

Chapter 3

SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN THE ABNORMAL LOCAL CHURCH

The preceding chapter attempted to analyze something of the place of spiritual gifts in the normal local church. For in the passages therein examined, gifts were viewed as an integral facet of the on-going church life. But in turning now to I Corinthians 12-14, we have before us a somewhat different situation. At Corinth, the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts was largely being ignored, requiring that the Apostle Paul spell out in great detail how gifts can be abused and what are the correctives for the abuse of spiritual gifts. Thus what was a misfortune for the church at Corinth affords to the reader of this Epistle a valuable insight into the whole subject of gifts and the essential life of a local Christian assembly. Findlay relates:

This Epistle discloses the interior life of an apostolic Church; hence its surpassing historical interest. We must not, indeed, apply its data without qualification to contemporary Christian societies, even those of Gentile origin. The Corinthian Church presented material of uncommon richness, but intractable to the founder's hand. Its turbulence and party heat are unparalleled in the N.T. records. But while the Church life here portrayed was exceptional in some features, and Paul's policy at Corinth may have differed from that pursued elsewhere, this Epistle is peculiarly full in its teaching on the nature and rights of the Church, and in the light it throws upon the conditions under which the first Gentile-Christian communities were moulded. Chaps. xii. and xiii. are the true centre of the Epistle. The very formlessness of this Church, its rudimentary and protoplasmic state, reveals the essence of the Christian society, its substratum and vital tissue, as these can hardly be seen in a more developed and furnished condition. The Apostle Paul is contending for the bare life of the Church of God in Corinth.¹

¹G. G. Findlay, EGNT, II:733.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN I CORINTHIANS 12-14

This is the lengthiest of the New Testament passages treating the subject of spiritual gifts. The Christians at Corinth needed some special clarification and instruction on the matter. Theirs was a church troubled by gross carnality, including moral problems, dissensions and cliques, toleration of idolatry, and various abuses of spiritual gifts.

The Context

The Epistle seems to have been written in response to a report about the church with certain questions that the congregation had for Paul. Notice 1:12; 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 15:1. Some of the quarrels in the church may well have developed over differing applications of otherwise good biblical truths, for example whether or not to eat meat which had been sacrificed to idols. Concerning spiritual gifts, none were ignorant of their existence, but there developed unbalanced opinions about which were the more important and about who possessed them. There was no ignorance of the existence of gifts, but many missed the purpose of them and were apparently using them for self-edification.

The establishment of the church at Corinth is recounted in Acts 18:1-11. As was his custom, Paul had first gone in among the Jews at the local synagogue. After some time there, he was compelled to forthrightly announce that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ. At that he was strongly opposed, that he declared his intention to go to the Gentiles and he went and started a church right next door to the synagogue.

Thus the one local church in which we know that glossolalia was practiced, was in an excellent position to demonstrate to Christ-rejecting Jews that the power of God had come to the Gentiles who believed in Jesus as the Messiah. For this reason, then, Paul forbade the church to forbid speaking in tongues (14:39).

The Text

Three main teachings were needed by the folks at Corinth in order to set them straight on spiritual gifts. First, they needed to understand the basis of the unity which they shared as Christians (chapter 12). Second, some clarification of how Christian love, the fruit of the Spirit, ought to affect the way believers act, especially regarding gifts (13). Third, then, a number of practical guidelines needed to be set down on how to use spiritual gifts in love for greatest Christian unity (14).

INTRODUCTION (12:1-3)

The Corinthian believers perhaps were not aware that they had any ignorance about spiritual gifts, but Paul confronts them with just that. On any wise there was no necessity to explain what gifts are; they were very acquainted with certain kinds of gifts which they called pneumatikon.² A spiritual gift was, in their mind, when someone "speaks

² Pneumatikon here is neuter, referring to spiritual gifts, not masculine of gifted men, for (1) the discussion soon turns to spiritual endowments (Grosheide, 259), and (2) the neuter occurrence of the term in 14:1 necessitates an antecedent of this nature (Robertson, RTR, XXXI:50, n. 2).

by the Spirit."³ They were very familiar with this kind of thing even before they became Christians.⁴ It occurred in connection with idol worship. But they must understand now that Holy Spirit-inspired speaking will always be consistent about Jesus Christ, and that, in fact, all profession of Jesus as Lord is a Holy Spirit message. So, by implication, all who confess Christ are those with a pneumatikon (cf. 12:7).

GIFTS AND CHRISTIAN UNITY (12:4-13)

There was disharmony in the local church because of misuse and misunderstanding about spiritual gifts. To correct the situation, three points are brought out, (1) the spiritual unity of the gifts, (2) the analogy of the human body, and (3) God's sovereign placement of Christians into the church with their various gifts. The members of the church needed to recognize how they were all of mutual benefit, every one helping the other.

