



THE MIRACLE AND MAJESTY OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS PART TWO EPHESIANS 4:11-16

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I thank God for the blessing of spiritual gifts, and I hope and pray that you do as well. Here is why.

When a person is discouraged, disconsolate, and about to give up all hope for the future, those with *the gift of encouragement* can speak life to them in the power of the Holy Spirit.

When an individual is physically sick and suffering from chronic pain, a person to whom the Spirit has granted *a gift for healing* prays for them, and in keeping with God's timing and sovereign will, they experience healing.

When a loved one who does not know Jesus as Savior is encountered by a Christian with *the gift of evangelism*, he/she hears the gospel and receives the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life.

When a man or woman is convinced, wrongly, but still convinced that God has forgotten them, a person who operates in *the gift of the word of knowledge* can speak truth to them that they otherwise could not possibly know, and their heart is reassured that God is really there and really does care.

When another is struggling financially and is on the brink of having their electricity and water shut off, a person with *the gift of giving* writes them a generous check that gets them out of trouble.

Or perhaps a family is experiencing the onslaught of the demonic in their home and have reached the limit of what they think they can endure. A person with *the spiritual gift of discerning of spirits* visits their home and is made aware of why this has happened and prays powerfully to drive away any lingering demonic spirits.

On occasion a believer will face a massively important choice in life and they are at a loss for what to do. A man or woman who ministers in the power of *the gift of the word of wisdom* speaks clearly about the options they are facing and makes clear what the proper decision should be.

Perhaps there is a man or woman who is facing a complex and potentially controversial challenge at their place of employment, and someone with *the gift of administration* can speak into that situation and help bring resolution. This reminds us, by the way, that our spiritual gifts can operate to bless others outside of the local church in our neighborhoods and places of work.

Whether it be a man or woman, if they have *the gift of serving*, they quickly volunteer to undertake what may appear to be menial tasks in the life of the church that others aren't aware of or simply take for granted.

One final example will suffice. Someone, such as my wife, who has *the gift of mercy* is always available simply to sit with a brother or sister who is in deep emotional distress and restore hope and a sense of being loved. People with a mercy gift often don't even have to speak wise words of counsel. They simply sit and listen and then pray.

I could go on and identify numerous other painful and challenging issues in the lives of Christians and non-Christians alike that are resolved and set right by a believer and the use of his/her spiritual gift. That is why I thank God for spiritual gifts and believe that their presence is so essential in the life of the church.

The Five-Fold / Four-Fold Ministry Gifts in Ephesians 4:11

Here in Ephesians 4:11, several spiritual gifts are mentioned by Paul.

(1) *Apostles* – I believe he has in mind those who are successful in missionary outreach and the planting of churches. These are not the 12 whose names will appear on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem, nor are they in the same category as the Apostle Paul and Barnabas and Silas. They are often gifted with skills in leadership and display profound wisdom in the challenging issues that churches face. Those who provide leadership for denominations or other church affiliations are often gifted in an apostolic way.

(2) *Prophets* – I hardly think this calls for much definition. Any Christian can prophesy if the Holy Spirit chooses to impart revelation to them. Those who prophesy with considerable accuracy and effectiveness may justifiably be called “prophets.”

What’s important to remember about apostles and prophets today is that ***neither is granted governing authority in the local church***. That responsibility rests solely with the Elders of each congregation.

(3) *Evangelists* – Whereas all of us are to share our faith with unbelievers, people with this gifting are extraordinarily courageous and fluent in sharing the gospel and successful in seeing people turn to faith in Jesus. They also are quick to respond to questions with satisfying answers, answers that help an unbeliever overcome his/her skepticism about Christianity. See Acts 21:8 and 2 Tim. 4:5 for the only other NT occurrences of the noun.

(4) *Pastors* – This is the only place in the NT where the noun *poimēn*, “shepherd” or “pastor” is used. However, the cognate verb form is used in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1-4 (see also John 21:16).

(5) *Teachers* – See 1 Cor. 12:28,29; 14:26; Rom. 12:7 (cf. Heb. 5:12; James 3:1; Acts 13:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; 4:11,13,16; 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:2,24; 3:16; 4:2,3; Titus 1:9; 2:1,7). Note Eph. 4:20-21.

