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Intro to the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Part 2)



Charisma and Character - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg focuses on the availability of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the present day. He argues that the arrival of the New Testament signaled the coming of perfection and the passing of immature gifts. However, he acknowledges that discernment is necessary when it comes to the manifestation of these gifts and advises careful testing to ensure they align with biblical teachings. Gregg also touches on the importance of wise counsel, prophetic utterances, and the different categories of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, emphasizing their role in building up the church.

Transcript

Tonight we're going to continue what we began a few weeks ago, and that is a study in the normative work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. Last time we began looking at what the Bible says about the gifts of the Holy Spirit because this is part of the normative work of God through the Holy Spirit in the church. Principally, we can write the work of the Spirit in the church down to a couple of categories.

Generally speaking, they're for power, the gifts, and holiness, which is the fruit of the Spirit, or what we might call Christian character. We're calling the series Charisma and Character. Charisma being the Greek word for the gifts.

Character being how we are summarizing the fruit of the Spirit. Last time I was giving an introduction to what the Bible teaches about the gifts of the Spirit. I told you at that time that I hoped to get through it all in one session, but thought that I might not, and I did not.

I'd just like to remind you that we looked at 1 Corinthians 12, and saw what the gifts of the Spirit are for. They are, first of all, to be understood as God's way of continuing to work and speak to His people, especially the gifts that are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12. A lot of those are revelatory kinds of gifts, where the Holy Spirit would actually speak something, a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, a prophetic word, tongues with interpretation is listed there.

There are other gifts that are speaking gifts as well. We saw that there are two

categories of gifts. Looking over at 1 Peter, there are those that are speaking gifts, which minister principally to the spiritual needs of the church.

And then there are gifts which fall into the category of service, to more of the physical needs of the church, things like giving and helps and stuff like that. I tried to point out from the latter part of 1 Corinthians 12, that Paul treats the gifts as if they are the defining element of the parts of the body of Christ. That when we talk about somebody having a gift of prophecy, or a gift of healing, or something like that, we're really just talking about Christ continuing to minister in those ways that He ministered when He was on earth, through members of His body.

So that when the whole body is doing the thing that Christ gifts the body to do, then we find that Jesus is still doing all the same things He did when He was on the planet, in person, through His body today. And that is what the gifts are there for. It's simply the functioning of the body of Christ, that is, of Christ, through His body.

And doing things not really very different than what He did when He was here. At least ideally, that's the case. There were three reasons that I mentioned that the gifts of the Spirit are given.

One is for signs. We saw that the Bible speaks of them as confirmatory signs of the gospel. We saw that they are also for service or ministry to people.

And thirdly, they are for the edification of the body of Christ. And those are all things that we covered in the material we looked at last week. I'd like for us to move along now, without further review, so that we can try to get through the rest of what I hoped at that time I might get through.

And we might have some hope of doing so, if we get on the new material right away. The first question I want to address, which I basically gave you my answer last week, but I didn't demonstrate it, because we didn't get quite to that point in my outline where I wanted to bring up the scriptures relevant to it, is the question of whether the gifts of the Spirit are for today still. I mentioned in our previous lecture that there are more than one opinion about that.

There are those who feel that some of the gifts are still for today. The ones that are not too sensational. Things like preaching and teaching and giving and helps.

I don't know any pastor who wants to eliminate the gift of giving. But those rather unsensational kinds of gifts, almost everybody is willing to say those gifts are still with us. But they would say that the sign gifts, which are the ones that are more stupendous, things like healings and miracles and prophecy and casting out demons even, would be, in some people's minds, in this category of things that are no longer done today.

That these things, they say, were necessary in the founding years of the Church, in the

days of the Apostles, but with the Apostles passing, so passed these gifts away and they are no longer needed or available to the Church. The other opinion that is out there is that all the gifts are still available to the Church, as they always were. The second opinion is that which I believe is more biblical and I've never been able to understand how it is that some people have felt that they could make a division of the gifts in this way.

That the gifts that are not too miraculous are still with us. That the gifts that were very miraculous in nature are not still with us. It seems to me like that's just a way of explaining away the absence of the supernatural in the Church.

If a Church has no faith, or if a Church is apostate, or for some other reason God is not moving in a supernatural way, rather than doing what the Church should do, which is say, why God, why aren't we seeing you do what you used to do, most churches would rather just say, well, maybe we're not supposed to have those things anymore. What we are is about normal. And if what we are is powerless, and the needs that Christ and the apostles used to meet through the gifts of the Spirit are no longer being met in the Church, then that's probably about normal.

It's easy for us to want to believe we're the standard of measuring reality and what's normal. But it's not necessarily safe to do that. Because a Church can be backslidden, a Church can be in apostasy, a Church can be faithless, and a Church may therefore lack the power that God wants the Church to have.

And so when we ask, are the supernatural gifts for the Church today, rather than judging by our experience, which may be that I haven't seen a great number of miracles, therefore maybe they're not for today, it would be better to judge directly from what the Scripture says on the subject. And the Bible does address the subject, as to whether all the gifts are still for the Church even in the 20th century. I'd like you to look at three passages that are relevant to answering that question.

Maybe four. In 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, you may notice that 1 Corinthians is a book that has more than most books of the Bible on the gifts of the Spirit. The most extended discussions on the subject are in Corinthians.

Apparently the gifts of the Spirit were a subject that the Corinthians were interested in, maybe fascinated with, and in need of some correction about. But in 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, verses 4 through 7, or maybe through 8, Paul says, I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by him, in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short of no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, the reference in verse 5, to all utterance and all knowledge, although those terms don't in every context

refer to the gifts of the Spirit, in this context I believe they do.

There is a gift of the word of knowledge that Paul later mentions in 1 Corinthians 12. Certainly quite a lot of the gifts that he mentions have to do with utterance. And in this particular context, he speaks about gifts.

He uses the word charisma, gift, in verse 7, so you come short in no gift. So I suspect that utterance and knowledge that he speaks of here are revelatory knowledge and inspired utterance, such as some of the gifts provide. And he says that the church in Corinth was enriched in all these things, with all utterance and all knowledge.

Now, a person who is skeptical about the continuing availability of the gifts might say, well, that doesn't prove anything, because that wasn't church in the first century. The apostles were still around. Yes, the gifts and all the utterance and the knowledge and all those things were still available at that time, but not now.

However, he says to them in verse 7, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Which, if he doesn't say it outright, it certainly implies that while the church is waiting for the revelation of Jesus, the church will come behind or come short of no gift. Now, this scripture by itself might not prove it finally, because some might say, well, maybe he's just saying that these Corinthians in the first century were looking for and waiting for the coming of Christ, and while they were in their time zone, in their time frame, they were coming behind in no gift.

But what about us? We're still looking for the revelation of Christ. We're still looking for his second coming. But you know what some people say, and I'll have to show you 1 Corinthians 13 before I tell you what some people say about 1 Corinthians 1. They say that the gifts are no longer needed since the New Testament has been completed.

If you look at 1 Corinthians 13, I'll show you the principal verse that is used to make this point. Paul's discussion of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians takes three chapters, 12, 13, and 14. 1 Corinthians 12 through 14.

Chapter 13 is the most famous of those chapters, and it's sometimes called the love chapter, although it's really another chapter about the gifts of the Spirit. He is simply saying there that the gifts of the Spirit are worthless unless you have love, which is, of course, a fruit of the Spirit. And in that chapter, which we will not read in its entirety, he makes these statements in verse 8 and following.

He says, Love never fails, but whether there are prophecies, they will fail. Now, that doesn't mean they'll fail to come true, but all scholars, I think, agree that he means they will come to an end. There will come a time when prophecies will no longer be needed, will no longer be relevant.

They will come to an end as a phenomenon in the church. Whether there are tongues,

they will cease, presumably meaning the gift of tongues will someday have an end. There will be no more gift of tongues.

Whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. And here it must mean the gift of the word of knowledge, because knowledge itself will vanish away. I mean, we're going to know the Lord for all eternity.

So he must, in a special sense, mean knowledge in the sense that he listed the word of knowledge in the previous chapter as one of the gifts. So what he's done is named some of the gifts. Prophecy, tongue, knowledge.

And he says in all those cases, those things are temporary. They won't be here forever. A time will come when they're not around anymore.

He says in verse 9, 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. When I was a child, I spoke as a child.

I understood as a child. I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Now, the way some people understand this passage, Paul is saying that gifts, prophecy, tongue, knowledge, these things are in part, and when that which is perfect has come, those things that are partial, those things that are incomplete, will be done away with. There will be no more use for them. Tongues will cease.

