

**Facing Spiritual Gifts
in the Context of the Church**
First Corinthians Chapters 12–14

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The Diversity of Gifts

1 Corinthians 12

Introduction

My dear friends, beloved in Christ, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all here this morning. It is a great pleasure for me to be with you again, and it invokes in me the happiest memories of the other occasions when I was with you in this place some years ago. That reduces my trepidation now as I stand before you, because I remember that even the questions were put in a very Christian fashion. I stand before you therefore with great anticipation that, as we study God's word together, we may hear the voice of the Shepherd guiding us into all his truth.

The topic is 'facing spiritual gifts in the context of the church', and the passage you have set me to expound is 1 Corinthians 12–14. Let's begin then by reading Paul's opening words in chapter 12.

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (vv. 1–13)

May the Holy Spirit who inspired these words be our instructor as we think about them.

The context

These three chapters where Paul deals with this subject are actually corrective in their central drive. They're not simply a positive exposition of the matter of gifts; we shall constantly find that they were written to correct a false idea that had arisen in the church. In the first chapter he tells how abundantly God had blessed the believers at Corinth.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge . . . so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1:4-7)

Paul adds to that the consideration that this is an example of the faithfulness of God: 'God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord' (v. 9).

When I read those words, my imagination goes back down the centuries to the story of the way Abraham sent a servant to find a bride for his son, Isaac. The servant was led by God to the appropriate young woman and in front of the household, together they put the question to Rebekah, 'Will you go with this man?' (Gen 24:58), so that he may conduct her to his master's son, whom she was to marry.

When she said, 'I will go', that was an amazing thing. She had, so to speak, come to love a man she had never seen and was on a journey to meet her bridegroom. Abraham's servant had already brought out all kinds of ornaments, beautiful bracelets and necklaces, to encourage her. She was going to be the wife of a multimillionaire and she had begun to be equipped with some of the wealth of Abraham and his son.

What a wonderful story it is, that God has called us into the fellowship of his dear Son. Ponder it, my brothers and sisters. Let's try to imagine the almighty glory of our God and Father. As if it were not sufficient for him to make us and put us in his variegated universe with all its wonders, he has called us into the fellowship of his Son: God of very God, the Word who in the beginning already was eternally with God in harmonious fellowship with the Father. He was and is God himself (see John 1:1-2). How shall we take it in that we're called into fellowship with him? How shall we behave in his presence and know what to say?

We English have a queen, and we all pay our taxes to a club that maintains her racehorses and things. They call it the Inland Revenue. In spite of my dutiful payments, she's never asked me to tea. I'm a little bit relieved because, introduced to that splendour, what would I talk about? How would I know what foot to put before the other foot, so to speak? I daresay you would carry it off well, but I have those feelings.

We're called into the fellowship of God's Son, and God is faithful. In calling us into the fellowship of his own dear Son, he has equipped us. Even now, while we're learning our spiritual etiquette and how to behave, he's enriched us so that we are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as we 'wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor 1:7).

The correction

That then is the context. But it would appear that, instead of concentrating on the great array of spiritual gifts, the Corinthians concentrated on just a few and one in particular, giving it such emphasis that it was now somewhat out of proportion, a little bit grotesque and not really profitable. These chapters are written therefore to correct that tendency, hence my emphasis today. Being wise men and women, you have not asked for my own thoughts, but to expound what the inspired apostle tells us.

Do not let the fact that much of it is corrective obscure the wonder that lies at the heart of this matter of spiritual gifts. 'For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body', says Paul—the *Body of Christ* (12:13). Before we come to the hard grind of study, sit back and think of how our salvation has introduced into the universe a series of almost inexpressible wonders.

The wonder of God becoming man

Ponder a moment, for instance, the incarnation of our Lord. It was unique in the universe. Never had such a thing occurred, that God should become man. The childishness that's in me has often tried to picture what Michael the archangel said to Gabriel when they saw 'the Son of the Highest' (Luke 1:32 KJV) stoop down and become human. In his humanity, for a little while he was made lower than the angels (Heb 2:9). What did Michael make out of it then, when he saw that God had allowed sinful creatures to nail his Son to a tree? I'm not sure that Michael really would have fully understood it, if he had been told that God's Son was dying there for us sinful creatures. Has heaven ever got over the wonder, my dear friend, that God's own Son was delivered up for you, because of your rebellion against the Almighty?

That wonder would fill eternity, but then not only did he rise from the dead, he ascended into heaven and carried humanity to the very throne of God. For when he arose, he arose bodily. He asked his disciples to touch him. 'It's really me,' says he. 'See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have' (Luke 24:39). A risen man, still with a human body, a glorified body, has gone into heaven. I wonder what Michael said and thought.