Two additional comments are in order.

First, it should be noted that the definite article (“the”) appears before each of the first three: “the” apostles, “the” prophets, and “the” evangelists, whereas pastors and teachers are linked by a single article: “the pastors and teachers.” If Paul had put the definite article with teachers, there would be no debate. That would clearly indicate that he is talking about five separate gifts of the Spirit. Some grammarians contend that the one article connecting pastors and teachers means they constitute one gift, not two, hence: *pastor-teachers*. If so, we should speak of a “Four-fold ministry,” not “Five-fold ministry”! However, without boring you with Greek grammar, it is best to recognize here two separate gifts that often overlap, such that a person can be both a pastor and a teacher.

One thing is clear. I do not believe that Paul is describing what many call the “five-fold” ministry of the church. ***These are not authoritative offices. These are spiritual gifts***. Many contend that these five “official giftings” are to be viewed as comprising some sort of unique church authority, apart from which the local church cannot fully function. I disagree. I believe they are listed here simply as random representatives of the many and various spiritual gifts bestowed by the Spirit. Of the 21 gifts of the Spirit, Paul could have chosen any of them to mention here and still accomplish the same purpose.

So, let’s assume for the sake of argument that pastors and teachers are separate gifts, although it is certainly the case that some would have both gifts. How many gifts are there in the NT?

Romans 12:6-8

In our first text, Paul writes this: “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them” (Rom. 12:6a). This introductory comment actually leads to the expectation that he will identify every gift of the Spirit. Instead, Paul selects seven gifts.

“(1) if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; (2) if service, in our serving; (3) the one who teaches, in his teaching; (4) the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; (5) the one who contributes, in his generosity; (6) the one who leads, with zeal; (7) the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness” (Rom. 12:6b-7).

One may well wonder why Paul doesn’t list other gifts, such as those he delineates in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10. Some contend that it is because the two lists contain different categories of gifting or different kinds of gifts. The immediate problem with this is that the gift of prophecy is mentioned not only here in Romans 12, but also in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, 12:28-30, and again in Ephesians 4:11. I doubt if anyone is prepared to make a case for differing kinds of prophetic ministry. It seems likely, unless a strong case can be made otherwise, that Paul is referring to a singular gift of prophecy and includes it in all four lists.

The same may be said about the gift of serving, mentioned not only by Paul in Romans 12:7 but also by Peter in 1 Peter 4:11. Likewise with the gift of teaching, which Paul lists in Romans 12:7 and again in 1 Corinthians 12:29. Although the Greek terms are different, it is unlikely that we should draw too great a distinction between “the one who leads” in Romans 12:8 and the one who has the gift of “administrating” in 1 Corinthians 12:28.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Here the apostle Paul mentions the existence not only of a "variety" of gifts (v. 4a) but also "varieties of service" and "varieties of activities" (v. 5). Are we to conclude that this "variety" only includes the nine gifts later mentioned in vv. 8-10? Or could Paul again be providing us with a *sampling of gifts*, on the assumption that there are others not explicitly mentioned in the NT? We know with certainty that, like the list in Romans 12, those in vv. 8-10 are at most representative. Other lists include gifts not mentioned in vv. 8-10. In any case, here are the nine gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.

"For to one is given through the Spirit (1) the utterance [or, "word," logos] of wisdom, and to another (2) the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another (3) faith by the same Spirit, to another (4) gifts of healing[s] by the one Spirit, to another (5) the working of miracles, to another (6) prophecy, to another (7) the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another (8) various kinds of tongues, to another (9) the interpretation of tongues" (vv. 8-10).

1 Corinthians 12:28-30

The list that appears at the conclusion of chapter twelve is an interesting mixture of what some would call both miraculous gifts and those that are notably more mundane or routine. In other words, the former grouping includes those gifts that are more overtly miraculous or supernatural, while the latter, although likely no less the manifestation of the Spirit's power, appear more natural in operation.