The Unity of Spiritual Gifts (4-11)

All gifts have something in common and which gives them unity: all are by the Holy Spirit. This unity which exists among the spiritual gifts and therefore among those who possess them is evident from three

³See Robertson in ETR, XXXI:50-55 regarding pneumatikon as a current Corinthian expression for Spirit-inspired speech, especially glossolalia as contrasted to prophecy. The nominal use of the word with the generic article indicates that it had become a technical term in Corinthian parlance.

⁴For an example of glossolalia in contemporary Greek idolatry, see Durant, The Life of Greece, 198, Hay, What Is Wrong, 24-25, 31-32, as well as histories of the Greek and Roman mystery religions.

points of view, that of their interrelations, that of their common purpose, and that of their manner of distribution. Through all of this, it is always the one and the same Spirit, Who neglects no one in the matter of spiritual gifts.

In their interrelations (4-6). Having begun the discussion with the term which was important to the Corinthians (pneumatikon), Paul now changes to the more usual word, charisma. Variety is the emphasis at this point. One can look at spiritual gifts from three angles, as that which we received by God's grace (charisma), as that which we do with our gift (ministry, diakonia), or as that which God causes to happen through our gift (effect, energema). But no matter how one looks at them, there is great variety, but still great unity. Gifts, ministries and effects are as interrelated as are the Persons of the Trinity,⁵ God the Spirit, the Lord (Jesus Christ) and God (the Father) who works all of these things in all believers.⁶ A gift is used in ministry to others, through which God produces His intended effect.

In their common purpose (?). If there is any question about which gifts are authentic displays of the Holy Spirit's presence and power or about which Christians have spiritual gifts, here is the answer: every gift shows the Spirit and every Christian has a spiritual gift. The Corinthians' concern about gifts and the Spirit was evident from their use of the term pneumatikon, which meant "spiritual," that is

⁵Meyer, 279; Lenski, en loc., 496.

⁶Ta panta (neuter) = these specific things; panti (masculine) = all (kinds of) people.

to say, spiritual gift. So Paul now uses the phrase "manifestation of the Spirit"⁷ in order to carry on the idea of the Spirit's part in gifts. The Holy Spirit discloses Himself⁸ through everybody's spiritual gift. And everybody's spiritual gift is beneficial; all gifts contribute some good.⁹

In their distribution (8-11). Although the Spirit is never said to be the giver of the spiritual gifts, He certainly is closely linked with the giving of them.¹⁰ He is involved in three classes of gifts in this listing.¹¹ "Of the three classes . . . , the first is connected with the intellect, the second with faith, and the third with the Tongues."¹² But all are manifestations of the Spirit. And He continues

⁷"Manifestations of the Spirit" seems to be Paul's interpretation of the term pneumatikon as a device to underscore the Spirit's part in all of the charismata.

⁸"The syntax of the gen. . . . cannot be determined w. certainty. Whether the gen. is subj. or obj. the expr. means the same thing as charisma" (A & G, 861). In II Corinthians 4:2 the genitive appears to be objective. In I Corinthians 12:7, both meanings may be in view.

⁹Pros to sumpheron. Accusative of purpose. Sumpheron = substantival, neuter, singular participle. "For (someone's) advantage" (A & G, 788).

¹⁰The Spirit's part is dia, kata, and en, but never apo, hupo or ek. Winer remarks, "The prepositions dia, kata, en in parallel members, refer the Spirit's gifts to the pneuma from whom they are all derived: dia indicates the Spirit as the medium, kata as the disposer . . . , en as the continens" (522).

¹¹The three-fold division is consequential to the alternation of allos and heteros. Although there is little difference in meaning between the two words (Moulton III:197), they do serve to underscore the width of distribution in the gifts.

¹²Robertson and Plummer, 265.

to keep each man's gift operative,¹³ according to His own sovereign will. It is not the man or his "spirituality" which determines when or which gift he should have. No Christian should be dissatisfied with his gift or begin to arbitrarily classify or compare or rank the gifts of others. All gifts are pneumatikon! All serve to underscore the great variety of ways in which the Spirit is manifested. One writer¹⁴ has suggested that the gifts listed here be grouped in this manner:

Two involving the intellect
 Expression of wisdom
 Expression of knowledge
 Five involving faith
 Faith itself
 Healing } Deeds¹⁵
 Miracles }
 Prophecy } Speech
 Discerning of spirits }
 Two involving the tongue
 Tongues
 Interpretation of tongues

The word of wisdom and the word of knowledge, are more than merely possessing wisdom or knowledge, but are an expression, that is to say, a speaking which contains wisdom or knowledge.¹⁶ Faith, in the sense of spiritual gifts, is a special capacity to believe God for things beyond that faith which is the possession of every believer, for it is seen here as not given to all. The miracles and healings are viewed as

¹³ Notice the present tenses, "works" and "distributing."

¹⁴ Lenski, op cit., 499. See note 11. (The sphere of) the Holy Spirit.

