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Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Part 2)



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg explains that the Gifts of the Holy Spirit can be divided into five categories: gifts of revelation, power, utterance, corporate ministry, and individual ministry. He emphasizes that these gifts are not meant to divide but rather to serve in different ways. Using one's gifts for the benefit of the body of Christ is essential and requires trust in the Holy Spirit's guidance. While some argue that certain gifts are no longer relevant, Gregg suggests that gifts will continue until the revelation of Jesus Christ and should be accompanied by love.

Transcript

What we just saw before we took our break was that Romans 12 has another list of gifts of the Holy Spirit in addition to that list in 1 Corinthians 12. I want to first of all say that there are some people who try to make a qualitative difference between the two lists, suggesting that the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 are, they might call them, ministry gifts, and that the gifts in Romans 12, sometimes they call them motivational gifts. Now this distinction is not made by Paul, and I'm not particularly favorable toward it.

I think it's artificial to say that the gifts Paul mentions in Romans 12 are of a different character or a different type of gifts than those mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12, especially so since one of the gifts is in both lists. The gift of prophecy is in both lists, which suggests that we really are talking about the same kinds of lists. They're just different entries on the list.

It is the case that much of the listing that Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 12 is of gifts that, what shall we say, they might have more of an obvious supernatural character in many cases, miracles, healings, tongues, interpretation of tongues. Some of the things that Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 12 are those that, when they occur, they are obviously something more supernatural, whereas the listing in Romans 12, more of the gifts he lists there are what we might talk about as natural things, giving, serving, leading, exhorting, showing mercy. The things that Paul lists in Romans 12 are things that we might see going on around us all the time without any suspicion that something supernatural is going on at all.

When someone's teaching or exhorting or giving or serving or leading, it doesn't necessarily look supernatural, and that might be the reason why people have tried to put the two lists of gifts into different categories. I don't see them as in different categories. Again, I think Paul makes that clear by including the gift of prophecy in both lists.

I think we just have partial lists in two different places. We've got some gifts mentioned in chapter 9, excuse me, the nine gifts he mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12, and these are of maybe the kind that interested the Corinthians more or the kind that they were involved in more, so he listed those. Where in Romans 12, he lists some more gifts in addition to making a total of 15 gifts in those lists.

Now, there are other gifts that are mentioned individually, different points in the Bible, and I think we should just understand that though Paul lists a total of 15 gifts in these two lists, that's not a comprehensive listing. There are no doubt gifts that he doesn't mention that were known, but the reason he gives lists is not to give a catalog of gifts, but to make some point about them. For example, in 1 Corinthians 12, he wants to make the point that although gifts differ from each other, they are all cooperative with each other.

They all serve the body of Christ in different ways as the members of a body serve a body in different ways, but it's the same body in every case. You don't start a different church based on a different gift. If you're a prophet, you don't go off and start a church of prophets, and if you're a miracle worker, you don't go start a church of miracle workers.

There's only one body, only one church, and all the functions are necessary. That's what Paul's trying to get across to the Corinthians. In Romans 12, he's making a different point.

He seems to be making the point that whatever gift you have, you should be focused. You should make sure that you're diligent, that you're a good steward of it. I think in each case, Paul's making a point that is not the same as intending to catalog all the gifts in some categories, but just giving samples of different gifts in each case about which he can make the points he wants to make.

Now, it is obvious, though, that some of the gifts are different in nature from each other, and what I'm going to do for you is, I don't know, some might think it's a little artificial, but I think it kind of is natural to do. You can kind of divide the gifts that Paul lists into five categories, each category having three gifts in it. Now, because this works out as neatly as it does, it may seem to militate against my suggestion that this is not the total number of gifts.

It works out mathematically well if we list them this way, but that's more, it's just more of a learning device for us to do it this way. I'm not saying that Paul had in mind that the

gifts should be categorized this way. There are three gifts, for example, in one category that you could call gifts of revelation.

Paul doesn't call them that, so you don't have to go along with these labels. I'm just, again, this is just a way of categorizing them for your own learning. There are three gifts that we could call gifts of revelation.

They involve God having to reveal something. The word of knowledge, the word of wisdom, and the discerning of spirits. These involve God revealing something.

Then there are three gifts of another category that we could call gifts of power. They manifest supernatural power. One would be the working of miracles, obviously.

This would be in the second category. One would be healings. Paul refers to this as gifts of healings, plural.

Gifts, plural, of healings, plural. We're going to talk about why he does that. Then the gift of faith.

Now, the reason I put the gift of faith there is because although all Christians have faith, Paul indicates that some have a gift called faith. Although he doesn't clarify what he means by the gift of faith, in 1 Corinthians 13, he says, And though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, it profits me nothing. He actually lists some gifts in the beginning of chapter 13 in order to point out that none of them are of any value without love.

But one of the gifts he mentions is faith. And he speaks of it as faith that could remove mountains. So obviously, when he talks about the gift of faith, he's not just talking about trusting Jesus for salvation.

He's talking about having some stupendous faith that works exploits of some kind. So I call these three gifts of power. Working in miracles, healings, and the gift of faith.

Then there's, we could just call them gifts of utterance, where you actually utter something that is an oracle or is inspired. That would be the gift of prophecy, the gift of tongues, and the gift of interpretation of tongues. All of these involve speaking out something that is inspired.