"And God has appointed in the church (1) first apostles, (2) second prophets, (3) third teachers, (4) then miracles, (5) then gifts of healing(s), (6) helping, (7) administrating, and (8) various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all (9) teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all (10) interpret?" The answer, of course, is no.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 8-10

Although there is not a list to speak of in these verses, there is a reference to several spiritual gifts in this chapter. Paul mentions tongues in v.1, prophecy in v. 2, most likely the word of knowledge in v. 2, and also the gift of faith in v. 2. He may be referring to the gift of giving in v. 3 ("If I give away all I have"), which he describes in Romans 12:8 as "the one who contributes." A bit farther down in the chapter he again mentions prophecy, tongues, and perhaps the word of knowledge (v. 8). Nothing new appears in this chapter, as each of these gifts has already been listed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12.

Ephesians 4:11

As already note, many contend that the "gifts" listed in this text are less abilities and more specific and somewhat authoritative or governing offices in the local church. I disagree. There Paul says that the risen Christ "gave (1) the apostles, (2) the prophets, (3) the evangelists, (4) the shepherds and (5) teachers."

1 Peter 4:10-11

Peter's words in this text are not technically a list, as only two general categories are noted. Some have argued that these are the only two categories and that all the gifts previously enumerated by the apostle Paul may be subsumed under them. Peter says,

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4:10-11).

Is Peter suggesting that all gifts are either *serving gifts* or *speaking gifts*? In other words, is he telling us that gifts such as mercy, healing, administrating, and giving, just to mention a few, are examples of what it means to serve but do not necessarily entail a special capacity to speak with eloquence or persuasive power? Likewise, would speaking gifts include things like tongues, prophecy, exhortation, and teaching? Perhaps. But the problem is that some gifts seem to overlap the two categories, while others struggle to find a place in either (such as the gift of

faith or discerning of spirits). I think it wise not to press the distinction between speaking and serving gifts, simply because in actual experience we often serve people by speaking truth to them and we communicate truth (even if not verbally) by giving and expending ourselves in their service.

Tallying up the Gifts

From these texts we might then produce this list, in no particular order:

(1) prophecy; (2) service; (3) teaching; (4) exhortation; (5) contributing or giving; (6) leading; (7) mercy; (8) word of knowledge; (9) word of wisdom; (10) faith; (11) gifts of healing(s); (12) miracles; (13) distinguishing or discerning spirits; (14) tongues; (15) interpretation of tongues; (16) apostle; (17) helping; (18) administrating; (19) evangelism; (20) pastoring or shepherding.

It may be that leading and administrating are actually the same gift. Likewise, mercy and helping, together with serving may all be differing ways of referring to the same gift. And whereas a person might be a pastor-teacher, we should acknowledge that another may only have the gift of teaching while yet another might only have the gift of pastoring (although it is difficult to envision how one might "pastor" people without also "teaching" them). In any case, it would seem that, given the most generous reading of Scripture, there are **20 spiritual gifts**. But might there be more gifts that the Spirit supplies according to his will (1 Cor. 12:11) that no NT author explicitly mentions? And if so, how would we recognize them? Let's consider a few possibilities.

The first thing that comes to mind is **intercession**. Nowhere in the NT do we read of intercession as a spiritual gift *per se*, but does that necessarily preclude the possibility that it might be one? All of us, I'm sure, have known individuals who are devoted to prayer in a way that exceeds what the typical Christian might do. Yes, we must all pray and intercede at the throne of grace. But some appear to be uniquely energized or called to pray in such a way that they witness a remarkable track record of answered petitions. I've personally known quite a few who feel extraordinarily drawn to the prayer closet, who spend hours each day seeking God on behalf of others and their needs.

Then there is the ministry of **deliverance**. As with intercession, all Christians have not only been given the responsibility to pray but also have the God-given authority, in Christ and his name, to exercise power over the demonic (see Luke 10:17-20). I have had the privilege of ministering to those who were demonized or oppressed by evil spirits and have witnessed freedom that came to them. But others, once again, appear to operate at a level of authority and success in this regard in a way that far exceeds anything that I or any number of other Christians have experienced. Might there be a spiritual gift of deliverance? Our good friend, Michael Miller, one of the hosts of Remnant Radio, likely has this spiritual gift.