¹⁵ Lenski comments, "The plural of the governing noun as well as the plural of its genitive are significant and indicate that all healings and miracles are in each separate case gifts", op cit., 502.

¹⁶ A & G, 478 on logos.

occasional manifestations which should occur only from time to time.¹⁷ Prophecy is the plain speaking by the Spirit's enablement by which men are edified, exhorted and encouraged (14:3). Discerning spirits is for determining the worthiness of men's teachings and of their hearts. The tongues are classifiable languages,¹⁸ which one can speak though he may not himself understand them. The interpretation of them is to relate their meaning so that other Christians can benefit from them. This whole list of gifts must be understood to be charismata, for several of them are identified as just that at the end of chapter twelve.

The Analogy of the Body (12-27)

This unity of the spiritual gifts can be compared to that of the human body, for it too is one body with many parts.¹⁹ Indeed, Christ and His church are like a body, many in unity. All believers have been baptized in the Holy Spirit²⁰ and so have a common identity in the body of Christ. "The doctrine taught is clear, viz., that by receiving the Spirit we are all made members of the body of Christ, and that it is

¹⁷Cf. note 15.

¹⁸A glossa, tongue, is an intelligible language. Genē are distinct classes. See standard lexicons.

¹⁹The gar of verse 12 makes the transition into an extended explanation by means of simile.

²⁰This is the only mention of Spirit baptism outside of the Gospels and of Acts. Baptizein eis is understood to mean "identification with" a stated object. It is baptism in (the sphere of) the Holy Spirit. On baptism for the purposes of identification see Oepke (Kittel I:538), and for participation see *ibid.*, p. 541. Our one common Spirit gives us our identity as one body. The aorist tense "were baptized" suggests a past event for all, namely, when they believed (cp. Acts 2:38). The argument about whether to translate the preposition en as in, by or with is moot, for the Greek idiom is not that precise. For an exhaustive treatise on the nature of the Spirit baptism and salvation, see Dunn, Baptism In the Holy Spirit.

in virtue of the indwelling Spirit that the church is one."²¹ And all believers have received fully the Holy Spirit into their lives.²²

Having swung from the Spirit's part in gifts to that of the Son, the divine placement of each one into the body (18, 24) suggests a number of principles. Not to possess some particular gift does not diminish a Christian's significance in the body (15-16). If all had the same gift, that would be insufficient (17, 19). No man's gift should be considered as unnecessary (21). Value should be placed upon every gift possessed by members of the church (22-24a). Our mutual care for one another ought to prevent any divisions among us (24b-25). The whole church benefits or suffers when any one gift is used or abused (26).

The Application to the Church (28-31a)

In keeping with this divine principle of unity with diversity²³ the designer of the body has Himself²⁴ arranged the members of the church with their various gifts. This fact ought to put a stop to all competition between Christians regarding their gifts. But we must see that there is a God-given rank²⁵ in the quality of the gifts. Some

²¹Hodge, 256.

²²The causal sense of potizō "to make to drink" would preclude any requisite waiting period, attainment of maturity or special deed on the part of the believer before he receives the Spirit.

²³The parallel conjunction kai.

²⁴The middle voice of etheto "placed" underscores the divine discretion in gift giving, "for his own purposes" (R & P, 278).

²⁵Equality of rank would have been indicated by men . . . de . . . de as in 12:7-10. Cf. Robertson and Plummer, 278.

gifts simply have a greater value for edification²⁶ than do others. It is these greater for which Christians ought to be the more zealous,²⁷ not to obtain (since each has his gift) but to see in active use.

The representative list of charismatic²⁸ gifts in verse 28 illustrates God's sovereignty in the distribution and ranking of gifts, just as the members of the body (cp. verses 18, 24, 27-28). These are (1) apostles, (2) prophets, (3) teachers, (4) miracles, (5) healings, (6) helps, (7) administrations, and (8) tongues. And not one of these is universal, as is obvious from the questions posed in verses 29-30 which all demand answers of "no"; and, further, no one gift should be held to be prominent above or more desirable than all the rest.^{30,31} As to the "greater gifts" (there are more than one), any gift can perhaps qualify as "greater" if its nature is well suited to ministries which edify (note 14:5).

²⁶Meizona "greater" is the correct reading here. Cp. 14:5b.

²⁷Zēloō is "to be impelled by zeal" (L. & S., 344), a frequent sense of the word in the N.T. It is not to seek to gain for oneself, for that would be inconsistent with the context. In fact, zēloute in 12:31 may very well be an indicative, a reprimand for seeking after the more spectacular gifts (so Bittlinger).

²⁸Verse 31 identifies the gifts in verse 28 as charismata, some of which are represented in 12:7-10. Thus that list of "manifestations" should also be understood as charismata.

²⁹The numerations "first, second, etc." are singular adverbial accusatives modifying the verb "placed," rather than the nouns. Epeita . . . esita signify "fourth and fifth" (A. & O., 284). The ranking is thereby assumed through the whole list.