Then you've got a fourth category. I've called these gifts of corporate ministry, which have to do with something that is done in the church, largely for the benefit of the edification of the church. One of these would be teaching.

There's a gift of teaching, there's a gift of exhortation, and there's a gift of leadership. These are, I believe Paul has in mind, gifts that are expressed from parties addressing the whole church or benefiting the whole church. It's corporate ministry to the church,

providing leadership, teaching, and exhortation.

Then the last category I would call gifts of individual ministry. So there's gifts of corporate ministry, but there's gifts of individual ministry. These are gifts that benefit somebody on an individual basis.

Of course, when an individual is helped, it helps the whole body, too, because when one suffers, all suffer, and when one is helped, all are helped. But these are gifts that are, I believe, directed toward helping individuals in the church. One is the gift of giving, and you might say, but we sometimes give to the corporate needs of the church.

No. Well, I mean, in modern church, yes. I mean, it's true.

The corporate needs of the church are sometimes viewed as having a building and things like that. But the church itself is people, and when you're giving to minister to the church, you're really giving to minister to people, their physical needs. The gift of service is a second one in that category, and then the gift of showing mercy.

So let me just... Showing mercy is the last one. The second one is service. So I'll run through those again real quickly.

Once again, Paul does not make these categories. I want to make that clear. I have made these categories just for the sake of seeing how these gifts have somewhat different functioning.

The gifts of revelation in the first category, I've said, are word of knowledge, word of wisdom, and discerning of spirits. Gifts of power, I identified as working miracles, healings, and the gift of faith. Gifts of utterance, that is, of inspired utterance, would be prophecy, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

Gifts of corporate ministry to the corporate church would be teaching, exhortation, and leadership. And gifts of individual ministry, ministering to individual needs, would be giving, service, and showing mercy. Now, I wouldn't make these categories too rigid.

For example, what I've called gifts of corporate ministry, teaching, exhortation, and leadership, I think Paul is thinking of this as being done in the corporate assembly. But there's no reason that teaching and exhortation and leadership couldn't function on an individual level to help individuals as well. And similarly, what I call gifts of individual ministry, although I think they're primarily to individuals, I think they benefit the whole body corporately too.

And so, I'm not trying to make rigid categories, but just helpful categories. So, taking the 15 gifts that Paul lists, you can see them as fairly neatly falling into five categories. And it just so happens that we've got three in each category.

It's so neat, it seems artificial, except it isn't. Now, on the other hand, Peter has given us a division of the gifts into two categories. And I'd like you to look at 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 10 and 11.

Now, before we read these verses, I want to clarify something that I could have said earlier but neglected, but it doesn't matter, I can say it now. And that is that when we use the word gifts in the Bible for gifts of the Spirit, the Greek word that is used is charisma. Charisma is singular, charismata is plural.

The word charisma comes from the word charis, C-H-A-R-I-S. That's a Greek word, charis. C-H-A-R-I-S.

Charis is the Greek word for grace, obviously a very common word in the New Testament. Whenever you find the word grace in the New Testament, you find the word charis. And there's some other times it's translated some other ways too.

But when you add another syllable to it, charisma, simply adding M-A, ma, at the end, you have another word. And it literally means gift, but it's a gift of grace. It's grace being given as a gift.

Now, this is important because we will see in some of the functions of the gifts, this has to be understood what grace is. A charisma is literally a gift of grace. And by the way, the plural is charismata.

And you may have heard the term charismatic. The word charismatic refers to a person who exercises the gifts or at least believes in the gifts. As opposed to, there's another kind of Christian who is non-charismatic, who doesn't believe the gifts are for today.

We're going to actually address that in a moment. But the reason I tell you that the word gifts is charisma or charismata, and that means gifts of grace, is because we saw in Romans 12, 6, as we will see in 1 Peter, the gifts are referred to as related to grace. For example, in 1 Peter 4, verses 10 and 11, Peter says, as each one has received a gift, charisma, minister it to one another.

Now, the word minister is an old word. It means serve, serve each other with your gift. As everyone has received a gift, serve one another with it as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Now, manifold is an old word. It means many faceted or, or, or, yeah, I think many facets is probably a good way to put it. The grace of God manifesting the church is many faceted and each gift is a gift of grace.

It's a function of grace in the life of the believer. Now, this is not different than a gift of the spirit because the spirit of God is called the spirit of grace in scripture. In Hebrews chapter 10 refers to the spirit of God as the spirit of grace.

The spirit dispenses grace. This grace is manifested in different gifts of grace. Now, we might tend to think of grace in terms of just God's favor upon us.

We're saved by grace, not by works. That means we don't trust in our own merits. We have received favor unmerited from God and that's grace.

Well, that's true. That is a proper use of the word grace. It's not the only use of the word grace.

In the Bible, grace is also something that's an enabling dynamic. For example, when Paul had his thorn in the flesh and he prayed three times that Christ would remove it, Christ spoke to him and said, no, my grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in your weakness.

Grace here in this case is that which would enable him to be strong under trial. My grace will be sufficient for you. I'm not going to take the trial away.

I'm just going to give you the grace for it. And you'll find that Paul uses the word grace this way a lot in his writings. He says, I, according to the grace of God given to me as a wise master builder, laid the foundations of the church.