Some may well push back on both of these suggestions by pointing out that all believers are to pray without ceasing and are to put on the armor of God by which we might resist the influence of our enemy. That is certainly true. But this is also the case with numerous other gifts of the Spirit. All should evangelize, but not all have the gift of evangelism. All should give, but not all do so with the generosity of those who have the gift of giving. All of us who know Jesus as Lord and Savior exercise faith, but not all experience that extraordinary, supernatural surge of confidence to believe God is going to do things for which we don't have explicit biblical warrant. And the list of such universal responsibilities and extraordinary spiritual giftings could go on and on. So, the fact that all of us pray and proclaim victory over the demonic does not itself rule out the possibility that there may be spiritual gifts that are given to enable certain believers to operate in these ministries at *an elevated level of success*.

I have two more examples that come to mind. For lack of a better way of expressing it, I would call it the spiritual gift of **interpretation**. I'm not talking about the gift of interpretation of tongues. Neither do I have in mind the ability to interpret Scripture. Anyone with sufficient training in the discipline of hermeneutics and its principles can interpret the meaning of Scripture without any particular spiritual gift. What I have in mind is *the capacity and insight that enables a person to understand and make sense of revelatory truths that come either by means of a vision or dream or trance or other expression of the Spirit's revelatory ministry*.

We first see evidence of this in the OT narrative concerning Joseph. Having been unjustly imprisoned with the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker, the latter two both have dreams on the same night (Gen. 40:5). They are greatly troubled, largely because there is no one who can interpret them (Gen. 40:7-8a). "And Joseph said to them, **'Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me'**" (Gen. 40:8b). Joseph then proceeds to interpret both dreams. Two years later Pharaoh himself has a disturbing dream that no one can interpret (Gen. 41:8).

The cupbearer remembers how Joseph interpreted his dream and reports this to Pharaoh, who summons Joseph to interpret for him. "It is not in me;" says Joseph, "God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer" (Gen. 41:16).

Nothing is said here that Joseph's ability was a spiritual gift. Such language would have been anachronistic, as it was first used subsequent to the Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost. But it may well be that this OT incident was an adumbration or foreshadowing or an early preview, as it were, of the Spirit-empowered ability to interpret dreams and visions in the age of the new covenant. There is another similar incident in the life of Daniel. Following Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel provided him with the interpretation. We read that "the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night" (Dan. 2:19a; cf. 2:28). It happened yet again with another of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams and Daniel interpreted it accurately (Dan. 4:4-33).

Again, I'm not suggesting that either Joseph or Daniel possessed a "spiritual gift" of dream interpretation, but it is not beyond the realm of possibility that what God did through these two men in the Old Testament he does yet again by means of a spiritual gift in the age of the New Testament. The Spirit-enabled enlightenment by which one can interpret or make sense of some revelatory encounter may well be a gift that is operative in this age that lacks explicit biblical reference. I must also say that I've witnessed on numerous occasions both men and women who seemed extraordinarily accurate in their interpretation of dreams and visions, an ability that does not appear to be accounted for by merely natural means or insights or intelligence. It seems to be a gift from God. Example: John Paul Jackson.

Yet one more possible spiritual gift has often been called the gift of *the seer*. By "seer" reference is made to a person who sees in the Spirit. They are especially adept at identifying the presence of angels or even demons, but I wouldn't limit it to that. One OT example of this that may be a foretaste of the NT gift is found in 2 Kings 6:15-18 and the story of Elisha and his servant.

[15] When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" [16] He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." [17] Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. [18] And when the Syrians came down against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, "Please strike this people with blindness." So he struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha.

As noted earlier, many will insist that it is dangerous for us to go beyond what the Bible explicitly says concerning spiritual gifts. But I'm not advocating for anything that explicitly contradicts Scripture. In fact, if there are additional spiritual gifts beyond those we read in the texts noted above, regardless of their nature, they must be held accountable to the standards and guidelines that the NT sets forth to govern the exercise of any and all *charismata*. We should also ask what reasons might be given to conclude that God would be unwilling or disinclined to impart gifts not listed in Scripture. Might there not be new circumstances, unexpected crises, and pressing needs that emerge at various times throughout the life of local churches in the present age that call for a wider manifestation of the Spirit than that which Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12-14?