³⁰The negative questions with mē expect negative replies in verses 29-30. See Dana and Mantey, 265.

³¹The plural "gifts" precludes any one gift as the greatest of all (contrast charismatic writers, e.g., du Plessis, 86-91). The low rank of glossolalia here may be its low value for edification.

A SUPERIOR APPROACH (CHAPTER 13)

Christians ought not to be either ignorant nor negligent of the fact of their spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:1; 1 Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 2:6; 1 Pet. 4:10). An understanding of gifts is essential to the unity of the body of Christ. But there is clearly a superior approach to unity and mutual service, namely, Christian charity, or love.^{32,33} In fact, without love, gifts are ineffective (13:1-3), love has all of the necessary virtues (4-7), and love is a better way of thinking and of acting.³⁴ Thus the gifts of the Spirit (as we call them) find their relevance only as an expression of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:20) which results from the filling of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

The Dangers of Lovelessness (1-3)

Spiritual gifts can be used selfishly; love cannot. Love is the fruit of the Spirit which is necessary for the proper use of the gifts. This is true of all kinds of gifts, including tongues,³⁵ prophecy, knowledge, faith and miracles, and even of giving. To insure the proper use of gifts, we must seek to demonstrate love in their exercise (cf. 14:1).

³²Chapter 13 is parallel to chapter 12 by virtue of the conjunction kai in 12:31b.

³³Love is an end in itself, not merely a means or a way unto gifts. See Morris, 180.

³⁴Abbott-Smith, 310

³⁵The tongues of men and of angels are real, comprehensible languages. All instances of angelic speech in Scripture were understood by men. There is no evidence that the biblical gift of tongues was anything less than real languages. See note 15; the discussion in Gromacki, 55-56; Doolishaw, Bib. Sac. 1963, 147-8.

The Character of Love (4-7)

Paul's great hymn of Christian charity was penned in the context, of all things, of spiritual gifts and their use in the church. Love has all of the essential qualities for harmony in the church, which the gifts themselves neither possess nor insure. Among these many attributes is the fact that love is not jealous, suggesting that the very instructions in 12:31; 14:1b, 39 are in themselves inferior to the search for love.³⁶

The Superiority of Love (8-13)

In addition to the ineffectiveness of gifts without love, and to the virtuous character of love, a third reason is advanced for love's superiority. Love lasts longer. "It is not designed and adapted, as are the gifts under consideration, merely to the present state of existence, but to our future and immortal state of being."³⁷ Three linguistic gifts are selected to show their contrast to love: prophecies, knowledge and tongues.³⁸ These are the very first three gifts which had been mentioned in verses 1-2, perhaps because they are the easiest to abuse. Any "gift of gab" might pass for prophecy; knowledge tends to "puff up"; and any child can devise neo-logisms or "baby-talk."

³⁶The phrase "is not jealous" is more literally "does not desire." It is precisely the same verb as that used in these three passages. Paul's commands to desire earnestly are rhetorical.

³⁷Hodge, 271.

³⁸The plural "prophecies" as well as the singular "knowledge" are apparent references to the contents which are communicated by the gifts of prophecy and of the word of knowledge. When the gifts will be gone away, so will their partial messages. Compare verses 8 and 9. Cf. Toussaint, Bib. Sac., 1963, 314.

Each of these three gifts is proven to be temporal, limited to time, whereas love lasts forever. Let us see how this is proven. First, each gift is said to have a termination, an ending, "if there are prophecies, they will be done away; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be done away (verse 8). Notice carefully the wording. Prophecies and knowledge will "be done away." That is, something will make them to be done away. But tongues will simply "cease"; they will disappear all by themselves.³⁹ The time for each gift to terminate will be clear below.

Secondly, two of these gifts, those concerning prophecies and knowledge, are said to be partial by nature, incomplete, imperfect⁴⁰ (verse 9). Then Paul lays down a very general principle, "Whenever⁴¹ the perfect comes, the partial will be done away"⁴² (verse 10). By using the same word "will be done away" in verse 10 as in 8, Paul lets us know that only prophecy and knowledge are specifically in view at this point. By way of application of the principle, one can say that "when perfect prophecy or perfect knowledge comes, the partial prophecy

scribes before the return of Jesus Christ (at which the partial

³⁹The verb predicated of both knowledge and prophecies, katar-gēthēsontai, "will be done away, abolished," is both passive in voice, and is transitive; the subjects receive the action of the verb from without themselves. The word for tongues is pausontai, which is middle in form; although it may be taken as equivalent to a passive, the fact remains that the verb is intransitive. Rather than have some outside circumstance to bring tongues to an end, they were rather to simply of themselves "come to an end" (A. & C., 643).

⁴⁰A. & C., 507.

⁴¹Hotan + subjunctive.

