

1 The gifts of the Holy Spirit

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To understand the gifts of the Spirit in their Biblical context, we must first record all the places in the New Testament where lists of spiritual gifts are given. The following table shows these lists. In reading this table, please note these points:

- (1) Only the gifts in the first list are specifically attributed to the Holy Spirit. The gifts in the other lists are described as gifts of God or Christ.
- (2) The gifts in the first list refer to specific supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit. These are sometimes referred to as the manifestation gifts. However, for the most part, the gifts in the other four lists refer either to offices of leadership in the church or to gifts a person has by virtue of their character or personality -- sometimes called “motivational” gifts.
- (3) We have listed the **office gifts** in bold and the *motivational gifts* in italics, with the manifestation gifts left in plain type. Some in these lists, such as teaching, can overlap, depending on who is doing the teaching – a teacher exercising his office or another member of the body with an ability to teach. When these are excluded, only three gifts remain in the last four lists, and these three are duplicates of a gift already mentioned in the first list. Here we want to focus on the gifts given by supernatural working of the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor. 12:8-11	1 Cor. 12:28	Rom. 12:6-8	Eph. 4:11	1 Peter 4:11
word of wisdom	apostles	prophecy	apostles	<i>speaking</i>
word of knowledge	prophets	<i>service</i>	prophets	<i>service</i>
faith	teachers	<i>teaching</i>	evangelists	
healings	workers of miracles	<i>exhortation</i>	pastors	
workings of miracles	helps	<i>giving</i>	teachers	
prophecy	administrations	leadership		
distinguishing of spirits	tongues	<i>showing of mercy</i>		
tongues				
interpretation				

Handling the gifts in Christ's way

The correct use of the gifts of the Spirit and in particular the question of speaking in tongues has been one of the most divisive issues in the Body of Christ. In our churches, we certainly believe in the gifts of the Spirit and want to operate in them, but we can learn some lessons from Scripture as to how to handle them in a Christlike way in order to avoid such problems. The Corinthians had many problems with the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, and Paul has advice for them from which we can benefit. In 1 Corinthians 14, he addresses the controversy that has arisen because of an undue emphasis placed on tongues by some members in the congregation, and their habit of speaking in tongues in the public worship services without interpretation being given, thus drawing prominence to their own charismatic gifting while affording no benefit to those who listened. It seems that there were abuses of the gift of prophecy as well, with some members monopolizing the meetings and refusing to curtail their prophesying so that others also could participate. It appears that, in general, some members of the body were despising others, perhaps because they were not as prominent in the exercise of the gifts, while the latter group felt unworthy and left out. Paul makes the point that speaking in tongues should not be unduly exalted at the exclusive sign that a person is moving in the Holy Spirit, for there are other gifts which are more beneficial, and the way of love (chapter 13) far surmounts them all.

In 1 Cor. 12: 1-2, he addresses the subject of spiritual gifts, warning the Corinthians that he does not want them to remain ignorant, as in the days when they worshipped dumb idols. Then in verse 3, he lays the foundation for what he is going to say about the gifts of the Spirit and their correct use: *"Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed', and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit."* The two halves of this statement mean the same thing, expressed negatively and positively. If the Holy Spirit is genuinely present, Jesus will not be cursed, but will instead be exalted. In contrast to the days of their idol-worshipping, when they were dominated by evil spirits, now the Corinthians, for all their faults, enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit. Hence, they can afford to step out boldly in the exercise of the gifts. In this way, Paul sets a positive tone for the discussion that follows. This reminds us that when he goes on later in the chapter to address issues of abuse, his desire is not to shut down the use of the gifts, but to have them operate properly.