Nothing that I have said on this matter amounts to proof that there are more spiritual gifts than what we read about in Scripture. I may be entirely wrong to suggest that experiences such as intercession, deliverance, seeing in the Spirit, and interpretation of revelatory phenomena are spiritual gifts. But I think we should remain open to that possibility.

How Many Spiritual Gifts Might a Christian Receive?

We know with absolute certainty that every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. We see this confirmed in 1 Corinthians 12:7, 1 Peter 4:10, and perhaps also Romans 12:6. At the close of chapter twelve Paul again emphasizes that each believer is a member of the body of Christ. He then proceeds to delineate numerous gifts that have been apportioned to those members. Were it the case that some in the body were gift-less, his point about the unity of the one body and its many members and how they function together to build up one another would fail.

Perhaps the most explicit statement confirming the fact that every Christian has at least one spiritual gift is found in 1 Peter 4:10-11. There the apostle says this:

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:10-11).

One of the greater threats to a church being and becoming all that God wants of it is *the unbiblical idea that spiritual gifts and the ministry they produce is the sole responsibility of pastors and elders and those who work full time for a local church*. It is the notion that the professional clergy, to use profoundly unbiblical terms, those who've been educated in a seminary or have been officially ordained to ministry are the only ones who've received spiritual gifts and are the only ones who are responsible to serve others in the church.

But Peter is quite clear that “each” has received a gift that is to be used in the service of others and for the glory of God. No one is exempt. No one is unqualified. No one is left to himself or herself without the powerful enabling presence of the Spirit. We must overcome and reject the clergy / laity distinction. It isn't only pastors and elders who have spiritual gifts. No educational qualifications are listed by Peter.

Thus, we can say with confidence that every Christian has at least one spiritual gift and no Christian has them all (1 Cor. 12:29-30). Spiritual gifts forever shatter the myth that there are two kinds of Christians: those who minister and serve and those who are served and ministered to; those who have spiritual gifts and those who don't. All have at least one gift and all of us are to minister and serve.

I want to direct your attention to something that both the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter clearly assert. Paul writes in Romans 12:6 – “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us **use** them.” Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter 4:10 – “As each has received a gift, **use** it to serve one another.” If you are not serving others by making use of the gift you've received, you are sinning. This is a command, not an option.

We should also take note of the fact that Peter doesn't say that those with speaking gifts are more important or essential to the church than those with serving gifts. That is a mistake based on the idea that visibility and public recognition are important to God. They aren't. *Those who serve quietly behind the scenes and never utter a word on a microphone from a platform are just as valuable and highly regarded by God as those who preach every week or prophesy or pray for the sick.*

So, it is quite clear and undeniable that every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. But is it possible that a Christian might have more than one, and if so, when does the Holy Spirit grant additional gifts?

A brief consideration of the life and ministry of the apostle Paul demonstrates that he had received numerous gifts of the Spirit. Paul was clearly an apostle. It would appear that Paul exercised either a prophetic gift or the word of knowledge or possibly the discerning of spirits, when, in Acts 13:7-12, he discerned that Elymas the magician was a “son of the devil” and “the enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy” (v. 10). No one would doubt that Paul was an extremely gifted evangelist. There are several texts in Acts where he operated, under God's sovereignty, in the gifts of healing (see, for example, Acts 14:9-10). He often worked miracles and testified that he spoke “in tongues more than all” the Corinthians combined (1 Cor. 14:18). He was also a teacher and an exhorter. And the list could go on. At minimum, therefore, Paul himself had been made the recipient of at least ten spiritual gifts.

There are also a few texts where the underlying assumption is that a Christian might well be the recipient of more than one gift. Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians that they should “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that” they may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1; cf. 12:31; 14:39) clearly demonstrates that he expected these believers (and us, as well) to pray for and pursue additional gifts. If each of the Corinthians had already received at least one gift when they came to saving faith in Christ, Paul's exhortation would require us to believe that God might still impart additional gifts, always subject to the will of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11).