That's in first Corinthians 3:10. In Ephesians 3:10, he also, or not 3:10, but in chapter three, I think verse seven, he also mentions grace as that which enables him to function. Throughout the Bible, Paul sees himself as functioning through the power of grace.

First Corinthians 15:10, Paul is comparing his ministry and accomplishments with those of other apostles. And he says, but by the grace of God, I am what I am. And this grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain for I accomplished more than all the others.

He says his ministry accomplished more than the other apostles. But then, because that sounds a little unhumiliated, he says, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. In other words, my ministry accomplished a great deal, but it wasn't me.

It was the grace of God in me. You see, God's grace is his enablement. It's not only his favor upon us.

It's not only his mercy and forgiveness. It is more than that. It's something of his own nature, his own character.

And manifest in us, it is something supernatural that enables us to endure and to serve and to do things as we should. You see, the Christian life is not to be lived in the power of the flesh, but in the power of the spirit who gives grace to help in time of need. That's what it says in Hebrews.

We come boldly before the throne of grace for two reasons. One is to obtain mercy,

which we need when we sin. And secondly, to obtain grace to help us in time of need.

Grace is assisting and empowering us. That's what the Bible teaches. So a gift of grace is God giving you a certain allotment of grace that functions in a certain way to empower you in some ministry service that God has in mind.

Now, I say that so that you'll understand what Peter's talking about when he says, as we have gifts, let's serve each other with them so that we are being good stewards of the many faceted grace of God. The grace of God exhibits itself in many facets, different gifts of grace. And he's saying the way that we can be the good stewards or good managers of the grace of God that's been given to us is to use that gift of grace in service of others.

That's what he says in verse 10. But he expands on it in verse 11. First Peter 4:11.

If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. Now, oracles of God are like prophets speaking by inspiration for person speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers here, the word again means serves.

If anyone serves, let him do it with the ability which God supplies that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. Now, Peter has said, let's use our gifts to serve each other as good stewards of the grace of God. And that means if you speak, speak as the oracles of God.

If you serve, serve as of the ability that God gives you. Now, you see what Peter has done. He's spoken of the gifts generically in verse 10.

Then he's he's broken them down into two categories in verse 11. Gifts that involve speaking and gifts that involve doing something. And we can look at the list of gifts that Paul has given and see that many of the gifts fall readily into the speaking category.

Prophecy, teaching, exhortation, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, speaking in tongues, the interpretation of tongues. All of these are gifts that involve speaking. They they minister to the spiritual needs of the church.

They actually don't necessarily do a lot of practical good for somebody. That's why James said, if your brother is naked and destitute of daily food and you say to him, you know, be warmed and filled. You're not doing anything for him.

You know, words don't feed the stomach, but they do feed the soul. And the church has two sets of needs because we live in two realms. We are physical beings and we are spiritual beings.

We're born of the spirit. We have spiritual needs. That's why the Bible talks about Jesus said, man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the

mouth of God.

We live off of spiritually. We live off the word of God. Earlier in his epistle, Peter said in chapter two, verse two, he said, as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word.

So you may grow by it. You see, we're fed spiritually by the word of God. Jeremiah said, your words were found and I did eat them.

And your word was to me, the joy and rejoicing of my heart. Job said, I've esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. You see, man doesn't live by bread alone.

That's how he physically survives. But he also has a spiritual life to feed. And that's by every word that proceeds from mouth of God.

Speaking the word of God feeds, nurtures, sustains the life in the spiritual realm. And certain gifts of the Holy Spirit are directed toward meeting those needs, the spiritual needs of the church. And those are speaking gifts where the word of God is spoken in one way or another through prophecy, teaching, exhortation, the word of knowledge, word of wisdom, tongues, interpretation, tongues, all those gifts obviously fall into the category of if anyone speaks.

And Paul, Peter says, if anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. Now that would mean that whatever gift one has that involves speaking, you should count on God's spirit informing, vitalizing, anointing what is being said. Because the same information can be passed along by a teacher who has no gift of teaching and by one who does.

The information is good. But when a person is, let's say, teaching or otherwise addressing the body of Christ, the goal is not only to impart information, but to impart life. The goal is not simply to feed the mind, but the spirit as well.

And therefore, those who have gifts that involve speaking, if they are gifts of the Holy Spirit, we have to trust that the Holy Spirit is going to be ministering through them. So the person who speaks, in a sense, has the mentality of one who's like an oracle of God and is speaking under, hopefully under inspiration. Now, that doesn't have to be spooky or mystical.

It just means that I'm trusting that when I'm teaching you, that I'm not just giving you information that's true, which I trust it is, but I'm also hoping that what I'm saying is going to feed something spiritually in you that you'll be spiritually edified, not just informed. And that's what it means. If anyone speaks, let them speak as the oracles of God.

And we know that quite a few of the gifts are of that. And the speaking gifts are directed

toward the spiritual sustenance and need and health of the church. But the church also is made up of people who are physical.

We have spirits, but we have bodies, too. And those bodies have needs, and there are gifts to meet those physical needs as well. And that's why Peter mentions a second category.

He says, if anyone speaks, let them speak as the oracles of God. But if anyone serves, let them do it as of the ability which God gives that God will be glorified in him. Now, certainly providing leadership is a service.

In fact, Jesus said, if you want to be a leader, you need to be the servant of all, because leadership is a service. It's not a privilege. We'll see that the gift of leadership is not a political privileged position in the church.