His next comments are divided into five parts. First, in verses 4-11, he identifies the nine manifestation gifts of the Holy Spirit, that is, those occurring by sheer supernatural intervention and unrelated to our character or office gifting. Then, in verses 12-13, he declares the fundamental unity of the entire body based on the presence of the Spirit in each individual member. In verses 14-20, he addresses those who feel inferior, encouraging them that they are an essential part of the body. In verses 21-26, he reminds those who feel superior that they need the other members of the body for the body as a whole to function properly. Finally, in verse 27-31, he urges all members of the body to find and be at peace with whatever gifts (manifestation, motivational or office) they have been given. Following through the teaching of the chapter as a whole ensures that the exercise of the manifestation gifts will be conducted in a way honouring to Christ, and will avoid the pitfalls the Corinthians fell into. Many times the example of the Corinthian church has been pointed to as a reason why people should avoid the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit completely. But remember, that is not at all what Paul says here. What he is saying can be summed up in this phrase: *the cure for abuse is not disuse, but correct use.* Paul

concludes his discussion of the gifts with the phrase, “*Let everything be done decently and in order*” (1 Cor. 14:40). We tend to read this by placing the emphasis on the phrase “*decently and in order*”, but John Wimber, who knew a lot about the proper use of the gifts, suggested we should place the emphasis on the word “*done*” instead. Think about it!

The manifestation gifts of the Holy Spirit

What is the distinguishing feature of these gifts? Primarily, they are *manifestations* of the Spirit. That is, they are visible, supernatural and extraordinary occurrences. They occur in various settings:

- \$ in the context of the worship gatherings of the church (1 Cor. 12:8-11 or the prophecy of Agabus concerning the famine, Acts 11:27-30)
- \$ in a personal context (such as the prophetic word given to Paul in Acts 21:20-11)
- \$ in evangelistic settings, where the Gospel is declared to the world and accompanied by signs and wonders: the interpreted tongues of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13); the frequent healings performed in private homes or public places by the apostles and others (Acts 3:1-10, 5:12, 15-16, 6:8, 9:32-43, 27:8), and the prophetic revelations of Paul to his fellow-sailors (Acts 27:10, 23-26).
- \$ or even in the context of church discipline (Peter’s word of knowledge concerning Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:1-11).

Note that the majority of references to exercise of the gifts occur in evangelistic settings. Why is it that we think of them only in the context of church worship services? This is probably because we focus on 1 Corinthians 12-14, where the gifts and their use are most clearly described. But Paul did not write 1 Corinthians to suggest that worship services were the only or even the most important place where the gifts were to be exercised. He wrote the chapter for the same reason he wrote many of other things in this and other letters: to address a specific problem that had arisen in the church. The Corinthians did not know how to use the gifts of the Spirit properly in the worship service, and they needed to be corrected. This in no way implies that this is the only place where the gifts are to be used. That we can determine only from all the references in this and other parts of Scripture. The same could be said for the Lord’s Supper. Reading only 1 Corinthians 11 would suggest that the Lord’s Supper can only be taken in the context of the whole body. Yet reading Acts 2:42-46 suggests it may have been taken in smaller groups meeting in peoples’ homes. What we are suggesting is that the evidence as a whole points to the fact that the gifts are perhaps even more designed for use out in the world, as tools by which we can show people Christ’s love and win them to Him. Combining gifts in evangelism is powerful: consider the case of a young man I knew who had a word of knowledge that he would meet a man on crutches, which almost immediately occurred; this gave birth to faith to pray for the man; and faith released the gift of healing, so that the man was instantly able to walk without the crutches. Note that, in whatever context the gifts are used, they are designed to be of benefit to the recipients: “*To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good*” (1 Cor. 12:7). The gifts are not meant to make those who exercise them either feel good or appear good. They are to be given away at no cost and no benefit to the giver, whether in the setting of the church or the world. The benefit to the giver is to see the recipient blessed, and if the love of Christ is in us, that should be more than enough.