Prophecies will fail. Knowledge will vanish away. When? When that which is perfect has come.

Now, on the view of many, virtually all the people I know who are not believers in the continuing validity of the gifts today, they think that that which is perfect is a reference to the completed New Testament. The argument goes something like this. Paul was writing at a time when there was no New Testament scripture.

The Christians still had only the Jewish scriptures. And, of course, the miscellaneous utterances, such as the Holy Spirit might give in the church, or if the church was fortunate enough to have an epistle from Paul or from Peter, that was additional scripture for them. But they didn't have a complete revelation from God.

And so they were dependent on fragmentary, occasional utterances, such as might come through prophecy or through a word of knowledge or through tongues and interpretation. And because they lacked a complete scripture, they needed this special revelation from God. But Paul anticipated a time when the New Testament canon would be complete, when all the books of the New Testament would have been written.

And when this would have happened, then there would be a perfect thing, the New Testament. And when that which is perfect came, there would no longer be need for that which was not perfect, which is by which they mean prophecy and tongues and the other gifts. So they believed, those who say this, that the finishing up of the New Testament, the final chapters and books of the New Testament being written, was that which signaled the arrival of that which was perfect.

The New Testament itself was perfect. And because that which is perfect came, the gifts no longer were necessary and have not been necessary ever since. We don't need prophecies today, they say, because we can just read the Bible.

We don't need words from the Lord. We can just get it from the printed page. Now, let me say, initially, even apart from my disagreement with the exegesis of this passage by such people, the mentality seems strange to me, that God, who has spoken throughout all eternity, from the first we read of him in Genesis, he's speaking, up through the Old Testament, speaking continually to his people through prophets, even when they had scriptures.

He still spoke through prophets and wise men and so forth. There were gifts of wisdom and gifts of prophecy and so forth, as well as healings and miracles. God still revealed himself in those ways, even when the Old Testament scriptures were partially available.

And when the Old Testament scriptures were completely available, God was still speaking through the apostles and the prophets. And God has always been speaking, but all of a sudden, now that he finished writing the New Testament, he doesn't talk anymore. Suddenly, while it has been normative throughout history for his people to be in communication with him one-on-one, it's no longer his policy to communicate one-on-one with people.

Now he just wants to talk through his book. If you have any questions for God, you just read the book. I've got nothing to say to you personally.

It's so that the impression I get from this teaching is that we, in the New Testament era, have less communication with God, less of a relationship with God, than people even in the Old Testament had or that the early church had. Now, while this is possible that God would do this, I don't find anywhere in the scripture that indicates that he did do that or would do that, and I can't really understand why he would even think of doing that. It would seem like there would be an entire change in his personality and his character and his concept of relationship with his people.

If he said, OK, I've been revealing my mind, I've been revealing my heart to you, directly, one-on-one, in conversation with you and with the people corporately, and now I'm just tired of doing that. I think I'm just going to give you a book and just read the book. If you've got any questions, just read it.

And, again, I would grant God the right to do that. I'm not trying to mock this in the sense of saying that God doesn't have the prerogative to change his ways if he wishes. I just don't read anywhere in the scripture that God has had such a change.

Nor does the exegesis of this passage in 1 Corinthians 13 make sense in the context. But the reason I bring that up is to take your attention momentarily back to 1 Corinthians 1.7. It says, You come behind in no gift while you eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who think that the finishing up of the New Testament spelled the end of the gifts of the Spirit for the church, would say, well, look, while they were waiting for the revelation, well, the Revelation is the last book of the New Testament.

So while they were waiting for the writing of the book of Revelation, they lacked no gift. That is literally what I've heard some people argue with me about this. But I point out, well, Paul said that we're going to lack no gift while we're waiting for Jesus to come.

He said, no, he didn't say while we're waiting for Jesus to come. He said, while we're waiting for the revelation of Jesus Christ. And if you'll check out the name of the book of the last of the Bible, it's the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

That's the first words in the book of Revelation. So all it's saying here, they say, is that we will have the gifts until the New Testament is complete. Now there's several reasons why I cannot accept this exegesis right out of hand.

And then we'll even look at 1 Corinthians 13 a little closer and see why that can't be the meaning. First of all, there is no certainty that the book of Revelation is in fact the last book of the New Testament to be written. It is the last book positioned in our Bible.

But the books of our Bible are not positioned in chronological order as they were written. For example, almost all scholars these days seem to believe that Mark was written before Matthew. Now whether this is true or not, I don't know.

But Matthew is positioned earlier in our Bible. James and Galatians are some of the earliest books written. But they're not the earliest in the arrangement of the New Testament books.

And there's no certainty at all that Revelation was written, for example, earlier than the Gospel of John or the Epistles of John. And many scholars believe that the other writings of John may have followed the writing of the book of Revelation. And it's entirely possible.

In fact, the book of Revelation may have been written a lot earlier than many people think. Because both James and 2 Peter have places where they seem to be quoting or strongly alluding to things in the book of Revelation. If that is so, and I guess that would be disputable, then there may have been a great number of books of the New Testament that were written after the book of Revelation was written.

So to argue, well, you know, they were waiting for the writing of the book of Revelation because that would be the complete canon of the New Testament. But we have no objective way of knowing that the writing of the book of Revelation was the last of the New Testament books. And so the argument is on shaky ground right from the beginning there.

Secondly, this would suggest, if that was Paul's meaning, that Paul somehow knew that at some later date, John was going to be on the island of Patmos and see the visions and write them up in the book of Revelation. And I dare say that Paul knew more about it than John did, if that's the case. Because I get the impression that John was surprised, startled, and stunned when he received the visions on Patmos.

And yet by this theory, Paul knew all about that before John ever had the visions. He knew that John was going to write the book of Revelation. He even named it right here, waiting for the book of Revelation to be written.

And that seems to me very unlikely. Another thing that seems unlikely to me is that Paul even had a conception in his mind of a complete New Testament canon. He may have, but some of the books were no doubt written after his death.

And there's no evidence in his writings that he saw himself as writing portions of what would later be a collection of writings called the New Testament. He wrote letters to individual churches, very personal letters. Many of them don't have evidence in them that he intended audiences of later generations to read them.

I'm not saying we don't benefit from them, we do. But he wrote very personal letters, often with personal allusions to things that later generations just puzzled over, trying to figure out what he was alluding to, because he did not write as if he was self-consciously writing for a collection of essays or books that would later be called the New Testament. So for him to suggest when that which is perfect has come and means the New Testament canon, it would suggest that Paul knew more than we have reason to believe he knew about.

Furthermore, there's other reasons this can't be the case. For one thing, even when the last book of the New Testament was written, the church didn't have the whole New Testament. The canonization of the books wasn't completed until almost the year 400.

And therefore, there were churches that didn't have the whole canon of the New Testament for hundreds of years after the books were written. The books were around, floating around, being passed from hand to hand, but there wasn't anything like a complete bound work called the New Testament available to the church until 300 years after Paul died. And the other apostles, which means that if the gifts were available until the church had the complete New Testament, the gifts would have to be around for several centuries after the apostles, because it was at least that long before the books of

the whole New Testament were completely agreed upon, which ones belonged there and gathered together as the New Testament covenant documents.

What I'm saying is, it's overly simplistic and not realistic to my mind to suggest that Paul A. knew there would be a New Testament collection, B. was referring to that when he spoke of that which is perfect coming, and that he even named the book of Revelation by name before John even knew about it. Now, some people have such a view of the inspiration of Scripture, it wouldn't be strange at all for Paul writing a letter to write things that he himself didn't even know. The Holy Scripture was inspiring him.

So he mentioned the book of Revelation, but it meant nothing to him, because he's almost like in a trance or something writing Scripture. However, the Scriptures do not indicate that that's how it was written. Paul wrote things that he understood, and therefore I don't think he was writing about some phenomenon that God had not yet even revealed was going to come into existence, namely the New Testament canon or the collection of New Testament books, or the book of Revelation.

Much more likely, if you look at 1 Corinthians 13 again, we should understand that which is perfect in some other sense than that it refers to the completed New Testament. One way that is commonly understood among Christians who are not committed to this other view is that that which is perfect is a reference to Jesus himself. When that which is perfect has come would be a reference to Jesus coming back, so that it would be saying the same thing in 1 Corinthians 13 that it said in 1 Corinthians 1, that the gifts are here until Jesus comes back.

Then that which is in part will be done away when that which is perfect has come back. This is probably the most common view of the passage held among those who are open to the continuation of the gifts in the present age. One objection that has been raised to this is that the expression that which is perfect in the Greek is in the neuter, not the masculine.