⁴²To ek merous and to telion, both being of the neuter gender, should both be understood as abstracts in 13:10. The gain specific identities only by way of application, as in verses 11-12.

or knowledge will be done away. The principle is illustrated from Paul's own life in replacing immature behavior with mature (cp. 14:20).

Thirdly, in verse 12, the principle is applied to one of the three gifts, to knowledge. Our present knowledge of Christ is quite inferior to what it will be when we see Him "face to face."⁴³ The termination for knowledge is, therefore, when we are present with Jesus Christ.⁴⁴ The termination of prophecy will doubtless be the same as for knowledge, in view of the fact that the same phrase "will be done away" is used of both.

But there is another seemingly valid application of the principle stated in verse 10. If any more perfect form of prophecy should come, then any current but inferior forms (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:29-32, q.v.) might be expected to be done away. Now the written Old and New Testament Scriptures are just such a more perfect form of prophecy (Notice I Pet. 1:20; James 1:25; etc.).

For tongues, however, no definite termination is here given.⁴⁵ But one thing does appear certain. Tongues could be expected to cease sometime before the return of Jesus Christ (at which the partial

⁴³The phrase "face to face" seems to be an allusion to certain Old Testament passages bespeaking a man's presence with God. See Deuteronomy 34:10; Numbers 12:8.

⁴⁴The word "comes" seems to suggest the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, which would indeed be the case when partial knowledge would be done away for all Christians.

⁴⁵There seems to be a tendency on the part of some evangelical writers, in their apparent haste to debunk the present-day tongues heresy, to miss this fact, and to assume the same verb for all three gifts in 13:8.

knowledge would be done away for all believers).⁴⁶ In chapter 14:22, tongues will clearly be called a sign. Therefore, the termination for tongues is the same as for all sign gifts: when the New Testament teachings about Christ had been confirmed (cf. Mark 16:20; II Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4). Three things will continue forever, however, "faith, hope and love; but the greatest of these is love" (verse 13).

THE REGULATION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (CHAPTER 14)

Having established the facts of divine sovereignty in the giving of gifts, the equality of all believers respecting the Holy Spirit, the necessity of all gifts given to the church, and the supremacy of love, the Apostle Paul turns to practical guidelines on how to use the spiritual gifts in the local church. Several principles are seen to apply, that of edification (14:1-19), that of maturity (20-33), that of submission (34-36), and that of the priority of Scripture (37-38), with a concluding statement in verses 39-40.

The Principle of Edification (1-19)

Now we have explained for us how it is that some gifts are greater than others. In view of the superior place of agape love in Christian life and service, those gifts can be called "the greater" (12:13) which lend to building up the church as a whole. This regulating principle of edification is clarified in 14:1-12 and applied specifically in verses 13-19.

⁴⁶ See note 39. In order to cease "of themselves," tongues had to disappear temporarily sometime before Christ's Second Coming. If the return of Jesus Christ is indeed imminent, then tongues must have ceased early; otherwise their continued presence would preclude the

The principle clarified (1-12). Love must be the Christian's chief aim. That comes as our first concern. Then our perspective on spiritual gifts will be right. When one is pursuing love, then it is perfectly all right for him to "be zealous about spiritual gifts (pneumatikon)" (14:1), for he will have the interest of others in mind. Paul uses the Corinthians' popular word for gifts, pneumatikon in such a way in 14:1 so as to include all spiritual gifts as he takes up the contrast between prophecy and tongues. Of all the spiritual gifts, the church as a whole⁴⁷ should be especially zealous about the ministries of prophesying.⁴⁸ Paul explains why.⁴⁹

Tongues and prophecy have three main points of contrast. Their messages are directed to different parties (2-3), their immediate concerns are different (4), and their value is not the same (5). An important point to grasp is that "one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men" (2). His message is toward God (see verses 14-17). Any benefit for other Christians is only indirect--and if interpreted (5, 13). Other people in the church⁵⁰ simply do not understand what is being said.

Second Coming, for they apparently must cease first, before knowledge "be done away." For the position that tongues ceased in the New Testament era, see, e.g., Johnson, Bib. Sac. 1963, 311, in. z.

⁴⁷The second person plural verbs in 14:1, as in 23-24, makes these actions the responsibility of the whole church, although not every member is individually to practice prophesying. That is for the so gifted.

⁴⁸The verbal form, propheteuō, is seemingly introduced to hold forth more the action of prophesying than merely the gift of prophecy.

⁴⁹The illative conjunction gar ("for") connects verses 1 and 2.

⁵⁰Chapter 14 assumes a context of the local church. Verse two does not preclude the intelligibility of tongues for all people; those outside the church may indeed understand them if they happen to be of those peoples' own dialects. See Acts 2: 10; 19; I Corinthians 14:21-22.

The Corinthian believers were unwisely using tongues in the same manner as their pagan neighbors, rather than for their real purpose (14:22).