Various groupings of the gifts have been suggested, but none is really convincing. It is best to deal with each individually. It is possible that the first two – wisdom and knowledge – are put at the head of the list because these are concepts which have been badly misunderstood by the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:18-25, 2:1-16, 3:18-23, 8:1-13). Here he is emphasizing how precious true wisdom and knowledge from God are. All nine gifts listed are supernatural manifestations, given at the sovereign distribution of the Holy Spirit. Here are some brief comments on each:

(1) *The word of wisdom.* In 1 Cor. 2:6, Paul has spoken of the spiritual man possessing a message of wisdom (2:6). This wisdom (as in the chapter 12 gift) is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit, who alone knows the thoughts of God (2:11). The Holy Spirit gives us wisdom so that we may understand what God has “given” us (Greek *charisthenta*, from the same root word as we get *charisma* in chapter 12). We then speak these words of wisdom which the Spirit has given or taught us (2:13). The message of wisdom focusses us on understanding all of life through the reality of the cross and our call to live for Christ in all things. The difference between the word of wisdom in chapter 2 and that in chapter 12 is that, in the first, the man of God is pictured as preaching and teaching this Spirit-revealed wisdom, whereas in the second, a member of the congregation is pictured as giving some kind of spontaneous inspired utterance which brings wisdom. Both are from the Holy Spirit. The first comes through study and preparation, and the second through supernatural revelation. If this (chapter 12) word of wisdom is from God, it must be in line with the (chapter 2) wisdom that comes from the message of the cross. A word of wisdom is given so that someone has a better understanding of how to live for Christ. The fact that it is supernaturally-revealed means it is something we did not think of (or perhaps could never have thought of) in our natural minds. Have you ever been in a difficult situation and suddenly knew the way out of it? Have you ever been thinking of a predicament someone else is in and suddenly realized what they should do? You have probably received a word of wisdom. I was once involved with trying to bring several groups of leaders together for a common purpose. Thinking of a strategy of how to accomplish this left me in more and more confusion. Suddenly it came to me that I should let another leader take a certain initiative and how this would lead to various things unfolding which would resolve the problem. The next day that leader phoned and said he was going to do the very thing I had thought of. I was ready for his call and encouraged him to go ahead, whereas before receiving the word of wisdom I would not have known how to respond. You can receive a word of wisdom in church or anywhere else, while deep in prayer or while looking at the scenery out the car window. And remember, receiving a word of wisdom depends not on the level of your education, but on your sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

(2) *The word of knowledge.* How do we determine what differentiates this from the word of wisdom? Wisdom and knowledge are closely related words. Paul had to warn the Corinthians about false wisdom (chapters 1 and 2), and in chapter 8 he rebukes them over their false knowledge which makes them arrogant and leads to the destruction of other believers. A clue comes in 14:6, where Paul places knowledge between revelation and prophecy. The word of wisdom resolves situations by giving practical solutions revealed by the Spirit, whereas the word of knowledge comes more as a prophetic revelation. It is a kind of revelation, yet not the same as prophecy, which involves God speaking a message to someone through the prophet. We understand it as an impartation of information revealed supernaturally through the Spirit. This information then becomes a tool in our hands for a particular divine purpose. For instance, a

man I knew (John Hutchison) had a word of knowledge that a lady was present in the service intending to commit suicide. The word of knowledge even showed John she had the pills for the overdose in her purse. Because the lady did not identify herself, God gave John a further word of knowledge which identified who the lady was. Though this was embarrassing for her, her life was saved as a result. Pastor Rowland Ike of Nigeria had a word of knowledge that a secret police representative was in the church service. When the man refused to identify himself as requested, Pastor Ike had a further word of knowledge that God would identify him. The policeman was thrown out of his seat and against the nearest wall, and the church was not bothered with the secret police after that. Jesus had a word of knowledge at the well in Samaria, where the Father showed Him the woman He was speaking to had had five husbands. This opened the door to her salvation, and that of her fellow villagers. The word of knowledge can be given in conjunction with gifts of healing. The word of knowledge reveals a sickness someone has and then a gift of healing is given to make the person whole. On one occasion I received a word of knowledge that God was healing someone in the middle of a time of worship. As I spoke this out, a young woman screamed, then rushed out of the meeting. She had an incurable kidney disease and, as I was speaking, she felt heat in her kidney area to the point where she became fearful. When she went to the hospital, her kidneys were functioning normally and she was completely healed. The word of knowledge can be given to help you in knowing how to act in a situation and or how to minister to a person. On a number of occasions I have received a word of knowledge that I was going to meet someone I had not seen in a long time. When soon after I met the people, I knew God had a purpose in the meeting and I should act accordingly. The word of knowledge is supernaturally-revealed information which you could not possibly have known otherwise which you need to know for a kingdom purpose to be accomplished.