It's a servant position. People need leadership. Some do.

Some people just don't know which way to go. Some people need a lot of direction. But there's also the gift of giving.

Now, giving, obviously, meets material needs. There's the gift of showing mercy, which also, in some respects, meets spiritual needs, but also probably emotional needs to some extent. There's also the gift of serving.

Now, serving can take the form of doing any kind of menial chores, but that are assisting somebody. Assistance to people in physical ways. Giving to physical needs.

Showing mercy to a person in physical distress. These are service gifts. Now, there's not so many in the list, but we shouldn't think that if Paul lists 15 gifts, that these will be about equally distributed, so that about out of every 15 people, one's going to have each of those gifts.

Or out of every 30, or out of every 150, there's going to be 30 who have each of the gifts. The gifts are not equally distributed, because for one thing, it takes a lot more people giving than it takes to teach or to be an evangelist. An evangelist, like Billy Graham, he can reach thousands of people at one time, but it may take thousands of people giving to pay the bills for the stadium, or for the TV time, or whatever.

I mean, you're not going to have just one person writing a check to cover his entire ministry. It's thousands of people who give to support his ministry, but they are partners with him, so when he preaches, he's got the mouth and they've got the money, to put it crassly. But, I mean, if he's really the servant of God, then of course, then those who are supporting him are serving God too.

They're partners with him in it. But, obviously, it takes more people giving than talking.

For everyone who talks, you need a lot of people to give.

You know, when the church got started on the day of Pentecost, there were 3,000 people converted. There were only 12 preachers initially. There were 12 people preaching and teaching.

What were the other 3,000 doing? Well, they were sharing. They were fellowshiping, they were praying, they were sitting under the apostles teaching, they were breaking bread, and they were sharing their goods, because there were a lot of poor who needed to have their needs met. There were a lot more people with the gift of giving than with the gift of evangelism or the gift of teaching, because you don't need as many mouths talking as you need people handling the practical matters.

Serving, setting up the chairs, cleaning up afterwards, cooking the food, that's gifts of service. And you need a lot more servants and a lot more givers than you need preachers. Now, that might make it seem like the preachers are kind of an elite class.

They do what few people can do. And everybody else who's kind of working in the background, they don't get all the honor and all the respect. And that's why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12, those gifts, those members of our body that don't really receive as much attention and as much honor, they are valuable, he said, and we do bestow honor upon them.

Jesus made it very clear that you want to be great, you be a servant of all. And to have a gift that involves serving in some capacity to the physical needs is every bit as important as those who minister to spiritual needs. Paul made that distinction, for example, in 1 Corinthians 9, when he talked about how, he said, if I have ministered to you in spiritual things, is it a great matter if you minister back to me in material things? He's talking about the fact that them supporting him financially would be quite appropriate, given the spiritual benefits he's bestowed upon them.

Although he goes on to say, but I'm not asking you to do that. He says, I've never asked you to do that. He's just making it very clear that I would have the right to do that because it would be a fair exchange.

There are physical needs and spiritual needs. I'm meeting your spiritual needs, you meet my physical needs. That's what he's arguing.

And, you know, in the body of Christ, you've got a certain number of people who prophesy or teach or evangelize or exhort or, you know, have a word of wisdom or word of knowledge. And then there's others who are serving and giving and showing mercy. And so Peter recognizes two different classes there.

And just as those who speak speak as the oracles of God, that is, they depend on the Holy Spirit to inspire what they say. So those who serve, they do it as of the, Peter says,

as of the ability which God gives. So Jesus gets the credit.

Now, setting up chairs or sweeping a floor or cooking a meal or giving money don't seem like spiritual activities at all. If you have money, you can give money, whether you're a Christian or not, whether you're spiritual or carnal, you can give money. If you have money, if you know how to set up a chair, you can set it up, whether you're a Christian or not, it doesn't seem like it's a spiritual gift.

There's lots of things that people do. They fix cars, they, you know, repair roofs for people and they do it unto the Lord. There's also people who do those same things and just do it for money, maybe not even Christians.

So what's the difference between having a gift of service or a gift of giving on one hand and just serving and giving on the other? Because in the latter case, even a non-Christian who doesn't have the Holy Spirit can give or can serve. But Peter says, no, if you have one of these service oriented gifts, do it as of the ability which God gives. And what that would mean, obviously, is that just like the person who speaks depends on the Holy Spirit to inspire what he's saying or she's saying, the person who serves needs to depend on God, the ability that God gives.

Now you might say, but I already know how to fix a car. I already know how to repair a roof. I already know how to sweep a floor.

I already know how to cook a meal. I already know how to wash dishes. I don't need to depend on the ability that God gives.

But you do. You have to recognize that whatever you do in word or in deed, you do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It says that in Colossians 3, 317.

Colossians 317. Whatever you do in word or deed, you do it all in the name of Jesus. Now, a person who sweeps the floor who's not a Christian is actually doing something different than a person who sweeps the floor because they have a gift of serving and they're doing this in the name of Jesus.

Because what the latter person is doing is service to the Lord and service in the name of the Lord as a member of the body of Christ. They're serving Christ, not man. And they are serving in a way that actually because it is their gift, it can actually bestow a spiritual benefit on people as well as a physical.