It is argued that if he was talking about Jesus coming back, he would more likely say when he that is perfect has come, rather than when that which is perfect has come. The very use of the neuter rather than the masculine suggests something other than the second coming and probably something more like the canon of the New Testament. This is how they argue.

However, that is not at all a certain argument. The Holy Spirit is certainly treated as a personal being and is spoken of as he. Throughout Jesus' teachings about the Holy Spirit, he calls the Holy Spirit he.

And yet the word *pneuma*, which is spirit in the Greek, is a neuter word. And it is not impossible for a neuter to be used sometimes when speaking of a personal being. But more importantly, I would like to suggest even a third alternative to meaning in Paul's

words.

He says we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect comes, that which is in part will be done away. And then he illustrates it this way in verse 11. When I was a child, I spoke as a child.

I understood as a child. And I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Now, what were the childish things he put away? Well, he mentioned speaking, understanding, and thinking. When he was a child, he understood and spoke and thought like a child. When he became a man, did he put away speaking and thinking and understanding? Or did he simply put away speaking, thinking, and understanding as a child when he became a man? In other words, when he became a man, he didn't give up these activities of speaking and thinking and understanding.

What he gave up was the childish way of thinking. And the childish way of understanding and the childish way of speaking, because he was no longer a child, he now did these things in a mature way. Perfect, by the way, is the ordinary Greek word in the New Testament for perfect, which can be, and is often translated, mature.

Or complete. So, you could translate it, when that which is mature is come, then that which is, in part, meaning immature, will be done away with. If this were the meaning of his statement, he would be saying something altogether different than either of the two other suggestions.

He's not saying that the gifts are going to be abolished altogether, either when the New Testament is complete or when Jesus comes back, but rather, the childish and imperfect way in which we currently know and think and speak will give way to a more mature, more complete, more perfect way of speaking and thinking and understanding. That the gifts of the Spirit are marvelous indeed at this age, but they're still rather immature expressions since we still do these things as immature persons. But when perfection comes, or when mature comes, it's not that these things will no longer exist, but that the childish use of them will no longer exist.

Maturity will have come, and the immature way in which we now know and speak and so forth will give way to a more perfect way of doing so, which would suggest that the gifts, even when maturity is reached, are not done away with completely, but the immature sense in which they are will be done away with. That which is in part, which is the immature thinking and so forth, will be done away with. Now, what would maturity then, what would that which is perfect be? Well, in chapter 13, that which seems to be emphasized as the most perfect thing is love.

Notice the opening verse of 1 Corinthians 13, Though I speak with the tongues of men

and of angels, I have speaking in tongues, but have not love, I have become just a lot of noise, a sounding brass, and a clanging cymbal. Though I have the gift of prophecy, that's another gift of the Spirit, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, which is here used in the sense of the gift of knowledge, and though I have all faith, which is also listed as a gift in chapter 12, these are all gifts of the Spirit, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. In other words, if I have all these gifts, marvelous gifts, but don't have love, it doesn't count for anything.

Yet we know it is possible to have gifts without love. It is possible to be selfish and immature and yet have gifts. And the Corinthian church was a good example of that.

They had gifts, but they didn't have maturity. They lacked love. And Paul had said to them in chapter 3, as long as you're competing with one another, and saying, I'm of Paul and I'm of Cephas, are you not still carnal and immature? Are you not babes, he said.

The church was immature. They lacked love. They lacked unity.

They lacked the ability to exercise the gifts in their proper spirit, because they didn't possess the proper spirit to maturity for it. But a time would come when that would change, that they would grow up. Maturity would come.

They would grow up in love. And when they did, this childish expression of the gifts would give place to a mature expression of the gifts. And I think that is the best way to understand verse 11, because he illustrates his point there.

I was a child, I did all these things like a child. Spoke, thought, understood like a child. When I became a man, I put away childish things.

But childish things can't be thinking. Thinking is not a childish thing. Speaking is not a childish thing.

But I gave up the childish way of doing that in favor of a manly, mature way of doing that. So that he's not really necessarily in this passage even talking about a time in which the gifts will cease to exist, but rather a time in which the partial, immature, inadequate use of the gifts will give way to a more mature sense. Now there's another passage I think may suggest the same thing.

If you look at Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians chapter 4. I'd like to begin reading at verse 8 or verse 7. But to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore he says, when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. Now there's a parenthesis for two verses which we'll skip over.

And in verse 11 he expands on his statement, he gave gifts to men. That is, Jesus gave gifts to the church. And Paul tells us what some of them were in verse 11.

He himself gave some to the apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers. For what? What are these gifts for? Well, they're for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry. By the way, that function does not necessarily become obsolete with the passing of the apostles.

The equipping of saints for the work of the ministry seems to be necessary as long as there are saints and ministry to be done. Further he says, for the edifying of the body of Christ. I'm not sure that that will ever become obsolete either.

Edifying the body of Christ seems like a good, permanently valid thing to hope for and to work for. But furthermore he says in verse 13, how long these gifted persons are here for. Namely, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect or mature 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, etc., etc. Verse 15, but speaking the truth in love. We may grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ.

Now, reading this passage, bear in mind what I said about 1 Corinthians 13. That the gifts in Corinth were exercised by immature persons lacking in love and therefore not really accomplishing all that much. They were worthless, just like a lot of noise is done without love.

But, immaturity can be replaced with maturity. When maturity comes, when that which is perfect or when that which is mature comes, then these immature expressions will be obsolete. Now, Paul says many of the same things here.

He even says that we should no longer be children in verse 14. And in 1 Corinthians 13, he said, when I was a child, I did it as a child. But now I'm not a child anymore, so I don't do it in a childish way.

Paul says, well, these gifts are given so that we would no longer be children. And we would speak the truth in love. There's the love factor there that he emphasized in 1 Corinthians 13.

And we may all grow up into him, into Christ, in all things. Now, in particular, he says, the gifts are there functioning until, verse 13, we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. Now, you and I, as Christians, all have faith, and we all have knowledge of the Son of God.

I'm not sure that we all have unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God in the sense that he's talking about. Now, I would say that everyone who believes in Jesus, at some level, at some very low level, has a unity in faith. We all have some things we believe in common.

But that was true then, too, and Paul spoke of a future time, where through the expression of these works, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, some future development will come where we are all in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. Quite obviously, there is something beyond that which the church at that time had, which he's referring to as the unity of the faith and the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God. I would suggest that cannot, therefore, just mean the basic unity that all Christians have because they all know Jesus, and they all believe in the gospel.

There must be something more, and I'd like to suggest the possibility that it means until we all come to believe alike. And to know Jesus about the same as one another. While all Christians know Jesus, not all Christians know Jesus equally well.

While all Christians have some shared content to their faith, yet there's a great deal of differences in beliefs among Christians. And that was true in Paul's day, too. But he spoke of a time when we would all come in unity of the faith, and in unity of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a mature man.

And there it's a singular. The body of Christ has to mature. The body of Christ has to grow up to maturity.

And this will happen as we grow up as individuals, and are no longer children tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. But by speaking the truth, we'll grow up into him. And as we as individuals are no longer children, the body of Christ corporately comes into maturity as well.

And then, perhaps, we'll not need apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers because what's left for them to do? We will have reached perfection. We will have reached maturity. We will have reached the very thing that they are here to bring about.

That's what they're here for. To build us up, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ until we reach the goal. Now, has the church reached this goal yet? I am not aware of it.

It depends on how we define church. If we want to give a very narrow definition of church as the, you know, the few people out there who are 100% everything that Christians should be, we might say, well, I guess Christians have always had this, this unity and so forth. But if we mean everybody who really loves the Lord, everyone who is a serious follower of Christ, everyone who has the Holy Spirit, everyone who has been born again, then by no means could we say that we have reached a place of unity of faith and unity of the knowledge of the Son of God.

There's still a great variety, even great disunity, among those who name the name of

Christ. And I suggest that Paul is describing something that has not yet come about. Now, some would say, well, that won't happen until Jesus comes back.

Maybe not. I don't know. Paul doesn't say that.

We may just assume that because it doesn't look very promising from our point of view that Christians are going to come together and believe the same thing. But then we need to guard against making our predictions about the ultimate end of things on the basis of how things stand right now. I remember thinking a long time ago that Paul teaches here, and I still may think this, I'm not sure, but that Paul here is teaching that Jesus may not even come back until we reach a unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

I'm not going to affirm that because I don't know that that's true. But he, interestingly, does not mention the second coming of Christ directly here. He speaks of the church reaching a goal that it is growing toward.