(3) Faith. In 1 Cor.13:2, Paul speaks of the faith that can move mountains. This gift of faith, imparted supernaturally to a believer, is to be clearly distinguished from the confession of faith by which we are saved, and the day-to-day faithful trust in God by which we live. Sometimes we are confronted with a mountain which our faith will not move. Suddenly God so increases our measure of faith that it becomes possible for us to believe Him to move that mountain. The gift of faith is a supernatural assurance given to someone that God is about to do something which previously we would not have believed was possible. Usually it gives the person or those with them the courage to step out and do what God is calling them to do, but about which they would have been hesitant or afraid otherwise. Peter received a gift of faith when he stepped out of the boat on Galilee – then lost it when he saw the waves. A long time later, he received another gift of faith when he saw the beggar at the gate of the temple (Acts 3:1-10). How many hundreds of times had Peter passed that beggar before and done nothing for him? Yet on that day Peter had such faith that he took the man by the hand and ordered him to walk. When Peter told the crowd: “*It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through Him that has given this complete healing*” (3:16), the faith he was referring to was his own, not the beggar’s. Smith Wigglesworth was a man who frequently moved in the gift of faith. On one occasion he picked up the corpse of a dead woman and threw it against the wall, commanding her spirit to return – which it did. Although such an occurrence may seem far beyond our experience, each of us can receive gifts of faith when we need them. Have you ever been in a situation where, contrary to appearances or expectations, you just knew that God was going to answer prayer? You probably received a gift of faith. When I first met my wife, she and some other young women had rented a house to live in. The real estate agent then went back on his word and rented the house to a

couple from out of the country who had promised him cash the next morning. First, I received a word of knowledge that their money had to be transferred in and that God would stop the money from reaching their bank account overnight. Then I received a gift of faith and found myself saying, "You will go to the real estate office tomorrow morning and he will tell you they could not get their money into the country, and he will offer you the house." It happened just as I said, and eventually we got married and lived happily ever after! I have to admit that once the gift of faith had come and gone, I lived the next few hours in some trepidation as to the outcome! But it had done its job.

(4) Gifts of healings. Divine healing, in one sense, needs no explanation. It was a normal feature of New Testament church life, and should be of ours. The use of the plural here (and again in verses 28 and 30) emphasizes that God wants to minister healing through many members of the body, not just one or two. It is true that one person can characteristically move in that gifting (a Kathryn Kuhlman, for instance) but God's higher intention (as Miss Kuhlman stressed) was a multiplication of the gift throughout the body of Christ and in every local church. Some have suggested that the gift is actually that given to the one healed, but with all the other gifts listed, the person exercising the supernatural empowerment is the one who receives the gift, and that is likely how it should be understood here. You never know when God will use you to minister a gift of healing. Unless the gift is accompanied by a word of knowledge, faith or prophecy, you may have no indication that anything is happening. People frequently testify that it was on occasions when they were expecting nothing that others got healed. One of the greatest examples is that of John Wimber, father of the Vineyard movement, who brought an emphasis on divine healing around the world. In his early days, Wimber was convicted by God that he needed to pray for the sick. For months and at every service (as related in his book *Power Healing*), he faithfully obeyed God, yet no one was healed. People began to leave the fellowship in disappointment and anger. One day a man in the church was starting a new job and found his wife very ill in bed. He phoned Wimber to come and pray. As he finished praying for the lady, John Wimber turned to the husband and gave his well-rehearsed speech as to why God does not answer our prayers for healing. Meanwhile, the wife rose up out of bed, completely healed, and invited Wimber to stay for breakfast. Wimber was in such a daze that he left the house and got to his car before realizing what had happened. From that day on, the gift of healing was manifest not only in John Wimber but in thousands of others trained through his ministry. His own experience is why Wimber told people they should be prepared to pray for a thousand before seeing the first one healed, because that is what he had to do. The gift of healing is not restricted to church services, or even to believers. Peter moved in such a gift of healing that people were healed as he passed them by on the street (Acts 5:15). Jesus healed ten lepers who came to him, yet only one turned around and became a follower (Luke 17:11-19). Remember how God put this gift in the plural. There are to be many gifts of healing, often through the unlikeliest people with no great level of faith. You are probably an ideal candidate!