The distinction between tongues and prophecy becomes clear in verse 3, "one who prophesies speaks to men." Tongues are not normally understood by those in the church, whereas prophecy is clearly comprehended. But mere idle talk is excluded, for the specified message content of prophecy is "edification and exhortation and consolation." Tongues are directed toward God (at Corinth!), prophecy toward men.⁵¹

A second great difference between tongues and prophecy in verse 4 is the matter of who becomes edified, built up, or, for whom is the pneumatic speaker mainly concerned. Paul sets the two in contrast. "One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church." Now the tongues speaker does benefit himself; Paul acknowledges that, but only because he is leading up to the principle of edification as it is applied in verse 12, "Seek to abound for the edification of the church," precluding the selfish use of any gift.

Thus Paul is able to make the value statement in verse 5, "Greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues." This gives us the key to understanding which are the greater gifts (12:31); they are those which edify the church. Paul shares his wish that all spoke in tongues, but all do not (12:31). Besides, tongues were not even meant for edifying the church. Tongues are valid (at least they were

⁵¹The term "mysteries" used here of something of no value to the church, was highly regarded in pagan Greek religious rites. "In the Greek sense a mystery was a secret ceremony in which sacred symbols were revealed, symbolic rites were performed, and only initiates were worshippers" (Durant, *Life of Greece*, 188). This may explain something of why tongues were so highly regarded by this Greek church so recently out of paganism. Cf. Ray, *op. cit.*, 23-30. Compare the modern "devotional" use of glossolalia (cf. du Flessis, 86-91; Williams, 32).

valid when this Epistle was written), but they have less value. The tongues speaker gains his value to the church only when his message is translated (14:5). Paul will have more to say about that later.

So then, one should be careful that, in addition to any tongues speaking, there should also be forms of communicating⁵² to the church which are clearly understood. "Revelation, knowledge, prophecy and teaching" (6) are instances of clear speech which profit the church. This practical need of clear, intelligible speech⁵³ is illustrated in verses 7-11 from the natural world of music, battle and languages. Without clarity, there is no benefit, only confusion.

The principle of edification is put in the form of a command in verse 12. "Seek to abound for the edification of the church." This should put all gifts into a perspective regulated by love. One may therefore ask himself, "Who is being benefited by my gift? I or the church?" Of course, when the church benefits, the gifts user will profit as well; but the converse is not true. Paul could give this kind of a command to the Corinthians, because they were already aware of spiritual gifts and were, indeed, "zealous of spiritual gifts,"⁵⁴ already. Notice the progression of admonitions this far, not to be ignorant of gifts (12:1), to be concerned for the greater gifts (12:31), to pursue love and to be concerned about gifts, especially to prophesy and to finally make edification of the church the principal aim (14:12).

⁵²The four locatives can be understood as the means by which one may speak or as the form which one's message may take.

⁵³A & G, 326, on εὐσημῶς.

⁵⁴Literally, "zealous of spirits." It was not merely the spiritual gifts per se which were their concern but the sphere and the empowering force in them, i.e., their own human spirits and the Spirit of God.

For others do not need merely to say the "amen" to prayers and blessings, but also to be instructed. The principle applied (13-19). All of this has some direct implications⁵⁵ for the various facets of the worship in the assembly. Apparently there are several exercises which one can do "with the Spirit" which can be expressed through the phenomenon of tongues. These include praying, singing, blessing and giving thanks. Now although these are very personal, subjective expressions of worship, even they can be of benefit to the church, if they are understandable, in that others may identify with them, such as in the adding of an "amen" to the giving of thanks (16). It is not enough to have personally given thanks to God, others must be edified thereby as well (17).

"Let's be frank and honest," says the Apostle to the tongues speaker, "There is always somebody in the group who 'does not know what you are saying' (16).⁵⁶ And he gets nothing out of it." This is why any one with a gift of tongues ought to pray that he might also be enabled to interpret as well as to speak (13). But there seems to be even a more practical approach to corporate worship than tongues, even if translated, and that is to speak intelligently "with the mind" (19).

⁵⁵Note the inferential particle dio.

⁵⁶This seems to be what is meant by the term idiotēs. The translation and lexical possibility "ungifted" or "unversed in spiritual gifts" is inadequate, for none is ungifted (Romans 12:6; I Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 4:7; I Peter 4:10), and even to be well indoctrinated regarding gifts would not enable one to understand a language which he has never learned. Amongst the many lexical possibilities, Trench's observation on the word may help in ascertaining the Apostle's meaning in this verse: "There lies in it a negation of that particular skill, knowledge, profession, or standing, over against which it is antithetically set, and not of any other except that alone" (303). The idiotēs is he who does not understand particular languages. In verse 24 the term applies to those who are unfamiliar with the content of Christian prophecy.

