

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Maturity (Lesson 10),
Scripture: 1st Corinthians 12:1-12; 29-31
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What Are the Gifts? (Part 6)

Interpretation of Tongues, Miracles, Discerning of Spirits

1st Corinthians 12 (NASB)

NOW concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. 2 You know that when you were pagans, *you were* led astray to the dumb idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

12 For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ... 29 All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? 30 All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? 31 But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

Introduction If you are new to the Bible, this passage might sound familiar—it is often read at weddings. 1st Corinthians is one book of the Bible that is aimed at helping first century Christians figure out a whole bunch of technical details about how to be Christians. One of the technical areas is in the area of spiritual gifts—TOOLS that we are given to build up the body of Christ in love. I’m thinking this: if God gives people something, it is probably good and it is probably meant to bless them.

My Dad gave me things and they were never bad for me. On my 8th birthday he gave me an “Operation X-500” Rocket Launcher and Defense Base! On my 12th birthday he gave me a rifle (Mossberg 340B) and he taught me how to use it. He gave me a Rolex watch on my 21st birthday

and I wore it for many years—still have it, in fact. At our wedding my Dad gave us a car (1971 Mercury Cougar.) I can't think of anything he ever gave me that was intended to confuse me or distract me—his gifts, as an earthly father—were good.

We would say that all the more so, our heavenly Father gives good gifts to people, and to the church He gives gifts through the gifted people that are IN the church. They are no less gifts, for the benefit of the body of believers than were the good things my own earthly father gave to me.

The gifts God gives to us, are INTENDED TO BLESS US. They are deliberately given to build us up and to help us become more mature in Christ and more in-tune with the kingdom of God. This includes the spiritual gifts that He gives to the church. We are looking at all the gifts that are mentioned in the New Testament.

- They are not all equivalent.
- Some are more important, in the great scheme of things, than others are.
- The gifts are not even said to be *evenly distributed* in some kind of “fairness-mandated” equalization of all churches.

We really don't know how the gifts were laid down because only three churches (Rome, Corinth and Ephesus) receive any mention of spiritual gifts in the New Testament. But however they were distributed, they blessed people.

The next three gifts that we want to mention are interpretation of tongues, discerning of spirits and miracles.

Interpretation of tongues [1st Corinthians 12-14]

I love how the Bible is just so often logical: if you have a gift of tongues (and whatever it was, they DID have this interesting gift in the first century) then it is logical that God would provide someone to *translate* whatever was SAID in that tongue, so that the church body could understand what the message was. Peter Wagner defines the gift of “interpretation of tongues” as the **special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to make known in the vernacular the message of one who speaks in tongues.**¹ *The Theology Program* suggests that interpreting tongues would mean either the translation of the language to the audience for whom it is foreign, or translating the “prayer language” or ecstatic speech.² Wayne Grudem's definition is as *reporting to the church the general meaning of something spoken in tongues.*³ Think about the coolness of this: someone is getting a message from God and he speaks it in some language that you don't know. And someone else, miraculously, can understand what that

¹ Wagner, C. Peter (2011-01-01). *Discover Your Spiritual Gifts* (Kindle Locations 1449-1450). Gospel Light. Kindle Edition.

² *The Theology Program*, Ecclesiology and Eschatology, 2005, p. 317

³ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology : An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), 1076.

person is saying and translates it for you to hear. But let me remind you: if you're excited about the notion of getting a word of revelation from the Lord, remember that we already HAVE a word for the Lord: THE Word OF the Lord.

Discerning of spirits 1st Corinthians 12:10]

The second gift that we are considering today is called “discerning of spirits.” In the first century, and in a culture which was probably heavily demon-possessed, assisting Christians to distinguish whether something was from God or from another source would have been important. They did not yet have New Testaments to give them guidance and theological insight. And they did not have two thousand years of theological reflection by many Christian thinkers from most countries in the world to lean on. Having some specific people who could *tell* whether a teaching or an idea or a practice was really of the Lord, or not would have been vital.

Wagner says “distinguishing of spirits” is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ TO KNOW WITH ASSURANCE WHETHER CERTAIN BEHAVIORS PURPORTED TO BE OF GOD ARE IN REALITY DIVINE, HUMAN OR SATANIC.⁴ *The Theology Program* gives this as **THE EXTRAORDINARY ABILITY TO DECIDE WHETHER A TEACHING IS FROM GOD OR FROM ANOTHER SOURCE.**⁵ Grudem gives that this is as a special ability to recognize the influence of the Holy Spirit or of demonic spirits in a person.⁶ It was an invaluable “filter” to help people know what to believe and who to listen to. As far as evil spirits go, we believe they are quite capable of masquerading as something good and profitable when, in fact, they only want to destroy. Indeed today, any doctrine which does not promote Christ, give God the glory of build up the body of Christ ought to be immediately suspect.

Miracles [1st Corinthians 12:10, 29]

A third gift is simply called “miracles.” We read one such phenomena this week in John 2 and there we read about when Jesus changed the water into wine. In John 2:11 John tells us, ***This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.*** Whatever was done by the apostles or anyone else who might have had the gift of “miracles” were doing it to SHOW God’s power and glory, ultimately so that people would believe in Christ.

Wagner defines “miracles” as the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to serve as human intermediaries through whom it pleases God to perform powerful acts that are perceived by observers to have

⁴ Wagner, Kindle Locations 1420-1421.