(5) Workings of miracles. Obviously, miracles were common in the NT church. This phrase probably refers to all miracles other than physical healings. Jesus frequently moved in the gift of miracles. He multiplied the loaves and fishes, turned water into wine and calmed the seas by His word. Stories of the gift of miracles abound in many areas of the world where revival is occurring. In the Indonesian revival, believers were enabled to walk on water and perform other miraculous signs. On a more amusing level, two men used by God in the early days of the

charismatic movement in England, Sid Purse and Harry Greenwood, ran out of gas travelling home from a meeting in the middle of the night. Sid told Harry to pour water into his gas tank. The car revived and they made it home. The tragedy is that our western mindset has become so influenced by rationalism and liberalism that while we believe the miracles of the Bible, and while we even believe God still heals, we find it very difficult to conceive of God working miracles. Yet there is as much a need for this gift as any today.

(6) Prophecy. In the Bible, prophecy has two basic meanings: to speak out God's will to people, and to declare what (according to God) is going to happen in the future. Some call these two aspects forth-telling and fore-telling. Prophecy revealed the heart of God and spoke it into situations to give direction, encouragement and correction as required. Sometimes, but not always, prophecy predicted the course of future events. Agabus prophesied the coming of a famine (Acts 11:28). Judas and Silas prophesied many things which encouraged and strengthened the church at Antioch, though it is not recorded whether they made any predictions concerning the future (Acts 15:32). Paul tells us a few things about prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14. Prophecy is for strengthening, encouragement and comfort (14:3). Prophecy lays bare the secrets of men's hearts (14:25). Prophecy is not delivered in some religious trance but in a normal state of mind, where the person prophesying can stop and start at will, is sensitive to revelation being given to others, and will with humility step aside to give others an opportunity, making way for a variety of prophetic gifts in operation (14:29-32). These manifestation gifts of the Spirit are distributed as the Spirit desires, and so potentially, any member of the Body can move in the gift of prophecy: *"For you can all prophesy in turn"* (1 Cor. 14:31). However, only two or three should prophesy in any given meeting, and the rest of the congregation should weigh or evaluate these prophetic words: *"Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said"* (1 Cor. 14:29). There are two Greek words for "others". One would mean here "the other prophets" and the second would mean "the others in general". The second word is used, and so the weighing is to be done by the other people present, whether they operate in prophecy or not. The Old Testament prophets spoke the word of God, which was not to be questioned. Their level of authority partly derived from the fact they were largely alone as spiritual leaders in the nation. The Ephesians 4 corporate leadership structure of the New Testament church did not exist. Moreover, the Spirit was not, as in the New Testament, poured out on all believers. His anointing rested only on a few, in particular, on these prophetic men. Finally, in many cases their prophetic utterances were being incorporated by the Holy Spirit into the body of Scripture. With the stakes so high, there was a severe test applied to them: if their prophecies did not come true, they were to be put to death. By contrast, New Testament prophecy is more limited in authority and is to be carefully evaluated before it is accepted. In one sense, we evaluate the prophet rather than the prophecy – "test the spirits" (of the prophets), as John warns us (1 John 4:1). Place weight according to the one who gives the prophecy. If it is an established, respected prophet with an Ephesians 4 ministry and outstanding track record in accuracy, place much greater weight than if it is given by someone in the local church who has never prophesied before. Be very wary of one who prophesies direction for the church without having consulted the elders! This kind of prophecy should always be brought privately to the elders so it does not short-circuit their authority. Therefore, weigh prophecy – but never despise it (1 Thess. 5:20). The wheat is to be accepted and the chaff discarded, but at least in these days, the prophet is not to be stoned! Prophecies should be delivered in humility rather than the person presuming to be a pipeline from God, and it is not necessary to reinforce them by "Thus