The church is being built up, being edified, until it reaches the goal of the fullness of the measure of the stature of Christ and maturity. Now, perhaps that goal will be reached only when Jesus actually appears. But between now and then, we're growing toward it, and he does not say we will not reach it before Jesus comes back.

And if you think we might not, you may be right. But you could be wrong, too. Who knows what God may be able to do or may intend to do through the church.

And in the church before he comes back. I think the reason that we sometimes suspect this can't happen realistically before Jesus comes back is because we insist that he must come back real soon. I mean, we've been told, you know, he's got to come back in our generation.

Hey, we're way too far from unity. We better just not hope for anything much more than what we have and just hold on and hope that Jesus comes back before we get more backslidden. But actually, the goal of Christ is to have the church grow up into maturity.

Not just grow bigger. The church has certainly grown bigger since Paul's day, but I'm not sure it's all that much more mature than it was in Paul's day. And yet the growing up of the body of Christ as a mature man is what is here said to be the end result of the total functioning of the gifts as long as they're available and in use in the church.

So I am going to suggest, although I'm not going to predict whether this will be accomplished before Jesus comes back or if it will require the second coming of Christ to bring it about. To my mind, either view could be supported scripturally. One thing is clear, we haven't reached it yet.

And if the gifts are here until that happens, then they're still here because that hasn't

happened. And for that reason, I would say that the maturity of which Paul speaks, that putting away childish things and becoming a man is something that has not yet happened. And because it has not yet happened, we cannot argue that the gifts are irrelevant, that the thing that they were being useful for in the first century, they're no longer useful for that.

As long as the goal of the gifts is still unreached, then the use of the gifts is still needed. And there is evidence from these passages that there is not ever going to be a generation of Christians to whom the gifts will not be available. And the burden of proof would rest very heavily, to my mind, on those who think that they passed away with the apostles and that burden has not been met at all.

I mean, essentially the only scripture that is ever given to try to prove that the gifts have passed away is 1 Corinthians 13, when that which is perfect has come. And yet there's so many possible meanings of that which are different than the one that that argument hangs on, that this is a very weak argument indeed. The fact is that church historians record that the gifts, the healing and prophecy and so forth, continued for centuries in the early church.

The people who say it passed away with the apostles simply haven't read church history very carefully, because gifts and the spirit were taken for granted as a normal thing in the church in the second, third and fourth century too. And if we're going to say, well, then they passed away after that, we have to figure out, well, what significant happened then? You know, I mean, the passing of the apostles does seem like a big turning point, but third, fourth, fifth century, what turning point do we point to there at the end of the gifts besides the apostasy of the church? And that is, of course, the main development that happened in those centuries, is the church apostatized. The church went into heresy and apostasy, and no surprises, the gifts kind of disappeared for the most part.

But that is not a good reason to say that God didn't want the gifts to still be around. And therefore, those who would argue that the gifts are still for today have every biblical reason to hold to that position, and church history is on their side too. Because, of course, we do find the gifts in operation today, and those who believe that what we see and call the gifts today are all artificial or counterfeit or deceptive work of the devil, are really in a hard spot.

Because they have to say that all the miracles that are done in Jesus' name are all done by the devil. And there are people who say that. There are people who are so convinced that the true gifts of the spirit passed away with the apostles, that they would say that every healing that has taken place ever since, every miracle, every prophecy that has been uttered, even if it has proven to come out true, every exorcism, almost everything supernatural that has happened since the death of the apostles, has been a spiritual counterfeit accomplished by demons, not by the spirit.

In my mind, that is a very dangerous position to take, in view of the fact that when the Pharisees said of Jesus in Matthew 12, He cast out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, Jesus said, well, if I cast out demons by the spirit of God, which was the case, then the kingdom of God is overtaken to you. And He said, those who speak evil and blaspheme against the Holy Spirit have no forgiveness, neither in this age nor in the age to come. I don't know to what extent, I don't know where we would put the boundaries around what blasphemy of the Holy Spirit includes, but in that case, it meant looking at the actual work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus and saying that's the devil.

And it seems to me if you saw the Holy Spirit at work today in the life of believers and said that's the devil, it's not very far removed from what the Pharisees did, and it may not be very different than what He called the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. So, while I would certainly argue for discernment, I would definitely say don't think that every miracle that is claimed or even that really happens is of God, because the Bible does indicate the devil can work signs and wonders. In fact, the man of sin comes with signs and wonders by the power of Satan.

It says in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, signs and lying wonders done through the power of Satan. There can be signs and wonders done by Satan, but that simply means Christians need to have discernment. It doesn't mean that we just throw out all signs and wonders because some of them may be of the devil.

And that's what some people do because they've lacked discernment for so long that it's a lot easier just to reject all supernatural. Since some of it's of the devil, we don't want to accept that, and we don't have much discernment, so we can't tell the difference between the real and the false. Let's just throw it all out.

And I think that may be how some people are motivated when they just say, I don't want any of that happening in my church. Because there is phony baloney stuff. There are occultists who speak in tongues.

There are false prophets. There are false healers. And that being so, of course, we are forced to test all things and hold fast that which is good, as Paul said, but that testing requires some discernment.

And to tell you the truth, I see two problems, really major problems in the modern day body of Christ. Among those who are anti-charismatic and don't believe the gifts are for today, I think the problem exists in not being able to discern when God is really doing something supernatural. They just think it's the devil, or they ignore it, or they pretend it's not happening, and they can't discern when it's of God.

On the other hand, the charismatic, in many cases, have said, well, hey, don't throw out the baby with the bathwater, so they take the baby, but they take the bathwater too, and they can't discern when it's not of God. I say they can't, maybe they can, but they

don't. It seems to me that there are some charismatics who just welcome any phenomenon that's supernatural, and if you speak against it, the fact that it was done in a church to them makes it of God, as if the devil never goes to church.

Now, I know some good Christians who don't go to church very much, but I know the devil goes to church every Sunday, and he is not always sitting silently by. He disrupts too, and he does things that are deceptive. He even speaks to the pastors sometimes.

The devil sometimes even gives the sermon. So just because something is done in church doesn't mean that it's of God. This is one thing that's always perplexed me about people who are talking about holy laughter.

I'm not opposed to the phenomenon. I believe there could be such a thing as holy laughter. I believe there is.

I believe if you get really happy in the Lord, I mean, the Holy Spirit can just be tickling you inside, and you just feel great, and you just feel happy, and you just kind of laugh. I have had the experience, and I personally don't base it on experience alone, but I can't think of anything biblically that would forbid that the Holy Spirit might make you at times laugh. The problem is, the people who are talking about holy laughter, so often they just assume that if there's laughter happening in the church, it's holy laughter, because it happened at a church meeting.

But I've been to the meetings where this is kind of taking hold, and so forth. I've looked it over, and I think, well, I see laughter, but I don't see very much evidence that it's holy. And I'm not sure why it is that I'm supposed to assume that all the laughter that's taking place here is holy, in some sense.

What makes it holy? Just the fact that it's happening in a church service? That makes it holy? I don't think so. You've got to discern on a more definitive basis than that, a more reliable basis than that. There's such a thing, I think, of laughing in the Spirit.

I can't find it in the Bible, and therefore you're welcome to disagree with me. If you don't think there is such a thing, I won't go to the mat on that point. I don't care if you agree or not.

It's not a tenet of my theology, and it's not something that I do here. I'm not laughing, and so I don't have to defend myself laughing. I'm just saying that if you ask my opinion, I think there is such a thing as laughing because of the moving of the Holy Spirit upon you, in a sense, where you see, where you're just full of joy, or you can see humor in a situation.

But I'm very skeptical of much, I think the majority, of what today is happening, and they're calling holy laughter, because I don't see any evidence of it being holy. I don't see any evidence of it being edifying. I don't see any evidence of it being, in any sense,

glorifying to Jesus.

I just see people having a good time, and not that I'm against having a good time, but that's not what the Holy Spirit's all about. He's not here to just let us have a good time. He's here to build up the body of Christ, to glorify Jesus, and to promote the issues of the Kingdom of God.

So that's some of the tests I would place. I'm talking about laughter, because that's a common thing nowadays we hear about, but take prophecy, or a healing, or a miracle, or some other thing. How do you know if it's of God or not? Well, does it edify the body? Does it glorify Jesus? Or is some human personality being glorified through it? Those are some of the major tests I'd apply first.