⁵ *The Theology Program*, p. 314

⁶ Grudem, 1082.

altered the ordinary course of nature.⁷ *The Theology Program* gives this as **PERFORMING VISIBLE AND SUPERNATURAL ACTS OF DIVINE POWER BRINGING ASTONISHMENT TO THE VIEWERS.**⁸ Grudem has an excellent meditation on “miracles.” He says,

the gift of miracles may include the working of divine power in deliverance from danger, in intervention to meet special needs in the physical world (as in the case of Elijah in 1 Kings 17:1–16), in judgment on those who irrationally and violently oppose the gospel message, in vanquishing the demonic forces that wage war against the church, and in any other way in which God’s power is manifested in an evident way to further God’s purposes in a situation.⁹

If you believe these gifts are present today, just as they were at Corinth, then you will take a certain direction. You will seek these things and spend time sorting out genuine from fraudulent. You will probably *expect* to see them and be disappointed every time someone *says* they’re exercising the gift of miracles but you’re not actually seeing the effects of a New Testament-grade miracle.

But with no disappointment whatsoever, I find that even if these gifts are not operating in Dartmouth right now, perhaps something EQUIVALENT or *gift-like* IS operating. That’s where I want to spend the rest of this message. Because I think it is the same Holy Spirit of Jesus operating in US as was operating in the first century. I believe the Bible when it says, **Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.** I don’t think His NATURE changes, even if His program might change from century to century.

Gift	Gift-like
interpretation of tongues	interpreting, translating
discerning of spirits	discernment, perceiving
miracles	impressive witness

GIFT-LIKE MINISTRIES

Interpreting and translating

Like the gift of “interpretation of tongues” we still have people in the body of Christ who are adept at interpreting what’s going on and what the Lord might be saying to our church. With all the factors on a particular issue, it even involves a kind of “translating” the will of God so that we can understand it.

- ❖ For instance, if the Lord’s real plan for DBC is to sit tight, hunker down, take care of each other and just wait for the second coming because it is right around the corner, I would want to know that. Wouldn’t you?

⁷ Wagner, Kindle Locations 1471-1472.

⁸ *The Theology Program*, p. 313

⁹ Grudem, 1062-63.

- ❖ If the Lord was *really* wanting us to split in half and plant a second church in some other location, and this is what we were supposed to be moving towards, I would want someone to communicate that to me from the Lord. That would be great! We would roll with that and we would need someone to *translate* that message from the Lord. Not in an unknown tongue, literally probably, but to make sense of all the signals we think we're receiving.
- ❖ But if the Lord was *really* saying to us, reach out, take care of each other along the way but "REACH OUT. Make a deliberate effort to touch the lives of as many people as you can," I would want to hear that from the Lord and it would be wonderful to have someone with such an ear to the ground that could HEAR that from the Lord and *translate* it to us.

Last year we had two special speakers in DBC. One came to us and said, "We're in a mess and we need the men of the body of Christ to 'man up.'" Then we had another one who said the Lord's coming is very, very soon and the anti-Christ is ON the scene right now and so we need to get ready to be raptured out of here." It would be nice if we had someone in our midst who could *translate* to us from out of the "languages" what God wants us to focus on. It would make things easier.

Discernment and perceiving

Like the gift of "discerning of spirits" we still have people of *discernment* and who are very perceptive. This isn't an active act of *translating* or interpreting a recent message from God so much as it is more a general awareness of how things are, spiritually. Most often people are pretty oblivious in a church family about what's going on. Most of the "troops" are focused on their own lives, and getting along in their families. But a few are more watchful and aware of how a church is. This is true in our church and it is true in any church. We need people of discernment who can sense, with some accuracy, if things are healthy, or unhealthy or spiritual or carnal or dead or alive. I would not guess as to if and who this might be in our church, but I can plainly see that any church or fellowship needs *perceptive* people who can DETECT whether a teaching is from the Lord or from some other source. We don't need to get paranoid or self-fascinated about these things, but the ministry of discernment is important.

Impressive witness

The last of the three gifts is "miracles" and I would see a parallel with that—since the apostolic ability to craft miracles was for the purpose of impressing people with the claims of Christ, and His authenticity as the true Messiah and Savior of the world—as people who can provide a similarly *impressive witness*. I am meaning something more than just the normal witness we are all to give. I think there are people, who may not be *performing* miracles, their lives are an impressive witness.

1. This might be for their heroism, as in the life and death of **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** or **Watchman Nee**.
2. It might be for their extraordinary courage and determination as with **Martin Luther** or **Joni Eareckson Tada**.
3. It might be for their great Christian rhetoric and ability to intellectually defend the faith as with **Josh McDowell**, **Ravi Zacharias** and others.
4. It might be for their impressive turn-around as in the lives of **John Newton** or **Charles Colson**.

Maybe someone somewhere can still do a mighty miracle for the testimony of Jesus Christ. But in the absence of truly powerful miracles we have the occasional powerful WITNESS for Christ, validated by some other quality that tells anyone watching: Jesus is alive, and He is who the Bible says He is.

Again today, what is your gift or your ability or your story? Are you what you have to build up the body of Christ? Are you looking for ways to use it? We can't maneuver you into it. You must make yourself available to the Lord and to His people. If you are a Christian, He has surely equipped and gifted you in some way to be used by Him.