The wonder of the Body of Christ

It was nothing new or surprising to see the Son of God seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty (Heb 8:1). But to see the man Christ Jesus seated at the right hand of God above the angels, how shall I significantly describe it? We have to try and take in the next wonder, do we not? He does not sit there alone. Christ has a Body; not just his own physical body, but an entity that the New Testament calls the *Body of Christ* (1 Cor 12:27). The word *body* may be a metaphor, but it describes a reality, a new entity in the universe of which Christ is the head and we redeemed men and women are the members. It is a functioning body, with the life of the head flowing through the members.

This is a new thing. You will search the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi and find no reference to the Body of Christ. This wonderful new entity in the universe was brought into existence at Pentecost. It is in that context that we think today of the spiritual gifts that are given to us as members of that Body, so that each one of us might perform the function that God has designed for us.

Let us not think that the Body of Christ is some temporary organization. ‘Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking’ (Heb 2:5), but unto man—that is, Christ—for the administration of the universe that shall yet be under his headship. His Body will be his executives; not angels, whatever role they will eventually play. The Body of Christ is vastly superior to angels, because angels are an individual creation. Some of them deserted and went over to the other side, we gather. Oh, what a thing this new administration shall be, where the very life of the head runs through and is shared by all the members.

Paul will remind us in chapter 13 that some functions of the Body will not outlast time. The Body and its membership is eternal, of course, and we are at present doing our work in this ‘vale of tears’. We are in training, so to speak, for that wonderful eternity that lies ahead. Let some of the awesome wonders and wealth of this thing grip our spirits as now we turn to the practicalities, and if need be to the correction here and there of our function as members of the Body of Christ.

vv. 1-3—The end and object of all gift is to glorify the Lord Jesus

The first major consideration that Paul mentions in this topic comes in verses 1–3. To sum it up, we are to observe that the mark and motive of the Spirit of God, who is the giver of all true spiritual gifts, is always to exalt our blessed Lord Jesus and to make it clear that Jesus is Lord. This is exceedingly important. That being so, we must ask what is the major aim of our gifts, whatever they might be?

You say, ‘To help my fellow believers.’

Excellent, ten marks out of ten for that observation. What else, and why would you want to help your fellow believers?

You say, ‘To build up the Body.’

You’ve got it right again. And why would you want to build up the Body? Paul will tell us why in the sister Epistle to the Ephesians: ‘we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ’ (4:15). We have a lot of growing up to do, to come to those dimensions that are suitable for us as members of the Body of Christ: a body grown up in all its members to be commensurate with that head. You see, the mark of all true spiritual gift is to emphasize that Jesus is Lord.

Before our Lord left, he told the apostles that he was going. They weren’t to be sad, because he would send ‘another *Comforter*’ (John 14:16 KJV), and among his functions would be this:

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgement, because the ruler of this world is judged. (16:8–11)

Notice that. ‘*Concerning sin*’: it was not particularly because they would get debauched every now and again, but the sin was the refusal to believe in God’s dear Son. That is the arch rebellion in the universe, and the Holy Spirit comes to convict people of sin for not

believing in Jesus. ‘*Concerning righteousness*, because I go to the Father’: his ascension to the right hand of God demonstrates that Jesus was right and is right, and therefore the world that crucified him is wrong. ‘*Concerning judgement*’: because that is so, inevitable judgment will follow.

The Holy Spirit still exercises his ministry in the world through his members. ‘He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you’ (v. 14). Whatever the immediate purpose is of the gifts he gives to us, their end and object is to glorify the Lord Jesus and establish him as Lord in our thinking and practice. When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost and exhibited his presence, Peter summed up the implication of it to the crowd who had murdered Jesus: ‘God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified’ (Acts 2:36).

Test the spirits

The Apostle John says, ‘Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world’ (1 John 4:1). How shall we test them? You test the spirits by their doctrinal utterances.

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God’ (vv. 2–3).

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? (2:22)

If we are to test the spirits to see whether they are from God or not, we shall have to know what the person moved by that spirit is saying doctrinally, and not ultimately be content with anything that does not say explicitly that Jesus is Lord.

vv. 4–11—The gifts of the Spirit are diverse

The second major consideration comes in verses 4–11, which tell us that the gifts of the Spirit are diverse. That is the first emphasis he lays down, because he’s thinking of the disproportion that has occurred in Corinth. They’re concentrating on one or two gifts and blowing them all out of proportion, forgetting that the gifts of the Spirit are diverse. Paul makes the point that the diversity of spiritual gifts is an expression of the diversity of persons within the unity of the Godhead.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same *Spirit*; and there are varieties of service, but the same *Lord*; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same *God* who empowers them all in everyone. (vv. 4–6)