I'm thinking of a man that was, he was just a small church I attended who was the caretaker. He was the groundskeeper. If you needed the key to the Sunday school rooms or something, you'd go and find him.

If you needed, if there's something broken, you went and talked to him. He's a real humble, genuine, sweet guy. If anyone would mention his name in the church to

someone else in conversation, it just brought up the most warm emotions.

It's just a blessing to remember this guy because he did everything to the Lord. He was so cheerful about it, so much of a servant. He didn't do it grudgingly.

He wasn't doing it for the money. He was doing it unto the Lord. And there was a certain spiritual element to his practical service that was a spiritual blessing to everybody.

And it really can be, it can make a big difference if some serves you grudgingly or some serves you happily because they, they're glad to serve Christ. It's a gift. And they are doing it.

They may be doing something that anyone could do in terms of the physical activity, but they're not doing it in the way everyone can do it. They're doing it because this is their calling and their gift. This is what they're contributing through the Spirit's working of grace in their life.

This is how they graciously serve the body. So you've got these different categories of gifts. There are those that have to do with speaking, and there's those that have to do with serving.

And Peter says, if you do use those gifts in whatever, whether they're the speaking ones or the serving gifts, in the service for the benefit of the body of Christ, you are being a good steward of that grace of God that's been given to you in the form of that gift. Now there's, I will say there are people today who indicate that there is a different categorization of the gifts and that some of the gifts are still for today and some are not. Now, I don't agree with this teaching, but I'm going to let you hear it because the majority, perhaps, of people who call themselves Christians would hold this view.

They would say that of the gifts that Paul lists, some of them we should call sign gifts. Sign gifts, like gifts that provide a sign. These are the ones that are more or less miraculous in nature.

Things like working miracles, healings, things like that. Prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues. These things clearly are the kinds of things that you can't do if you don't have the gift.

Now, if you have the gift of teaching, well, teaching is something that people sometimes can do who aren't Christians, too. I mean, it's not, there's a natural gift of teaching and then there's a spiritual gift. Therefore, to teach, it's not necessarily impressive.

I mean, you might be an impressive teacher, but it doesn't impress anyone necessarily that God is real, that something supernatural is going on here, because there are non-Christians who are impressive teachers, too. Now, there is something else, by the way, I would say, that goes on when a person has got the gift of teaching. There are people

who aren't Christians and don't have the spiritual gift of teaching, but they're great teachers.

They're college professors or otherwise just great mentors or trainers and they can teach well. But the spiritual gift of teaching, again, as I was saying, doesn't just convey information, but it ministers at a spiritual level because the Holy Spirit is enlivening and anointing at another level. It is not only ministering to the mind, but also to the spirit and building up the person's spiritual life.

However, that's kind of an invisible working of the Holy Spirit through that. It doesn't look supernatural at the time. A miracle does.

Speaking in tongues does. Healing does. And therefore, some teachers say that these latter group of gifts that are so obviously supernatural, they are intended to be a sign of God's supernatural activity and that those gifts, they say, are no longer for today.

They say that gifts like evangelism and teaching and leadership and service and giving, of course, they're still for today, but the gifts that were assigned by their miraculous nature, that those aren't for today. Those were for the apostolic age. They say that the early church needed them because they had such a daunting task of a few leaders spreading the gospel to the whole world.

They needed supernatural help. They would also say that gifts of revelation, remember I mentioned the word of knowledge, the word of wisdom, prophecy, tongues, those kinds of things, that those things are not needed today either. They say those were needed before the New Testament was completed.

We now have a Bible. We don't need people to prophesy and give words of wisdom and things like that. Those revelations are no longer necessary.

In fact, some would say they're not even legitimate because God has stopped revealing things that way. They say he was doing that in the age of the apostles, but once the apostles had written the entire New Testament, then everything we need to know was now available in writing and there is no need for further revelation. So the gifts of prophecy and tongues and word of wisdom, word of knowledge, anything that had to do with revelatory knowledge, those were only for the first century also, along with the sign gifts.

They also claim, in particular, about the gift of tongues. They say, well, tongues is certainly not necessary today because the reason they needed it in the first century, we are told, wrongly, but we are told, is that, you know, the apostles, they all spoke one language, but they had to reach the world that spoke many languages. And therefore, God gave them this supernatural ability to speak other languages so that they could evangelize all cultures and all language groups.

But now, of course, we have Christians who speak virtually every language. We don't need the gift of tongues anymore for that. We can evangelize simply by our natural knowledge of languages.

Now, I would imagine that when I gave you those three arguments, you immediately saw the flaws in them. If you didn't, I'll tell you what the flaws are. The first argument was that the apostles had such a daunting task, they needed miraculous power in a way that we don't today.

And my answer would be, why wouldn't we need it today? We're on the same mission as they were on. It is still a conflict between the powers of darkness and the kingdom of God. This is a supernatural battle.

Why would we need supernatural aid less than they needed it then? I can't think of any reason at all. In fact, since the supernatural working of the gifts of the Spirit are all functions of the body of Christ and part of the life of the body, it's hard to imagine why any body would come to a point where it doesn't need some of its organs. Now, a fish needs gills its whole life.

A frog doesn't. A frog starts out as a poliwog, a tadpole, and it has gills, but it doesn't need those later on. It has lungs instead.

But human bodies aren't like that. We don't outgrow our organs. We need them all through our lifetime.

