts 6:1** Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

We can see there that "distribution" is used as "service to the needy."

**I Corinthians 16:15** I urge you, brethren—you know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints—

So there again we see a use of the word *ministry* in a form of *serving*. *The gift of ministry* refers to the *service* that is rendered to God's church. It applies to all ministers and servants of Jesus Christ—not just the ordained ministry, but individuals as well. It especially applies to those engaged in the office of the ministry of the word—whose responsibility it is to preach and to serve the church. But it is not limited to the ministry.

So under the main category of Practical Service, **the gifts of sympathy** were (1) *the gift of helps*, (2) *the gift of exhortation*, (3) *the gift of alms giving*, (4) *the gift of works of mercy*, and (5) *the gift of ministry [or, service]*.

The fourth type of gift, under Practical Service, is *the gift of administration*. It is mentioned in two different ways in Paul's lists. "*The ruler*" is mentioned in Romans 12:8, and then the same gift is mentioned as "*governments*" in I Corinthians 12:28. "He that **rules**" (in Romans 12:8) is the one who is set over others, or who presides over others. The Greek word for "**governments**" (in I Corinthians 12:28), and which is the same gift, is very interesting. It literally refers to the work of a pilot who steers his boat through the rocks and treacherous shoals, into where he can dock his boat. That is what a ruler does. A ruler guides others—in humble service.

Turn with me to I Thessalonians 5. Here it is used in relation to ministers in general.

**I Thessalonians 5:12-13** And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

Rulership is given to individuals—not so that they can be admired and looked up to, but so that they can better serve. And we are to esteem them, as the office they hold. This is specifically for the ministry, but it would also relate to government and rulership.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, many Christian communities were guided and governed by those of their members whose wisdom in counsel had proved that God, through His Holy Spirit, had bestowed *the gift of ruling [administration]* upon them. This was before ordinations in the Corinthian churches.

In I Timothy 3, it refers to the head of a family—or, to one who diligently and faithfully performs the duty of a father.

**I Timothy 3:4-5** One that rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)

No man that does not rule his house well will receive *the gift of government [administration]*. That would be a minimum requirement. But God gives fathers and mothers "help" in the home—to be able to rule well. But He does not give this major *gift of administration* at that level. He gives it at the level that is needed to edify the church.

Now, *the gift of ruling (and governments)* refers primarily to people who carry out the administration of the church. In I Timothy 5:17, it refers to the elders of the church.

**I Timothy 5:17** Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

Well, that ends our survey of *the spiritual gifts*, except that there is one "gift" that stands above all other gifts in importance. You have probably already guessed what that gift is. That is the gift of **love**. Without the gift of love, none of these other gifts matter.

Of all the major *spiritual gifts* mentioned in the Bible—the greatest of these, of course, is love. **The gift of love** regulates the use of all other gifts! Without the gift of love the other gifts would be misused, if they were given. I Corinthians 13 shows that **love** [KJV—**charity**] is absolutely necessary for the proper use of all of the spiritual gifts.

**I Corinthians 13:1-3** Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I become as sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

We are told in I Corinthians 13:8 that the gift of love never fails, and never ceases. So,

from that alone, we can see that the spiritual gifts have not gone away. It is not that they are no longer in the church. They are there; but we are not using them, and God is not using us in that way at this time (and there are several reasons for that).

In I Corinthians 13:8-13 Paul foresees spiritual gifts as continuing to be manifested until "that which is perfect is come." In that case, their sporadic appearance throughout history has been affected by (1) the fluctuating faith and spirituality of the church and by (2) the sovereign purpose of God (who distributes the spiritual gifts as He wills, as are needed). So there are several reasons—and in the one, the responsibility falls on **us**. Are **we** using the gifts that we have in the best way possible to edify the church? The gifts are definitely permanent as far as the availability of them for our use, at the needed time, is concerned.

**Mark 13:11** But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that: for it is not you who speaks, but the Holy Spirit.

That is a promise that stands, no matter where we are, if that need comes.

**Luke 12:11-12** Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry how or what you should answer, or what you shall say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.

Those are **absolute promises** to us. God has the spiritual gifts ready to give. He will give them when it is necessary—when we need them. But we also have to do our part.

Let us assume for a moment that you only have one gift. (Think about that on an individual basis.) You probably have more, but let us narrow it down to just one. How have you used it for the edification and benefit of the other brethren?

If you cannot think of a "gift" that you have, you definitely do have one—because God says that you do. But how do you personally benefit the brethren? With the church so thinly spread throughout the world, it is very easy to neglect the use of the gifts we have and not to extend them. But *if* we do not use them, *then* God will not give us additional power to use them.

**I Corinthians 7:7** For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each

one has his own gift from God, one after this manner and another in that.

Now the expression "every man has his proper gift" implies that at least one gift has been given to every one of us! Or, if we do not have that one gift at that specific time, that another spiritual endowment is given to us to take the place of that gift. But we *always* have at least one "gift."

In Romans 1:11, Paul calls his imparting of God's Word to the Romans a "spiritual gift." That is because the spiritual instruction, and comfort, and joy, and strengthening that are produced by a minister's labors are *not* acquired by his own human reasoning—but as a result of the influence of God, through His Holy Spirit. So not one of the **spiritual gifts** is something that we can take credit for. They are just that—they are "*gifts*" endowed to us by the Almighty God.

In a technical sense, the word *gift* signifies *extraordinary powers* that distinguish individual members of God's church for specific purpose—enabling them to more effectively serve the church of God. So although we have gifts, if we want to more effectively serve the church then we must use the ones that we can have—so that God can increase the **power** in those gifts.

The number of the spiritual gifts is as various as the needs of the church [at any particular time]. Paul's lists of I Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4 do not begin to enumerate all the gifts that God has available that we can be given.

But what gift (or, gifts) do **you** have? Are you using them as fervently as you can? Please think of that. I have been thinking on it, in the last few weeks while I have been working on this sermon; and it has my mind overwhelmed as to how to use gifts. God is SO POWERFUL that He can use us in so many ways.

Using a familiar saying, "*If you don't use them, you'll lose them*"—we have to actively use the gifts that we have been given, so that God can use us in greater ways. As the tribulation comes, no doubt He will be using His people in ways far greater than we have imagined.

The gifts God gives us provide a wonderful opportunity to better serve God, and His church. The spiritual gifts are an essential tool in the *edification* and the *unity* of the Body of Christ.