For others do not need merely to say the "amen" to prayers and blessings, but also to be instructed.⁵⁷

The Principle of Maturity (20-25)

In chapter thirteen, verse eleven, Paul had used himself as an example of the supersedence of maturity over childhood. Now the same principle of maturity is urged upon the Corinthian believers. This is a not-so-subtle suggestion that current attitudes and practices lacked a necessary dimension, namely, mature thinking. Grosheide comments:

The Corinthians behaved like children by placing a one-sided emphasis on glossolalia and by speaking in tongues when there was no interpreter. Children usually look at the outside and boast to each other of things external.⁵⁸

The principle clarified (20-22). "Stop being children in your thinking."⁵⁹ This is coming to the point. The problem at Corinth was not any lack of gifts (cf. 1:7), rather their attitudes were wrong, and they needed to take a mature look at the whole issue of the gifts and what is actually being accomplished at the local church. The divine employment of human languages among the people of God was nothing unheard of. The passage quoted from Isaiah 28:11-12 proves this but illustrates what tongues are really for. When Isaiah had made the prophecy, the invasion of the Assyrians was impending. The presence of foreign languages with the people of Israel was to be a continuing sign of God's

⁵⁷ Katechec is "to teach by word of mouth, instruct, inform" (Abbott-Smith, 241). Compare English catechism.

⁵⁸ Grosheide, 329.

⁵⁹ The present tense of prohibition.

judgment, even until the advent of Messiah,⁶⁰ according to Isaiah 28. From this the Apostle can deduce⁶¹ the real purpose⁶² of tongues; they are for a sign. But that sign value is only to a particular class, the faithless, and in this context, to "this people," namely, faithless Israel. There is no sign value in tongues⁶³ for those who happen to believe, whether Jewish or Gentile.⁶⁴ Tongues made of the church at Corinth an instrument of divine judgment for the local Christ-rejecting synagogue located next door (see Acts 18).⁶⁵ Although prophecy is not called a "sign" as such in verse 22, it does remain the particular possession and function of those who believe, and the special concern of the more mature in their understanding of the nature and purpose of the church. This has specific application in the public meetings.

⁶⁰ See Hodges, Bib. Sac., 1963:229, Robertson and Plummer, 316.

⁶¹ Hoste, "for this reason, therefore, so" (A & G, 908).

⁶² Eis + the accusative of purpose. This includes the whole of the phenomenon of glossolalia, as indicated by the use of the generic article in verse 22.

⁶³ See Sweet, NTS XIII:240-57. Whether tongues were, in effect, a sign to the Jewish believers at the several effusions of the Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostle is otherwise moot question.

⁶⁴ The adjective (apistos) under these circumstances would--in contrast to the participial form--express pure description as over against the action of believing involved in the foregoing participle (Hodges, op. cit., 229-230). The generic articles with both indicates the fact that we are dealing with two general classes, the faithless and the believing.

⁶⁵ Bellshaw comments, "When Paul came to Corinth he proclaimed to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 18:5). They considered this to be a blasphemous message, but God authenticated it to them by giving to the believers in Corinth the gift of tongues" (150).

The principle applied (23-25). Two kinds⁶⁶ of people are likely to visit a Christian assembly, unbelievers and those who may believe but are unacquainted⁶⁷ with the Corinthians' common services. In either case, the reaction will be similar. They will react to glossolalia as madness (23). What a contrast to this is the result of prophetic ministries, as men come under conviction and worship God, recognizing His presence among the Christians.⁶⁸

The Principles in Practice (26-33a)

In a Christian meeting, there is likely to be a variety of ministries through which⁶⁹ one may employ his gift, but the principle of edification applies to them all (26). If there is to be any tongues speaking,⁷⁰ certain regulations must be observed: (1) No more than two or three may speak; (2) They must speak in turn, not at the same time; (3) There is to be only one interpretation of a tongue; (4) Tongues can be spoken only if an interpreter is present; (5) If there is none, the tongue must remain silent, one must speak to God with his mind (28).

⁶⁶The nouns are anarthrous and do not comprehend any sharply defined group or class of persons, e.g. the uninitiated.

⁶⁷Lias (157) remarks that "the distinction here is between active unbelief in Christianity and the absence of any information on the subject."

⁶⁸Compare Zechariah 8:23 which predicts that men of different languages will some day declare that God is among the Jews.

⁶⁹Both spiritual gifts and other "natural" abilities are mentioned here. Apparently, natural gifts are valid avenues of ministry for spiritual gifts.

⁷⁰A conditional sentence: tongues are not necessary to every Christian meeting. Contrast note 71. "Let him be silent . . . let him speak" contrasts mentally unfruitful and mentally unfruitful speaking.

and to overstatement. Prophecy is subject to the priority of Scripture (14:37).