Now we can survive without some of them, but none of them become obsolete. And so in the body of Christ, this is the same body that they were. We're not a different body.

We're the same body that the apostles were in. It has the same functions. It has the same supernatural character and the same supernatural mission.

Why would supernatural powers no longer be needed? To my mind, it's a very presumptuous statement and foolish too. Now, when it says the things like prophecy and tongues and word of wisdom, word of knowledge, that those are not needed now because we have the Bible. We have the complete Bible.

We have the whole counsel of God written down in the Bible. Well, first of all, I don't know if we have the whole counsel of God written down in the Bible. The Bible doesn't say that.

In fact, the canon of Scripture, which is what these people often refer to, until the New Testament canon was complete, they needed prophecy and things like that because there were still things God wanted to say that hadn't been said yet. So he said them through prophets. But when the canon of Scripture is complete, then of course there's nothing more God wanted to say.

My thought would be, where are you getting that? Where does it say that the canon of Scripture has every word in it that God ever wants to communicate to people? God, after all, started human history by speaking. He created the heavens and the earth and said, Let there be light. Let dry land appear.

Let this happen. Let this happen. And it happened.

God's a talking God. That's the point that Paul makes at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 12. You served idols before.

They don't talk. But the God you have now does talk. He's a talking God because he's real, because he's personal, because he has a mind and he wants to express his mind.

He's done so throughout his entire history. He spoke to Adam and Eve. He spoke to Cain when Cain killed Abel.

He spoke to Noah. He spoke to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. He spoke to the children of Israel.

He sent prophets. He was continually speaking. God's a talking God.

In the New Testament, he manifests himself as the word in Christ, but that didn't end the mission of the prophets. There were prophets in the early church. Agabus was a prophet.

Philip had four daughters who prophesied. Paul said in each service, two or three prophets are allowed to speak. There were prophets even after Jesus came and left.

We don't have any evidence in the Bible that God ever got tired of talking or that he ever lapsed into a silence. I'll tell you what, when a man stops talking to his wife or a wife has long periods of silence not talking to her husband, that means there's something wrong in the relationship. Communication between parties who love each other is absolutely necessary.

But he now communicates through the Bible. Well, sure he does. He did that.

They had the Old Testament even in the first century, but that didn't mean God wasn't still saying things to them. Sometimes the argument is made that if there were still prophets and that kind of thing today, then that would compromise the completeness of the canon of the New Testament. We'd have to still be writing more books of the New Testament.

Every time a prophet spoke a genuine word from God, we have to write it down, put it in the Bible. We'd never have a closed canon. Well, I don't know where we're getting this huge loyalty to a closed canon, but I think the argument is flawed in itself.

I believe the canon is complete. I don't think we should add anything else to it. But when

Agabus spoke, that didn't add anything to the canon of Scripture.

When Philip's daughter spoke, that didn't add to the canon of Scripture. You see, the New Testament canon wasn't written by prophets. It's written by apostles.

If we say the New Testament canon is closed, it's simply because the apostles aren't here anymore. Now, some people think there are apostles today, and that's another discussion. But the apostles that Jesus appointed at the beginning to speak on his behalf, they're not here anymore.

They wrote, they preached, and we have their teachings in writing. We've got the apostolic writings. But even when the apostles were here, there were also prophets.

And the prophets' writings were not put in the New Testament. So why would the writings of any prophet today be put in the New Testament? The New Testament's not written by prophets. The Old Testament is.

The New Testament's written by apostles. And therefore, having the gift of prophecy in the church does not mean, oh, now we're going to have to add some more books to the Bible. No, we're not.

Now, we do have a couple of Agabus' prophecies recorded in the book of Acts, but he didn't write a book of all the things he wrote and put it in the Bible. And those prophets, two or three per meeting in Corinth who spoke, we don't have their writings anywhere in the Bible, but they were prophets. Just having prophets in the church in no way compromises the canon of Scripture, because the prophets in the New Testament had nothing to do with producing the canon of Scripture.

That was the apostles. So if the church, even when the apostles were here, needed to have the word of the Lord spoken through prophets at times, how much more now that the apostles are gone, even though we have their writings, does God still want to speak to the church? It says in Amos chapter 3 in verse 7, Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he reveals his secret to his servants the prophets. That is, God wants his people to be informed about what he's up to, and he'll do nothing without revealing his secret to the prophets.

What a strange thing it would be if God, now that Jesus has come and gone, decided, yeah, I don't think I'll be telling my friends what I'm doing anymore. I told the Jews through the prophets. I told the first generation of Christians through the prophets.

But, you know, I just don't think I'll talk to my people anymore. Let them read about it in a book. You know, if I communicated with my wife only in writing, when she's here in the room, and, you know, if she asks me a question, I write down the answer and don't speak to her, and don't let her hear my voice.

That's a weird and strained relationship. And, you know, I think people who argue this way, they see Christianity as a relationship with a book more than a relationship with a person, a personal God. I know that they wouldn't say that God is impersonal.

I know they know that Jesus is alive and risen from the dead because that's part of their theology, but in practice they sometimes act like they don't really have a relationship with a person, just with a book. And God never intended that the Bible would replace him. What we have in the Bible is the same thing that the early church had spoken by the apostles.

It's the apostolic teachings. That's great. The church needs those for all time, and they're very, they're the authoritative words for the church.