In 1 Corinthians 12:12, Paul writes this: “So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.” Paul does not rebuke them for this eager desire for even more manifestations of the Spirit in the form of gifts. He appears to commend them for it. But if they had already received the only gift that

God ever intended to give, his statement is meaningless. Paul's only concern is that in their desire for gifts they pray for and pursue those that serve more readily to build up and edify the church.

In the verse that immediately follows (1 Cor. 14:13), Paul commands the person who speaks in tongues to "pray that he may interpret." In other words, here is a Christian who already has one spiritual gift, speaking in tongues, whom Paul exhorts to ask God for yet another, the ability to interpret for the sake of those in the church. Even if one does not believe that the gifts of tongues and interpretation are valid for the church today, this passage indicates that a Christian who has one gift can easily be the recipient of yet another.

Consider my own experience. I was born again early in life and made a public profession of faith when I was nine. I began operating in the spiritual gift of teaching by the time I graduated from high school. But it was early in my sophomore year at OU that the Spirit granted me the gift of speaking in tongues.

Yet another textual hint that a believer may receive more than one gift is found in the exhortation that Paul gave his spiritual son, Timothy. We read this in 1 Timothy 4:14 –

"Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you."

This is not the spiritual gift that Timothy would have received when he was first converted. This is a gift that was imparted to him by the Spirit when he was appointed, commissioned, or "ordained" to the pastoral ministry in Ephesus. When the elders laid their hands on him and prayed, he received yet another "gift" in addition to whatever gift or gifts he had earlier been given.

I should point out that if additional spiritual gifts are given to a believer subsequent to the time of saving faith, it is not in any way connected to what many perceive to be the experience of being baptized in the Spirit. *Spirit-baptism is something that all Christians experience at the time of conversion.* Contrary to what most in the classical Pentecostal tradition believe, Spirit-baptism is not something that occurs "separate from" and "subsequent to" salvation. It is, instead, simultaneous with it. Jesus himself is the one who performs this spiritual baptism. Nowhere is the Holy Spirit said to baptize us into Christ; rather, Christ baptizes or submerges all believers in or with the Holy Spirit.

The Function and Purpose of all Spiritual Gifts (Ephesians 4:12-16)

Verse 12 consists of three prepositional phrases: (1) "for the equipping of the saints," (2) "for the work of service (or ministry)," and (3) "to the building up of the body of Christ."

I believe what Paul is saying is that the first and second phrases are to be taken together as expressing one idea. Thus, the gifted people of v. 11 have been given to equip the saints for the work of ministry. ***That is to say, all believers are the ones who do the work of ministry, having been equipped to do so by the gifted people of v. 11.*** This will then contribute to the building up of the body of Christ. On this view, v. 12 is simply reiterating what both v. 7 and v. 16 assert, namely, that all believers, and not just a select few with special gifts, have received grace for ministry.

Let me emphasize this as strongly as I can. If you choose instead to sit quietly and passively in the body of Christ, whether in a corporate gathering or in a house church setting or somewhere or sometime in the normal rhythms of life, you are sinning. I'm not trying to be mean in saying that. I'm trying to be biblical. There is simply no place in the church for passive spectators.

The word translated "equipping" = to complete, restore, repair. See the cognate verb form in 1 Thess. 3:10; Gal. 6:1; 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11; Rom. 9:22 (cf. also Heb. 13:21; 1 Pt. 5:10). It can even have the force of repairing or setting a broken bone, i.e., mending that which has been damaged.

Please observe that these gifts are to operate "***until***" we all attain to the "unity of the faith" (v. 13a). The unity which, according to 2:15-18, already exists, and which, according to 4:3, must be diligently preserved, now, according to v. 13, is still to be "attained". Also, whereas our "one faith" was described in 4:5 as a given, Paul here envisions the full appropriation of that oneness of faith as something that lies in the future. Paul has in mind a progressive movement among all believers toward the full experience, appropriation and application of the objective doctrinal content of the Christian "faith".