There might be others as well. But what I'm saying is that there is a need to be discerning, and while those who are against all gifts being manifested today sometimes are just unwilling to discern, or unable to discern when God really is doing something, those who believe in all the gifts, as I do, can have the opposite mistake, and not discern when something isn't from God. And there's a lot of supernatural stuff that isn't.

So we simply are not ever able to let our guard down when it comes to testing and so forth. We had on our staff here some years ago a gentleman who came from a much more Pentecostal background than I do. I don't even come from a Pentecostal background, so it doesn't take much to come from a more Pentecostal background than me.

But he was saved in a Pentecostal movement, and he was very hyped on the gifts, which I was not opposed to that. And he wanted to see more gifts in operation on our Friday night meeting. And I let him encourage people along those lines.

And one night he was here at this pulpit, and he was saying, OK, folks, we want you to be aware that we will give you opportunity, if you want to, to give a prophecy, or to speak in tongues in the meeting here, or whatever. And I was sitting there by him, and I spoke up, and I said, and know that we will judge it. Now, he didn't react to that instantly, but later he wrote me a very nasty letter about the time he was leaving.

And he brought this up as an example of me dampening fervor for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He accused me of being anti-charismatic, anti-supernatural, anti-gifts, being too much of a bibliologist person or something. And he gave this example.

He says, once I was in a meeting, and I encouraged people to prophesy or speak in tongues, and you spoke up and said, and know that we'll judge it. And he said this in his letter to me. He says, what better way could you guarantee that no one would speak up? Well, I wrote him a letter back, and I said, well, you know what? If saying we're going to judge it is a guarantee that they won't speak up, then they'd better not speak up.

Because Paul said, let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge. And if Paul's words didn't dampen that, then I don't see why mine would. I mean, to say we're going to judge it.

I'll tell you what. When a teacher gets up to teach, he'd better be aware that people are going to judge it. You'd better judge it.

Don't just believe it because I said it. If I get up here or anyone gets up here and speaks, you should be sitting in judgment, discerning what is being said. Because the fact that I believe in Jesus and I'm sincere doesn't mean that I'm saying the right things.

I could be wrong. And I might not be operating through the Holy Spirit when I'm speaking. There's always that possibility.

You have to judge that. Now, if someone said, well, Steve, I want you to know before you speak tonight that everyone's going to be judging what you say. I'd say, well, I'm sorry, I won't speak then.

What is that telling you about my confidence in what I have to say? It's saying I don't think it can stand scrutiny. You know? It would mean I have no conviction that what I'm saying is true and can withstand judgment and criticism. I expect to be critiqued.

I expect to be judged. And I expect people to challenge what I say. And I expect my words to survive that test.

Because I believe them to be true. Now, maybe they won't survive every test. But I get up here with the assumption.

The Bible says if anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. Well, I wouldn't get up here to speak if I didn't think I had the mind of God on what I'm saying. I mean, I may be wrong, but I certainly encourage you to judge it.

And if I were to want to get up and give a prophecy or a tongue, and someone said, now, by the way, you'll be judged. I mean, that is, your prophecy will be judged. Well, maybe I won't speak after all.

Well, then that means I have no confidence. The prophecy I'm giving is genuine, but I would have given it anyway if I didn't think anyone was going to be discerning. And what does that tell you? And yet, to this man who came from a more Pentecostal mindset than I do, to him, that was as plain as day.

You tell someone you're going to judge it, and they're not going to give it. And I say, listen, if in order to have the gifts functioning, we have to allow all the counterfeit gifts that won't stand the test in the meeting, and there won't be any genuine ones, I'm just going to have a meeting without any gifts manifested. If there are going to be gifts of the

devil.

You know, this guy, Rodney Howard Brown, who's sort of the Holy Ghost bartender, as he calls himself, and he's kind of the one who's the founder of the Laughing Revival, you know, he's the guy everyone says started it. He actually says, I'd rather, or maybe it was not him, maybe it was one of the vineyard pastors up in Toronto, one of those guys who were early on leaders in this movement, in the renewal, said, I'd rather have the devil manifesting in the meeting than have nothing happening in the meeting. He literally said that.

He says, yes, some of these manifestations may not be of God, some of them may be of the devil. He says, I'd rather have the devil manifesting in the meeting than nothing happening in the meeting. And everyone cheered, and I say, hey, find me the door, quick.

I mean, I would rather be in a meeting where nothing was happening than where the devil was going wild. I mean, I know the devil comes to our meetings, but I just assume he didn't prophesy here. And therefore, we need discernment.

And you know, it's been one of my complaints, and I've been in the charismatic movement for 26 years, one thing I've observed from pretty early on, and I'm afraid I haven't seen much improvement in it in all the years I've been in it, is that charismatics, the ones who claim to have the gifts, the ones who claim to have more of the Holy Spirit, more of the power, more of the illumination of the Holy Spirit, more discernment, are in fact some of the least discerning Christians I've ever known, the most gullible, the most willing to accept any wind of doctrine that comes through. I say that as a person who's in the movement. I'm one of, I'm a charismatic, and if I was a non-charismatic saying that, you might say, oh, he's just bitter toward charismatics.

I'm, the movement, it's got to be self-correcting, it's got to be self-critiquing, and I'm part of it, so it's self-critique of the movement I belong to. And I think that Christians who suddenly become aware of the gifts and open to the gifts have to be sure that they also be open to critiquing, judging, and not being too gullible about everything that comes along that professes to be a work of the Holy Spirit. Okay, so we, as near as I can tell from Scripture, the gifts are here to stay, at least until the Lord comes, or until we reach total maturity, and I'm not convinced that that'll happen before the Lord comes, but if it happens before the Lord comes, I think it'll be just before the Lord comes.

I don't think we're going to, I don't know, I don't know, the Bible doesn't really, I don't know. Okay, but let me just say this, the Scriptures we've looked at, which are relevant to the duration of the availability of the gifts to the church, would certainly indicate that we are still living at a time while they're available. We are still waiting for the revelation of Jesus Christ.

We're still waiting for the unity of the faith, and the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God to come, and for us to all come to a perfect man. That hasn't happened yet, and for that reason we still need the edification, we still need the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, and that's what the gifts are there for, and we can't, I can't imagine that God, who has more at stake than we do, in the success of this mission, that He would not give us all the equipment that He gave the early church to accomplish the mission that He wanted them to accomplish, and which we're supposed to still be doing. Why would He rip away our weapons on the battlefield? Because, well, you didn't get the job done in the first century, I'm just going to punish you, you're going to have to be out in the battlefield without power.

I'm giving you no ammunition. I just don't understand that as taught in the Bible, and it doesn't make sense to me. Of course, what makes sense to me is not what's important, but what the Bible says is, and I don't see it there.

Now I want to talk about how many gifts there are. The answer is, I don't know. But there are nine listed in 1 Corinthians 12, and there are seven or six, seven I think, listed in Romans 12, and I'd like to look at those if we could, and try to identify what they are, if we could.

Now I'm not going to go into detail about what they are, because I intend to take, in later talks, a little more detailed treatment of what the Bible says these gifts are, and what they're used for. But I have a few rather unconventional ideas about what some of these gifts are. By that I mean, I don't tow the regular charismatic party line about some of this.

1 Corinthians 12. When I first was filled with the Spirit, and became aware of the gifts and so forth, I got some books by charismatic authors to try to inform me of all that I didn't know on the gifts, and I quickly learned what charismatics typically say about some of these gifts. And so I learned to say the same thing.

As years went by, I began to realize that some of the things that charismatics say about this are reading a great deal into the text that is not there. And they may be right, but they may not be right. And I'm not as dogmatic as I used to be in the identification of some of these gifts.

Let's take a look at 1 Corinthians 12. And the list there, where there are nine gifts, is not comprehensive, but we'll start there. It's the longest list we have in the Scripture anywhere.

He says in verse 7, that the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. One is the Word, through the Spirit. To another, the Word of knowledge, through the same Spirit.

To another, faith by the same Spirit. To another, gifts of healings by the same Spirit. To another, the working of miracles.

And to another, prophecy. And to another, discerning of spirits. To another, different kinds of tongues.

And to another, the interpretation of tongues. Now here we have nine gifts, and Paul does not break them down into smaller categories. Sometimes for the sake of memory or whatever, people have broken them down into categories.

You can see that there are kind of like three different categories of gifts here. There are those which involve supernatural power, a demonstration of power. Those would be miracles and healings, and very probably the gift of faith.