But that doesn't mean they're the only words that God ever speaks to people. So this argument that we can't have prophets today because we have a complete canon of Scripture, it just doesn't make any sense at all. And this idea that they needed tongues back then, which we don't, because they had to speak to so many different language groups and get the gospel out, there's two serious problems with that argument.

One is, as far as we know, the gift of tongues was never used to evangelize people in other languages. The gift of tongues in the few times it's mentioned in the Bible doesn't seem to have that function at all. On the day of Pentecost, there were people of many language groups visiting Jerusalem, and when the Spirit came and the church members began speaking in tongues, it is true, these foreigners did understand the words they were speaking in their own language, but they weren't preaching the gospel.

They were speaking of the wonderful works of God. They weren't spreading the gospel through it. But more than that, it wasn't necessary to speak in tongues in order to communicate with these people, because everybody in the world spoke Greek.

I say the world, I mean the Roman world. Everybody spoke Greek as well as their local languages. Those of you who are from Europe probably know two or three or more languages, at least two, because you're listening to me in English.

And if you're nodding your head, it means that you do know something of English and you know your own language, and in all likelihood, because you're from Europe, you probably know at least some French and some other languages too, because Europeans tend to know many languages. In biblical times, everybody knew Greek, just like almost everyone knows English today, but they also knew their local languages. And so although the 120 disciples in the Upper Room spoke in these local dialects, to these foreign people, when Peter got up to preach, he didn't speak in tongues, he spoke in Greek, and everyone understood him.

You didn't need speaking in tongues to reach these people. It was a sign to them. It was

a supernatural sign to them that something was going on that they should pay attention to.

And when it came to the question, what is it that's going on that we need to pay attention to, one man got up speaking in one language and they all understood him. So to suggest that tongues was used to preach the gospel to people in foreign languages, it's just not found in Scripture at all. When Paul talks about tongues in 1 Corinthians 14, he assumes that tongues is being spoken in the church to the believers, not to unbelievers.

There's no suggestion anywhere in Scripture that the early church used the gift of tongues in preaching to the unbelievers, to the lost, whose languages they did not know. Now, they may have done it, and I have heard of some modern cases where this has actually seemingly happened with missionaries and things like that, though it's pretty rare, I think. The point I'd make is, if someone says, we don't need tongues anymore because they had to reach all these different language groups and they needed tongues, well, first of all, there's no evidence that they ever did use tongues for that.

The second thing is, if they did, why wouldn't we need it for that? In fact, we know of thousands of unreached languages that they didn't even know about. At least they were only preaching in the Roman Empire, mostly, and therefore speaking mostly to people who could speak one language, if they wished. We now have missionaries all over the world in tribal groups and all over the place.

There's thousands of languages that the apostles didn't even know existed and which no Christian today speaks. But we've got people like Wycliffe Bible translators and other missionaries going and living with these tribal people and spending decades of their lives to learn their language and to reduce it to writing, then to translate the Bible into a language so they could read it. All of that, why waste decades of life when you could just speak in tongues and preach, if that's what tongues is for? If that's what the early church did, we need it more than they do.

You see, all the arguments for the cessation of the gifts, cessation means ceasing of the gifts in the Apostolic Age, they're flawed arguments, they're silly arguments. Really when it comes down to it, the main argument that is used comes from 1 Corinthians 13 in most cases. Let me just turn your attention there.

Remember, 1 Corinthians 12 through 14 is really where Paul's talking about the gifts of the Spirit. He introduced them in chapter 12, he gives lots of instructions about their regulation in chapter 14, but in chapter 13, right in the middle of his discussion, he talks about the gifts and talks about the need for love, of course, that's the famous love chapter. But in 1 Corinthians 13, and I better turn there, I'm looking at Romans instead here.

Beginning at verse 8, Paul says, Love never fails, but whether there are prophecies, they will fail. Whether there are tongues, they will cease. Whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. Now here Paul says tongues will cease, he also says that that which is in part will be done away, and he lists what he means, what's in part is the way we know, the way we prophesy. The argument here is that gifts like prophecy and tongues and so forth, they are intended to cease, they're supposed to come to an end.

They'll vanish away. When? Well, when that which is perfect has come. So Paul says these things will vanish away, that which is in part will be done away, when that which is not in part, that which is complete, that which is perfect has come.

Now, those who believe in this doctrine of cessation, they're called cessationists. The cessationist Christians believe that some of these gifts have ceased. They say, well, the perfect thing that Paul is talking about is the New Testament.

In Paul's day, the New Testament wasn't complete, it wasn't perfect yet, but now, since that time, the New Testament has been completed, and now we have that which is complete, that which is perfect, so we don't need these things, they have passed away. When that which is perfect has come, that which is in part will be passed away, they say. So this means that the gifts of that type aren't needed anymore because we now have that which is perfect.

Now, let me just say, in looking at that argument, on what basis would we say that the completed New Testament is what Paul is referring to when he speaks of that which is perfect? Certainly, that which is perfect is vague enough that it might be applied to any number of possible things, not least Jesus himself when he comes back. Certainly, there are many who've read this passage, and the first thing that comes to their mind is, he's talking about when Jesus comes back. That which is perfect is Christ himself, and when he has come, then these gifts will no longer be needed.