says the Lord”, if that implies that the voice of God is coming directly through the person prophesying and must not be questioned. It is often wise instead to preface a prophetic word with “I believe/feel God is/may be saying”, to indicate a posture of humility and willingness to be corrected. The *gift* of prophecy as we have described it here is different from the *office* of prophet as referred to in Eph. 4:11. Anyone may exercise the gift of prophecy, but a prophet carries the heart of God to speak prophetically and governmentally/directionally into the entire church, both local and translocal. Note finally that prophecy is for unbelievers (1 Cor. 14:22-25). Whereas uninterpreted tongues brings only confusion and offence to unbelievers, through prophecy God reveals the secrets of their hearts and opens the door to their conversion. We should therefore expect the prophetic gift to be used in connection with evangelism, thus emphasizing again that, while Paul’s concern in 1 Corinthians 14 is primarily to correct difficulties concerning the exercise of the gifts within the church, his ultimate goal is just as much to promote their use outside of it.

(7) Distinguishing or discerning of spirits. Often people think this means discerning whether a person has an evil spirit or not. However, the words “evil” or “unclean” do not occur in the text. Furthermore, word “distinguishing” (in the form of a verb) also occurs in 14:29, where it is translated in NIV as “weigh carefully”. Two uses of the same word so close together suggests that the same thing is meant – evaluating or discerning the prophecies given. That is why it is located immediately after prophecy in the list of gifts. Prophecy is a powerful gift which can affect peoples’ lives and so must be handled carefully. Because it is spoken in the name of the Lord, prophecy places the Lord’s reputation at stake. That is why this gift of discerning is necessary. The “spirits” to be weighed are not *evil spirits* (which are not mentioned) but the *spirits of the prophets* (which are). Notice 14:32: “*The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets*”. Note how 1 John 4:1-3 gives instructions as to testing the spirits of the prophets. The gift of distinguishing between spirits, therefore, refers to a supernaturally-revealed insight into what is going on in the spirit of the person prophesying. It is not quite identical to the discerning of the prophecies themselves as in 14:29, where they are to discern “what is said”. The gift of discernment may reveal something is wrong in the spirit of the prophet, even though the person exercising the gift of discernment cannot put their finger on what in the content of the prophecy might be wrong. Sometimes, in fact, it is very difficult to judge the content of a prophecy. It may be completely off-base, but if it does not tell us to do something obviously contrary to the Bible, how are we to know whether it is genuine or not? That is why prophecies need to be weighed by the body and by eldership in particular. But the gift of discerning comes in very handy, because through it God can use the least educated and humblest member of the body to turn on a warning light which signals us to handle that prophecy very cautiously. It may be that the gift of discernment reveals that there is something very wrong with the spirit of the prophet. In this case, the spirit of the one prophesying may indeed be affected or influenced by evil spirits. The basic meaning of this gift, however, is the discerning of the spirits of those prophesying.