It's not entirely clear what Paul means by the gift of faith, but as understood by some, maybe most, it would be exceptional faith for meeting special crises in certain situations that God gives some people. There are other ways to understand that. But if faith has to do with special faith, such as to move mountains, like Paul said in chapter 13, if I had all faith so I could move mountains and had not love.

That kind of faith. Then we're talking about three gifts that have to do with demonstrating supernatural, miraculous kind of stuff. The gift of faith, the gift of miracles, the gift of healing.

We also have gifts of revelation, where God is actually revealing something that would not otherwise be known. A word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, and discerning of spirits are sometimes thought to be special revelatory gifts. Now I must confess, the gifts of word of wisdom and word of knowledge, we do not know for sure what they are.

I know what I have always thought they are. For example, I'll tell you what the charismatic party line is on this. Word of wisdom and word of knowledge differ from one another in this respect.

That a word of wisdom comes when the church must make a decision, or Christians must make a decision, that they do not have natural wisdom. And the Holy Spirit just tells them what the wise thing to do would be. An example of this would be when Solomon was faced with a crisis of two women claiming the same baby.

What's he going to do? It was a big crisis. Well, he had a gift of wisdom, that's for sure. And he said, well, I'll tell you what, we'll cut the baby in two.

Each gets half a baby. And what he was really playing on was the motherly instincts of the one. And he knew the real mother would be exposed.

But that was really a risky thing. But it worked beautifully. In fact, the Bible says after he

did that, I think it's 1 Kings chapter 4 tells this story, that the fame of his wisdom went throughout all the world.

And people came from all over to hear his wisdom because of this one decision. It's like he got a real insight on how to settle this crisis. Likewise, James, in Acts chapter 15, when they were trying to decide whether circumcision was necessarily part of the Christian life or not for Gentile converts, James stands up and he gives the answer after the disciples have been fussing over it and fighting and arguing.

And there's not any agreement. He finally gives what some people would say was a word of wisdom. And what Charismatics typically have said is that a word of wisdom is when God actually gives somebody an inspired answer to a perplexing problem, gives them wisdom to know how to resolve it.

I have been in elders' meetings, because I used to be an elder in more than one church, but in one of the churches where I was an elder, I was in meetings where we were dealing with very prickly problems. And we were discussing, quite obviously, in our own wisdom, well, we could do this, no, we could do that, well, we could solve it this way, but that might not work and there could be repercussions here. And it was obvious that no one had the answer.

And then one guy would speak up. And what would come forth was, I mean, everyone would discern instantly, that is the mind of God, that is the wisdom of God. And it wasn't just that he was smarter than the rest.

It's more that there was just a real sense that what that man just said was God's answer. And it seemed like the answer none of us came up with, but it was clearly and manifestly the wise solution. This is what I've been typically conditioned to call a word of wisdom.

And a word of knowledge probably is even more familiar to most charismatics because along with gifts of healing and so forth, many healing ministers exercise in what has come to be called a word of knowledge. And that is where there is a revelation, not of a solution, but of a bit of information, of data, actual information about somebody that the man did not know naturally, but God just revealed it to him. For example, when Peter knew, just in his heart, he knew that Ananias and Sapphira had lied to him about how much money they sold their property for.

Or when Elisha knew that his servant Gehazi had run off and gotten money for a healing that Elisha had done on Naaman the leper. And the man had done this beyond the eyesight of Elisha, but Elisha knew it as soon as he came back and confronted him about it. This would be called in the normal charismatic vernacular, a word of knowledge.

Probably the most common word of knowledge or phenomenon like this that we hear of these days is when there is a healing evangelist who says, somebody over in this side of

the room is getting healed right now of a tennis elbow. Or somebody here has a bad liver, but you're being healed right now. God wants to know you're being healed.

Now, do I believe this is authentic? I'm not trying to imply it isn't. I don't know. Sometimes it seems so general.

It seems like God could say who it was if he knew. I mean, some of these so-called words of knowledge are so generic that it would be really hard for it not to be true of somebody. You know, somebody over here came very distraught to the meeting tonight.

You've got a crisis in your family. Somebody in your family has really got you worried. Oh, God wants you to know that this is Nancy taking care of it.

Well, that might or might not require revelation to know that. I could say that in this room, and it would probably be true. And everyone of whom it was true would think they were the person I was talking about, but they wouldn't know there were ten other people that thought that too.

I mean, I'm not impressed with everything I've seen that goes as a word of knowledge. And, of course, there's always been those charlatans, television evangelists, who say there's a woman over here who's got the doctors have said she'll never walk again, and blah, blah, blah. And he has a radio receiver in his ear, and his wife is telling him these things through a microphone, and there have been people caught doing that.

But that doesn't mean that the reality isn't real sometimes. But what I'd like to suggest to you is I'm not sure any longer, as I once was, that those things I just described are what Paul is talking about when he talks about a word of wisdom or a word of knowledge. They might be, but they might not be because he never mentions those things ever again.

The expression word of wisdom and the expression word of knowledge are found only one time each in the Bible, and that is simply in his list. To one he's given a word of wisdom, to another he's given a word of knowledge. He never explains what he means by that.

And therefore, charismatics have generally just assigned some known phenomenon that God does, and say, well, that's what Paul meant by a word of knowledge. Well, maybe he did, maybe he didn't. Maybe there's something else he had in mind.

I would say this, that what I have just described as a word of knowledge, in the Old Testament was just considered to be prophecy. And that might really be, in Paul's mind, just a function of prophecy. When Jesus was with the woman at the well, he said, go get your husband.

She said, I don't have a husband. He said, you're right, you've had five husbands, and

you're living with a man who's not your husband now. She said, certainly I perceive you're a prophet.

That's the stuff of prophecy. To know something like that, we'd call that a word of knowledge perhaps, but that was simply, oh, I can see you're a prophet, you're prophesying. And I'm not sure if the phenomenon that we have come to call the Word, that's what Paul meant when he used that term.

Because what we're calling the word of knowledge, he might have just subsumed that under the gift of prophecy, along with other prophetic kinds of things, and he might have had something entirely different in mind. Well, he said word of knowledge, or word of wisdom. Now, I can't tell you what he meant any more than the traditional charismatic view can be affirmed.

We don't know. But it has occurred to me that he might simply mean that some people have, as a gift from God, more wisdom. When they speak, they speak with more wisdom.

When other people have been given more knowledge, it's a gift they have. And this may be something that isn't like they get a revelation at the moment, it's just something that's resident in them as a gift from God. I certainly have known people that I've really admired because of their wisdom, and wondered if I'll ever be that wise someday, and I really doubt that I will in some time.

So I've been a Christian a long time, and I haven't gotten that much wiser than I was. I still make the same mistakes I made 25 years ago, so maybe I'm not going to grow into that. Maybe that's a gift some people have that I don't.

Some people just have a lot of common sense, what I would call more common sense than I have. But who knows, maybe that's a gift of the Holy Spirit. Maybe it's not common sense at all.

Maybe it's just resident wisdom in them. And likewise, knowledge. I mean, people have sometimes said, Oh, Steve, you've got a great memory.

Yeah, I don't. I do not have a great memory. And the reason they think I do is because I can remember Scripture a lot.

And I can remember where it is and stuff. And I can mostly quote it and stuff. And they say, Oh, what a memory that guy has.

No, I don't have a great memory. I cannot remember names of people I met last week. I cannot remember telephone numbers.

I can't remember birthdays of children, or even my own most of the time. My memory is not great. When it comes to anything other than Scripture, I have almost no memory at

all.

And I just have to say, when people say, Well, I hope I can study the Bible as well as you do. I say, I hope so too. I don't know.

I don't know how it is that I can quote Scriptures I've never memorized. Or tell you where a Scripture is, even if I haven't read it for ten years. Now, RNA Scriptures I haven't read that long.

But there are some I haven't noticed while reading for that long. And yet they'll come to mind. That might be a gift of knowledge.

I don't know. I really don't know what Paul means by the word of knowledge. But it's interesting that he says word of knowledge here, but he drops the word of and just says knowledge.

When he talks about, you know, if I have all knowledge in chapter 13. And knowledge will pass away, or whatever. I mean, he drops the word of knowledge and just calls it knowledge.

In the later references to it in the discussion. So maybe he's just talking about knowledge and wisdom, essentially. As certain things people have gifts in.

And what I described earlier as the typical thing we call the word of knowledge, might just be prophecy. Might just be a function of prophecy. I don't know.

What I am saying is, we don't know as much as we might think we do. About some of these things. There's much less in the Bible on them than we might have assumed.

Based on the dogmatic things that some teachers say about what these things are. A lot of it is guesswork. Another thing that I have a different opinion on than a lot of people do is, the discerning of spirits.