Although tongues are not required to be exercised in every Christian meeting of the church, it is expected that there will be prophetic ministries.⁷¹ And these too must be regulated by the same principles. (1) At least⁷² two or three prophets should speak. (2) Prophetic messages are to be discerned⁷³ by others.⁷⁴ (3) Each prophet must respect the others' right to speak.⁷⁵ (4) All the prophets should be permitted to speak. (5) Prophecies must be made one by one--prophets are not to speak simultaneously. Now tongues are not alone in their being subject to misuse, and there is a warning for the prophets in verses 32-33. God never prompts men to speak in a manner contrary to His own nature as a God of peace and harmony. So it is certain that any confusion resulting from competition or disorderliness among the prophets is not by divine impetus. True prophets are in control of their spirit; their spirits do not impulsively move them to burst out while others are speaking, or to speak out of turn.

The Principle of Subjection (33b-36)

The Corinthians are expected to be under the same guidelines for

⁷¹ Present tense imperative; prophecy ought always to be a part in the assembling of the whole church.

⁷² The upper limit placed on tongues appears to be the minimum number for prophecy.

⁷³ Diakrino. Compare diakrasis in 12:10.

⁷⁴ hoi alloi = the other prophets. Not every person in the church is the preacher's judge.

⁷⁵ Each prophet's impetus to speak can be called "revelation." At Corinth and elsewhere, as seen in the book of Acts, some prophets were given to communicating impressions made in their spirits. However, as will be seen in chapter five, these prophets were subject to error and to overstatement. Prophets are subject to the priority of Scripture (14:37).

proper behavior as the rest of the churches of the saints (33b), for they have no edge on the Word of God (36).⁷⁶ The subjection by women of themselves⁷⁷ and their consequent submissive role was a principle in the Old Testament and is equally valid in the New Testament church.⁷⁸ Obviously, spiritual gifts are subject to misuse at any point where divinely revealed role distinctions are not maintained. But, of course, Christian women are never relegated to ignorance and inferiority. Those who wish to learn ought to encourage their husbands to become their spiritual leaders. It is so important that the divine economy of role relationships be maintained, that it is best that women not even ask questions when the whole church is in session.⁷⁹

The Principle of the Priority of Scripture (37-38)

There are always likely⁸⁰ to be those in a gifts conscious church who suppose themselves to be gifted for prophetic ministries or for other charismatic ministries.⁸¹ All are required to recognize Paul's writings as carrying divine authority. No spiritual gift authorizes a person to

⁷⁶ Verse 36 requires that 33b be included in the paragraph following.

⁷⁷ Assuming the middle voice.

⁷⁸ There is perhaps an hint here that much of the confusion in Corinth was the result of divine role infractions on the part of some of the women in the membership.

⁷⁹ Attempts to limit this regulation to "chatter and gossip" do not seem to have contextual support. Rather it is a principle of Scripture that is being enjoined.

⁸⁰ First class condition.

⁸¹ Pneumatikos is the masculine form of the current Corinthian term for the more extraordinary gifts, particularly the tongues speakers. See note 3.

ignore or to by-pass the regulations of Scripture. Paul had begun his discussion of spiritual gifts with the expressed wish that the Corinthians not be ignorant of these matters; now he warns that if any continues in ignorance, he receives no more recognition than what he has given to Paul's guidelines--he is ignored, his ministry is invalidated.

Conclusion (39-40)

The principles of edification, maturity, subjection and the priority of Scripture, if fully appreciated and closely followed, lead naturally⁸² to the two-fold conclusion. (1) Top priority ought to be placed on prophetic ministry. But this does not categorically preclude the practice of glossolalia, rather it should be kept within the guidelines enunciated above (however long tongues speaking was to continue into the church age). (2) Let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.

SUMMARY

Ignorance of the nature of spiritual gifts can lead to the worst abuse and inordinate emphases. It must be understood that all believers are motivated by the same Spirit in their Christian profession and all possess and manifest spiritual gifts. The function of these gifts is integral to the unity of the local church. God has already sovereignly distributed and placed the gifts into the church. But gifts must be used only through the avenue of Christian love, else they be useless. The proper use and evaluation of gifts is determined by regulating principles.

⁸² Hoste.

Gifts must edify the church; they must be evaluated maturely; divine role distinctions must be maintained; and Scripture receives priority in all. Prophecy is the greatest of spiritual gifts.

TOWARD A DEFINITION OF GIFT

The spiritual gifts are easier to describe than to define. Perhaps that is because they are more a kind of operation or process than they are a thing. Yet it is often useful to us to have some operating definitions, something that states what is involved in each gift in a simple phrase. But before we attempt to deal with each gift individually, let us try to first understand just what is a "spiritual gift." There are several words which are used in the New Testament in this connection; these together lead to give us an understanding of gifts. Let us see what they are.

DEFINITION WORDS

A Bestowed Gift (dōrea)

The first of these words is the term dōrea. This word is always translated as "gift." It is the most general of the words and can refer to anything that is given. But it usually denotes a formal endowment.¹ In the New Testament passages concerning spiritual gifts, a dōrea is always something given by God's grace. Paul said concerning his own ministry in the gospel, "I was made a minister, according to the gift (dōrea) of God's grace which was given to me according to the

¹ See dōrea, in Gloucester III: 167.