(8) Different kinds of tongues. When Jesus ascended into heaven, He told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit fell, and the disciples began to speak in other languages (Acts 2:1-4). Jews from all over the world were gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost, and they heard the disciples speaking in their own various languages. The significance of the tongues is

probably related to the reversal of the curse on men at Babel, when God confused their tongues so they could not communicate with one another. At Pentecost, God acted to bring all men and women together in unity through Christ, and the first thing He did was to give them new tongues of praise, tongues which drew people of all nations together in a chorus of thanksgiving and glory to God. Not all on that wonderful that day, however, were impressed or understood. The empowering of the Spirit was such that to some they appeared to be drunk (2:13). Jesus had told the disciples (Acts 1:8) that this empowering or baptism of the Spirit would cause the Gospel to go to the Jews, the Samaritans (the cousins of the Jews and also descendants of Abraham) and the Gentiles (“*to the ends of the earth*”). Just as Jesus said, a similar outpouring did in fact occur when the Gospel came to Samaria (Acts 8:4-25, where tongues is not mentioned but implied) and when the Gospel came to the Gentiles (Acts 10:24-48). Other than that, Acts does not refer to tongues except when Paul prayed for the converts of John the Baptist in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7). The next we hear about tongues is in Corinth, and here there was a problem. It seems that some people were speaking out loud in tongues frequently during the services (14:23). Unlike Pentecost, when the believers spoke languages known to those who heard them, here no one understood what they were saying. Either they were not human languages, or they were languages unknown to the Corinthians. Throughout history, however, many examples have occurred (and continue today) where people have spoken in tongues and the language has been recognized by someone who heard it, often with powerful results. Such a case was reported to me first-hand. A young man from England was speaking in tongues while visiting Africa, and a lady asked him whether he knew the local language. He said he did not, whereupon she told him he did now, because she had just heard him “telling Jesus how much he loved Him” in her own language. In such cases, God supernaturally supplies the tongue He knows is needed and thus removes the need for interpretation.

The tongues-speakers at Corinth, however, were putting on a spiritual show for their own benefit, for no one else was being built up or strengthened. Paul certainly feels that speaking in tongues is valuable – according to verse 5, he wishes that they all spoke in tongues (and even more that they all prophesied). This indicates that the *primary use of tongues is for personal edification*. It is of enormous value to us when we speak in tongues, for as we speak, our spirit is praising God and bringing His life into us. This statement of Paul’s does not entirely prove that every believer is meant to speak in tongues, but it is certainly an extremely strong endorsement of the value of tongues. And of course, it is an even stronger endorsement of the value of prophecy. I believe it is a mistake for Christians who believe in the gifts of the Spirit to become fixated on tongues, to the exclusion of the other gifts of the Spirit, and defeats the point of Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 12 that every part and every function of the Body is equally necessary and of equal value. Why do we not insist instead on the availability of all the gifts of the Spirit to every believer? The ability to *speak in tongues for personal edification* should not be confused with the *manifestation gift of tongues*. Someone can speak in tongues privately, but rarely if ever exercise the gift of tongues in public. The gift is a manifestation given by God for use in a public setting, where it must be accompanied by a gift of interpretation, so as to be of benefit to the listeners and not just the speaker. The one speaking in tongues should also be the first person looked to for bringing the interpretation (1 Cor. 14:13). As with prophecy, the person speaking in a tongue is not in an ecstatic state, but has full control over when they start and stop (14:27-28).

(9) Interpretation of tongues. This word is slightly different from the normal Greek word for translation. It can mean to translate, but more often refers to a broader paraphrasing or articulating, a “putting into words” of what someone else has said. Consequently, there might even be more than one interpretation of a given tongue. Tongues plus interpretation are not to be equated with prophecy. Prophecy is a message from God to people. Tongues, however, are an expression of people but toward God : *“For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God”*, (1 Cor.14:2). This suggests that the interpretation should be expressed (as in the example of the young man noted above) in the form of prayer or praise to God, rather than an address of God to men. It might be an expression of praise and worship, for instance, which by glorifying God brings edification to the church. Paul makes it clear in 14:28 that no one is to speak in tongues in church unless someone interprets.