I've had a lot of people tell me they have the gift of discernment. Well, you know what? There's no place in the Bible that ever mentions a gift of discernment. The Bible talks about discernment as something that's developed in the Christian as they use the word of God.

It says that in Hebrews chapter 5, spiritual discernment is something developed in the believer. It's not a gift. Well, I can't say it's not a gift because there may be gifts I'm not aware of that aren't in the Bible.

But there's no mention in the Bible of a gift of discernment. I'll tell you what the Bible does say and what I think it might mean in a moment. But in Hebrews chapter 5, the writer says in those closing verses of that chapter, verse 12, Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the

oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. The ability to discern good and evil is something that happens as a result of developing your spiritual senses.

How do you do that? By using the word of God and by becoming, as he says in verse 13, skillful in the word. Skill in the word is something you can develop. You study it.

You meditate on it. You become a rightly dividing the word of God kind of person, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed. And as such you develop at the same time a discernment, the ability to discern what is right and wrong by your skillfulness and knowledge of the word of God.

Now do some people have a gift of discerning demons? Now some people I think do, but I don't believe that Paul refers to that when he talks of discerning of spirits. I used to. You see, I felt for many years that discerning of spirits meant the ability to discern whether a demon was present or not, especially if you're dealing with a demon-possessed person.

Whenever I teach about demon possession, I point out that a lot of the things in the Bible that are actual symptoms of demon possession can exist in a person who doesn't have a demon. I mean violence, blasphemies, even seizures and fits. Just because someone has a seizure doesn't mean they have a demon, but sometimes in the Bible demon-possessed people had seizures.

What I'm saying is the phenomena that are manifested in some demon-possessed people in the Bible can be manifested in a person who doesn't have a demon as well. So how do you know for sure if a person has a demon? And the easy answer was always, well, you need the gift of discernment. And that was the easy answer, though it wasn't easy to come by, because I've known a lot of people who told me they have the gift of discernment, a gift that's not mentioned in the Bible, and they had such poor discernment.

In fact, just almost everyone who's told me that they have the gift of discernment usually told me at a time when they were trying to tell me something they had in fact discerned, and because I knew more about the situation or about the person they were talking about, I was quite convinced they had not discerned correctly, you know. Of course, it's my opinion against theirs, but... Discerning of spirits is mentioned, but what does it mean? In 1 Corinthians 12, I'd point out to you its context in verse 10. Yeah, verse 10.

To another, the working of miracles, to another, prophecy, to another, discerning of spirits, to another, different kinds of tongues, to another, interpretation of tongues. I'd

like to suggest to you that discerning of spirits is related to prophecy, even as interpretation of tongues is related to tongues. Notice the sequence there.

Prophecy and discerning of spirits. Tongues and interpretation of tongues. Now, the suggestion is based on the fact that I have discovered, or I mean I've just noticed in my Bible reading, that sometimes prophetic utterances are referred to as spirits.

That's just a language of the New Testament, to speak of a prophetic utterance as a spirit to be discerned. For example, it says in 1 John chapter 4, Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. What are you discerning? Prophetic utterances.

There are many false prophets. Test their utterances. But he says, test the spirits.

Paul says in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, he says, don't be deceived by a word or by a spirit or by a letter as from us, as that the day of the Lord had come. Virtually all commentators agree that he is giving three ways that the church got their information. 1 John 4, verses 1 and 2. This is what I gave a moment ago.

What we are working on right now is 2 Thessalonians 2. I have to give you the verse numbers by looking. I think the opening verse is there too. Verse 3, 2 Thessalonians 2, 3, Paul says, let no one deceive you by any means, for that day will not come, no, no, the verse before that, verse 2, do not be soon shaken in mind or troubled either by these things, by spirit or by word or by letter as if from us.

Now there are three ways that people might get the wrong impression. By a spirit, by a word, or by a letter that purported to be from him. I believe, and I think most commentators do, that by a spirit he means a spiritual utterance, an alleged prophetic utterance in the church that would say, the day of the Lord has come, don't believe it.

But there again it looks like the word spirit is being used of a prophetic utterance. Now I'll tell you another reason why I think that discerning of spirits in 1 Corinthians 12 is testing of prophetic utterances, is because the word discerning in 1 Corinthians 12, 10, discerning of spirits is a Greek word that is used later in Paul's same discussion in chapter 14 where he says, let the prophets speak two or three and let the others judge. The word judge there is the same Greek word for discern.

So the prophets speak, notice what Paul says, the tongues speak and what happens? Someone interprets. The prophets speak and someone judges or discerns. That discerning of spirits goes with prophecy like interpretation of tongues goes with tongues.

When you get to chapter 14 you find Paul saying this. The tongues speak or speak and let one interpret. The prophets speak and let one judge.

You've got the discerning or the judging of prophecies or discerning of spirits, spiritual

utterances. And another thing that makes me believe that he's using the word spirit here not to refer to demons, but to actual utterances of prophets, is because of something he says in chapter 14, verse 32. Chapter 14, let me actually read verses 29 through 32 so you get the context here.

1 Corinthians 14, 29, let two or three prophets speak and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one that all may learn and all may be encouraged.

And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. Now that last line, the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets, I have been taught, as long as I've been in the Charismatic Movement, I've been taught that that means that the spiritual gift that the prophet has is subject to the person who possesses it, the prophet. Have you not heard the same interpretation of that verse? That's what I've always thought, that the gift is subject to the person who's gifted.

That the prophetic gift is under the control of the man who has the gift. The spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets. But I ask, this is a funny thing, I got this insight from my wife.

I don't know if she knew it was an insight or not, but we were talking about that verse once, and I said, Christian, what do you think that means anyway? Because I thought I knew what it meant. I had the standard Charismatic idea, and I said, what do you think that means anyway? The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. She said, well, doesn't that mean that when a prophet speaks, that his utterance is subject to the judgment of the other prophets? And I thought, well, come to think of it, I never thought of it that way.

And I looked at it again, and in the context, it made more sense than what I thought it meant. Because he says, let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge. And if, while a prophet is speaking, something is revealed to one of the ones standing by judging, then let the man who is speaking shut up.

Why? Because the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets. Let me suggest for you a possible meaning of this passage, which may not be right, but it is entirely possible. What he means is, let the prophets speak, and the other prophets will judge the utterance to see if it is a true prophecy or not.

And if, while they are judging, one of the other prophets gets a revelation, then the one who is speaking has to stop speaking. Hey, wait, brother, I don't think that's of the Lord. Okay, he's speaking.

Why? Because the utterance of the prophet, the spirit of the prophets, is subject to the discernment of the prophetic group. It's subject to the prophets. Now, you don't have to

believe that that's the right interpretation, but the more I think about it, the more I look at the passage in its context, the more I try to follow Paul's flow of thought, the more I think that's what it means.

That the spirits, or the prophetic utterances of the prophets, are subject to the judgment, or the discernment, or the endorsement, of the other prophets in the church. It was not just one prophet speaks independently, but his word is not taken in isolation, but it has to be judged by the others who have the same kind of gifting. And whatever the prophets as a group say about it, the individual prophetic utterances stands or falls based on the judgment of the other prophets.

This, I think, makes even better sense than the traditional view of that verse, the spirits of the prophets. But in that case, those spirits means the utterances of the prophets. I can't expect you to just, if you held the other view, to just shift it just as I said that just now.

I just suggest you look at that on your own later, and think about that, and see if that makes as much sense or more in the context. But what I'm suggesting is the expression, discerning of spirits, is placed right after the gift of prophecy, just like interpretation of tongues is placed right after speaking in tongues, in the list. Furthermore, the word discerning that's in the list is the same word Paul uses when he says, let the others judge the prophecy.

Same Greek word. And so, just the way the thing flows, and the way things are positioned, I've come to the position that the gift of discerning of spirits is really nothing else but the gift of discerning or judging prophetic utterances. And it's not necessarily the ability to tell if demons are present or whatever.

Now, there may be special abilities to tell whether demons are present. In fact, I suspect there are. There seem to be some people who have much more discernment in those areas than I do.

I don't know if that's a gift of discernment, or if it's just a spiritual sensitivity that they have above and beyond what I have. I'll tell you, one brother who came from Australia that none of you have ever met, he was a pastor over there years ago, and he came over to be on our staff when we were in Bandon. This guy was just incredible in his ability to discern spiritual reality.