Does the use of the word “until” in v. 13 have any implications for the duration of the “gifts” described in v. 11? Yes!

There is also a unity that consists in our “knowledge of the Son of God”. We are *together* to increase in our understanding and enjoyment of “the unfathomable riches of Christ” (3:8). The many and varied spiritual gifts bestowed upon the church are designed to enable us all, unity, to grow and deepen and expand and increase in our knowledge of Jesus.

We are also to grow up into “mature manhood” (v. 13). The standard of our attainment is the fullness of Christ, i.e., the complete expression of all that he is as God incarnate (cf. 3:19). The point is that the church is progressively being conformed to the perfect image of Jesus in all his fullness.

Here in vv. 14-16 Paul mixes his metaphors and draws upon vivid imagery to describe the results, both individually and corporately, of the proper use of spiritual gifts and gifted persons in the body of Christ.

The proper use of spiritual gifts can greatly reduce spiritual immaturity in the body, portrayed here by the word translated “children” (v. 14a), a term set in contrast to the “mature manhood” of v. 13. ***We are to imitate children in their humility and innocence but not in their ignorance and instability.*** For Paul “immaturity is evidenced in instability, rootlessness, lack of direction, doctrinal vacillation, and susceptibility to manipulation and error” (Lincoln, 257). His language is vivid: “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (v. 14b). The picture is of a tiny, storm-tossed, boat entirely at the mercy and whim of waves and wind. Thus, there is only confusion and lack of direction, in direct contrast to the clearly stated goal-oriented language of v. 13. Immaturity is especially evident when believers are easily duped by false teaching and always seem to embrace whatever new theological fad is being promoted. “Every wind of doctrine” is in obvious contrast with the “unity of the faith” in v. 13. In other words, ***at the heart of childish immaturity is the lack of theological discernment.*** Three phrases then explain what lies behind such threatening teachings:

(1) “by human cunning” (v. 14b) – The word translated “cunning” literally referred to the throwing of dice (*kubeia*; from which we derive the English word “cube”). He’s talking about false teaching in whatever form it assumes.

(2) “by craftiness” (v. 14b) – This refers to the unscrupulous and deceitful way in which false teachers dupe the immature and unsuspecting. Pragmatism and manipulation are no doubt in view.

(3) “in deceitful schemes” (v. 14) – The word “schemes” (cf. Eph. 6:11, where it is used of the devil) indicates that there is a method or plan to their action. The word “deceit” indicates that it is often difficult to detect. Consider the way that some TV/Internet “ministers” promise financial prosperity to those who give a sizable offering, or perhaps they insist that if you have enough faith to give more money you will be physically healed.

On a more positive note, the proper functioning of spiritually gifted people in the church should result in spiritual growth whereby all are brought into conformity with Jesus, the head of the body (v. 15). The phrase “speaking the truth in love” is designed to contrast with the concluding words of v. 14. In other words, Paul isn’t exhorting us to truthfulness in general or merely that we are to be kind when interacting verbally with one another. Rather he is calling on us to proclaim the doctrinal truth of Christianity, i.e., the “faith” (4:5,13), as over against the “error” of false teachers, and to do so in love.

Paul’s concluding comments in v. 16 are a concentrated focus on both the unity of the one body and the contribution to the latter’s growth by each individual believer. The words “from whom” (v. 16a) have as their antecedent Christ, the head, indicating that no growth is possible apart from living, vital, trusting union with him. The phrase “joined and held together” was used often in contexts of reconciliation (see Col. 2:19). Paul’s words here “underline forcefully that for the unified growth of the body its members have to be involved in a process of continual mutual adjustment” (Lincoln, 262).

All this is accomplished as a result of what ***every*** joint supplies, not just what the professional or ordained clergy supply! The word “joint” may be translated “ligament,” the idea being that each individual believer, through the proper exercise of his/her gift and ministry, provides the necessary connections between the various parts of the body and thereby mediates life and imparts power throughout the entire church.

That is why I thank God and praise him for spiritual gifts. I again pray that you do so as well.