There's certainly nothing that immediately draws our attention to a finished canon of the New Testament as that which is perfect. The truth is, we don't even know if Paul anticipated a canon of the New Testament. When Paul wrote his letters, he didn't necessarily know that someone's going to collect these someday and put them into a book with other books written by apostles and say, we're going to call this the New Testament.

Just like when Jeremiah wrote or Isaiah wrote, they didn't know they were writing part of a group of writings that were going to be collected to be the Old Testament. They're just writing in their own generation to the people of their time. They're not necessarily

thinking in terms of, I'm writing part of an anthology that's going to be called the Old Testament.

Likewise, there's no evidence that the apostles had any idea that their writings would someday be collected into the group we call the New Testament. And if Paul did believe it, he never mentioned it, and therefore, we have reason to question whether Paul even knew there would be a complete canon of scripture. And if he knew, there's no reason to believe that his readers were expected to know that, because he doesn't mention it.

So how could he be communicating anything of value to them if he's referring to a canon of the New Testament, which he never mentions anywhere in his writings and which his readers probably didn't have a concept of? That which is perfect would much more reasonably be applied to Jesus himself when he comes. But there's even another way to understand it. That which is perfect would be... The word perfect also means mature or complete.

And if you look at what he says in the following verse, in verse 11, he says, When I was a child, I spoke as a child. I understood as a child. I thought as a child.

But when I became a man, that is, when I became mature, I put away childish things. Now, why does he say that here? Because he said that which is not perfect, that which is partial, is going to be put away when it is replaced with that which is perfect. For example, when I was a child, I spoke and thought and acted like a child.

When I became a man, I put away those immature things, and they were replaced by manly things, mature things. But what are those mature things? Well, that still involves speaking and acting and thinking. He doesn't say, When I was a child, I thought and I spoke and acted as a child.

But when I became a man, I stopped thinking and stopped acting and stopped talking. No, I stopped doing it as a child. I stopped thinking like a child.

I started thinking like a man. In other words, the activities I did as a child were immature forms, which were replaced by mature forms when I became a man. The Corinthians were very immature in their use of the gifts.

When he says, When that which is mature comes, he might simply mean maturity. When you grow up, then you won't be exercising gifts in a juvenile way. You'll be exercising the gifts in a mature way.

And what is the mature way? Well, at the end of chapter 12, he said, I earnestly desire the best gifts, yet I show you a more excellent way. And what is that? Love. Now, love does not replace the gifts.

But exercising the gifts without love makes them worthless. That's what Paul teaches in

1 Corinthians 13. It's very important that you are preeminent in love.

Regardless of how gifted you are, it's of no use unless you love. If I have the tongues, if I speak in tongues of men and angels, but I don't have love, I'm just making noise. If I have all faith and can move mountains, if I understand all mysteries, I have all knowledge.

If I don't have love, I'm worthless. The point he's making is, I don't care what your gifts are. If you're immature and unloving and selfish, your gifts are not impressive.

They're not worth anything at all. Now, when you grow up, you'll be loving, because that's fruit of the Spirit. The proof of maturity is your love.

Now, when you come into love, then you'll do these things in a mature way. These partial things, these immature things, those will be done away. So he might not even be referring here to the total cessation of gifts, even necessarily at the second coming of Christ or any other time, but rather the replacement of an immature use of gifts for a mature use of gifts, which is characterized by more mature love and Christian character.

Just like when I was a child, I was immature in my thinking and acting and speaking. When I became a man, I don't do that in that way anymore. I do all the same things, but in a mature way now.

I act and I think and I speak like a man. Now, one other thing I'd point out about this, and then we're going to take a break again. 1 Corinthians 1, Paul makes a statement that seems to indicate when we can expect to be done with the gifts, or at least a point before which we will not be done with them.

In 1 Corinthians 1, 7, 5-7, Paul, speaking about the church in Corinth, he says that you were enriched in everything by him, in all utterance and all knowledge. Now, these are referring to the gifts of the Spirit that he mentions later on in the book. You're enriched in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, charisma, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, he says you will come short in no gift. That means you will not lack any gift. It's not that some of the gifts are going away and others will be stained.

You're not going to lack any of them. While you're waiting for what? The revelation of Jesus Christ, a term that Paul usually, or often uses, to refer to the second coming of Christ, the apocalypsis of Christ, the revelation of Christ is coming. It's the same as his parousia, his coming, in the Greek.

And so, while we're waiting for the second coming of Christ, the church will lack in no gift. That seems to say there will be no gifts that cease before then. And certainly,

there's not any positive affirmation in Scripture that any of the gifts are temporary.

And then, of course, what Paul just said there in 1 Corinthians 1-7 sounds like all of them are for the church until he comes back. And so, the gifts are still with us. Now, you might say, well, I don't see some of these gifts very much.

I don't see miracles much. And the people I hear who speak in tongues sound like they're making it up. Even some of the prophecies I hear sound like they're making it up.

Well, frankly, some of them are. There's fake as well as genuine. But one should not let exposure to that which is fake allow you to suppose there's nothing genuine out there.

The reason there is counterfeit money is because there is real money. If there was no real money, no one would be counterfeiting it. Because money has value, people make fake money.

And because the gifts of the Spirit are real and real value, there are people who fake them. And that's a shame because they only confuse matters. But we will talk about the gifts individually after we take another break.