I mean, he could, in some ways he wasn't all that wise, but he could meet somebody. He'd be over visiting, teaching at our school from Australia. He'd come over, and he'd meet someone at dinner time, and talk to them for five minutes, and later he'd meet with the elders, and he'd say, oh yeah, that person, he's really such and such and such, and he'd give a really, really insightful thing, that those of us who knew the man he was talking about knew was true, but which you could never have gotten from a five minute

conversation.

It's like he knew the guy through and through, and he just talked to him for five minutes. And I remember standing amazed at this man's ability, not only in a case like that, but in many cases. He always seemed to know what was on your mind and so forth.

Now, to tell you the truth, his own Christian walk failed, and I wonder whether his gift was from God, or if it's more like occult mind reading or whatever, but I have nonetheless been amazed by people who are genuine Christians, who seem to be much more sensitive and aware of spirituality than I am. And that may be a gift, that may just be a disposition, I don't know what that is. So I'm not ruling out that there could be a special gifting to know when demons are present or something.

I'm just saying that when Paul says discerning of spirits, I don't think that's what he's talking about. I don't think he's talking about demons. I think he's talking about discerning whether a prophecy is genuine or false.

And that is linked with prophecy, just like interpretation of tongues is linked with tongues. Now, if you'll look real quickly with me, I only have about 10 minutes and I have to wrap this up. I want to show you the list over in Romans chapter 12.

I have not talked in detail, of course, about even the ones on the other list, but I just want... we're going to take them in more detail another time, some of them. But in Romans 12, we have a shorter list of gifts, and Paul says in verse 4... No, let's go further. Verse 6. We'll start at verse 6. Romans 12, 6. Having then gifts, this is the word *charismata*, *charisma*, plural, differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them.

If prophecy, let us prophesy. Now, I want to point out to you that in our Bibles, there's a lot of italicized words in this passage. When you see words in italics, that means they're not in the Greek.

And the reason they're there is because in the Greek, the sentence is choppy. And the translators think it'll read a lot more smoothly if we supply words that we think are implied. So some of these words are added by the translators and are implied, but it reads very difficult in the Greek.

In the Greek, it would read like this. Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, if prophecy, in proportion to our faith, or ministry, in ministry, he who teaches in teaching. And it seems like there's something missing there.

And so the translators find what they think is missing, and frankly, I think they're probably right in what they supply, so I'm going to go with it. Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them. If prophecy, let us prophesy, in proportion to our faith.

Or ministry, that would be service, let us use it in our ministering. He who teaches in teaching, he who exhorts in exhortation, he who gives with liberality, he who leads with diligence, he who shows mercy with cheerfulness. Now notice this list.

You've got prophecy. Now that's in the one in 1 Corinthians 12 also, but apart from that, there's nothing else in this list that corresponds with the list we read in 1 Corinthians 12. Prophecy is the only point of overlap.

We have here additional gifts not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12. We have ministry or helps. By the way, there is a reference to the gift of helps later in 1 Corinthians 12.

At the end of the chapter, he's listing some more gifts, and he mentions helps, probably the same thing as service or ministry here. That would simply be a ministry of helping, of doing practical things that are needed to be done for the edification of the church and the building up of the body of Christ and for the promotion of the ministry. Teaching is mentioned here as a gift that's not in 1 Corinthians 12.

Exhortation is implied, he who exhorts. That literally means encourages. The word exhortation means encouragement.

We sometimes think of it as having a slightly different twist, but the literal meaning of the Greek word is encouragement, a gift of encouraging. Giving is mentioned in verse 8. Leading or leadership is there. And showing mercy.

Now, if we left prophecy out of the list, this wouldn't have anything that was supernatural at all. I mean, it seems supernatural. Service, giving, teaching, encouraging people, showing leading.

I've never heard anyone say these gifts aren't in the church today. I mean, all these things are unthreatening to even the non-charismatic. Sure, they believe in teachers, and they believe in encouragement, and they believe in giving and helps.

The thing that's probably bothersome to them is that prophecy is on this list too, and they don't believe in prophecy for today. Although some of these people say, well, prophecy just means inspired preaching. And that's what they commonly say, but that, to my mind, does not do justice to the biblical concept of prophecy.

And we'll talk about prophecy in a separate Bible study here. There's much to say about prophecy. It's one of the few gifts there's a lot about in the Bible.

And so we'll have much to say about it. But I want to point out here that these gifts are not generally sensational. They're the kind of stuff that goes on all the time, and we don't even necessarily notice that the Holy Spirit is in it.

Someone gives money, someone helps out, someone shows mercy, someone

encourages someone else. And, you know, there's nothing visibly miraculous about that, but those two are gifts of the Holy Spirit. So we can see that not all gifts are things that are quite apparently supernatural.

A gift of the Holy Spirit is simply an endowment with an anointing by the Holy Spirit to perform a function to the body of Christ. And that might be a function that is visibly supernatural, a miracle, healing, prophecy, speaking in tongues or interpretation of tongues. That would be visibly miraculous.

But other times what you do may not be all that sensational at all. It might not be the kind of thing that would turn anyone's head at all. And that's just as well, since you're not doing it, I hope to turn people's heads.

But we have here a different kind of angle of the gifts of the Spirit. And I want to say, you may have heard, because it's commonly said, that the gifts in Romans chapter 12 are a different kind of gifts than those that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 12. I think this is Bill Gothard's teaching, and many people have been influenced directly or indirectly by Bill Gothard.

I believe he says that in this chapter, Romans 12, these are what he calls motivational gifts. Whereas in 1 Corinthians 12 we have ministry gifts. They are more supernatural, but these are motivational gifts.

And he would say that motivational gifts are more or less just a description of a person's disposition, of somebody's inclination, the way someone is motivated. Some people are motivated like a prophet. Some are motivated to encourage and so forth.

But I just want to say, I don't much like this label, motivational gifts, simply because Paul doesn't use it. He uses the same word here, gifts, charismata, that he used in 1 Corinthians 12. And as near as I can tell, he just has two lists.

Neither of them complete. Two partial lists taken together. There's 15 gifts that he mentions.

Some of them are stupendous, sensational, head-turning kind of gifts. Others are just ordinary service, humble, performing a function kind of gifts in the body of Christ, supplying money, supplying energy, supplying talent, supplying leadership, supplying hospitality. The gift of showing mercy I would take to be hospitality.

By the way, I was taught that showing mercy had to do with counseling. But I'm not sure why that was. There's nothing in the Bible that suggests that showing mercy and counseling are related to each other.

Showing mercy is what the good Samaritan did to the man on the road. The Bible says he showed mercy to him. Doing something practical, showing hospitality to someone in

need, that's showing mercy.

These two are gifts. They're not sensational, but they are gifts, they are functions, and they may well be your gifts. And you shouldn't think less of yourself or of your giftedness if that's all you do.

All you do is supply money. All you do is encourage people. All you do is show mercy.

All you do is lead, provide some leadership. You might rather have a healing or miracles mystery, but that's up to the Holy Spirit to decide what you give. What he gives you is what he thinks is needed in the spot where you are, or where he's going to take you.

And therefore, we have these two lists of gifts. There are more. For example, Paul, I think in verse 7, he refers to marriage and singleness as two different gifts, charismata, a charisma of singleness and a charisma of marriage.

They are states that God calls people to and enables them to endure in for the ministry and edification of the body of Christ. And a person with a gift of singleness probably couldn't much endure married life. And a person with a gift of marriage probably couldn't endure single life all that much.

But they are different graces, different giftings that God gives people so that they can serve the body of Christ and build up the body of Christ better with the supernatural ability that God gives them. Unfortunately, we'll have to stop there. I don't want to because I have more points I wanted to make, but we will stop there.

I think we can do that. And I'm going to talk next week about the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. And there's much to say about that.

Not as much as there is on prophecy. But tongues and prophecy are the two gifts that Paul says the most about. And tongues, I think, is perhaps the gift that most people are most confused about.

So we'll try to be rigidly biblical in teaching what the Bible says about the subject. And we'll do our best to see everything that we can see from the scriptures. Are there any questions? Yes.

Judge. Let the others judge. Yeah, discerning and judge are the same word in the Greek.

Now, by the way, the word discern and the word judge and the word prove and the word test are words found elsewhere in scripture, not always that Greek word. That is not the only Greek word in the New Testament for judge or for discern or for test. But it happens to be the same word in both of those places in that same discussion, which is another thing that, to my mind, links those things.

If there was just one word in the Greek for judge, it would be no coincidence or not. I

wouldn't judge it to be so significant that it's the same word in those two passages. But since there are other words used elsewhere, for instance, in 1 Thessalonians 5.21.