God is a tri-unity, and now I must speak with bated breath and metaphorically take the shoes off my feet. In the Trinity, God is inviting us to consider not merely what God has said or what God has done; we are invited into this most holy place, to be allowed to look as far as mortal eyes can see into what God is in himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Long before the universe existed he was a divine fellowship, and always will be; each with different functions and yet one. One in three and three in one. The gifts that God gives to his people

are similarly diverse. Not all have the same gift. That diversity is their wealth, and their richness is an expression of the diversity of persons within the Godhead.

vv. 12–26—One Body with many members

The third major consideration is that the spiritual gifts given to us, and their exercise, are functions of the Body of Christ; hence the emphasis on their diversity. Paul is about to argue that a human body that had only one member would be so grotesque as not to be a body at all. By definition a body is diverse in its functions, and therefore in its gifts. And yet the marvel of the human body is that, though it has many members, it is a unity. It is a plurality in unity and a unity in plurality, and it is important to notice that as we come to consider this analogy. 'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ' (v. 12).

Strictly translated this would be, 'so it is with *the Christ*'. We're not thinking here merely of our Lord Jesus personally, but 'the Christ', which is the head and his Body. In the rest of this chapter, Paul is going to draw out the significance that the gifts are diverse because they are members of a body, and a body by definition has many members. The Christian Body must remember that, although it has many members and many gifts, it is a unity. And of course, the use of gifts to destroy and divide and separate the members of the Body would be a sad denial of the very purpose and existence of the Body of Christ.

The wonder of the wealth of our salvation

You may think I'm self-indulgent, but I like to sit back sometimes from hard doctrine and think about the wonder and the wealth of salvation. If my gift is because I'm in the Body of Christ, let me ask myself, how did I get into the Body of Christ in the first place? Did God look around his universe and spot Gooding and say to himself, 'Gooding has a little bit of a gift in this direction; if he improves and develops his gift and gets a bit expert I will consider putting him in the Body of Christ, because I could do with the likes of him'? I have met some people who have that sort of thought. You have to qualify by having a gift, and then you can be put into the Body. But that's putting the cart before the horse, isn't it?

I'm not particularly aware of it, or at least I've forgotten it, but I'm told that when I was born my parents didn't look around and say, 'We're thinking of having a new son in this family, where could we get a good hand or two that would be suitable for him? We'll need a couple of feet as well.' No, of course not. That would be grotesque nonsense.

So, how did we get into the Body of Christ? Paul reminds us that it was by a double process, 'For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit' (v. 13). Did you pick that up? We get into the Body of Christ by a double process: baptized in one Spirit, made to drink of one Spirit. In a moment or two, we shall consider why that dual process has to be true of us simultaneously, and why it is necessary for the formation of the Body.

What is baptism in the Holy Spirit?

But let us now look carefully at the term that is used. 'In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.' The matter of *baptism in the Holy Spirit* has been a controversy amongst God's people, as you will know. I myself find it helpful to go back to where this topic is first mentioned in the New Testament.

When John the Baptist was asked whether he was the Messiah or not, he made it plain at once that he was not. 'I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He [the Messiah] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire' (Matt 3:11). This is the great distinctive of our blessed Lord, distinguishing him from John the Baptist, the greatest of all the prophets, and even from his own apostles. It is the distinctive mark of Christ that he baptizes in the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not the baptizer; it is the Lord Jesus

To get our thinking clear, let's notice that the phrase sometimes in our Bibles *the baptism of the Holy Spirit* should not be understood as meaning that it's the Spirit who baptizes us. The Spirit is not the baptizer; our Lord is the baptizer. Listen to John again, 'I baptize you with water . . . he will baptize you [in] the Holy Spirit'. When John baptized anyone, he took hold of them and baptized them in the waters of the River Jordan. John was the baptizer; he took hold of the person and put them in water. 'That's what I do,' says John. 'How is the Messiah different from me? "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."' So Christ is the baptizer, and he takes those who put their faith in him and puts them in the Holy Spirit.

How shall I talk of that suitably? The Holy Spirit is not so much *stuff*. He isn't a mere impersonal force like electricity or energy; he is a divine person. Who else could put us in the Spirit of God except one who is himself God? It is Christ who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. Indeed, when the Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost and believers were baptized in the Holy Spirit, Peter eventually drew the implication and the significance of it.

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. (Acts 2:32-33)

If it is Jesus who has poured out the Holy Spirit of God, the deduction Peter drew from it was: 'Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that *God has made him both Lord and Christ*, this Jesus whom you crucified' (v. 36). He has made him both Lord, in the highest sense of that term, and Christ. Who else could send forth the Holy Spirit? Who else could put his redeemed people in the Holy Spirit?

How many of his people does Christ baptize in the Holy Spirit?

That's not a silly question to ask. I ask it on purpose just to draw our attention to the actual words: 'in one Spirit we were *all* baptized into one body . . . and *all* were made to drink of one Spirit' (1 Cor 12:13). Some of us? No, that won't do, will it? You'll never find a true believer anywhere on earth who has not been baptized in the Holy Spirit by the risen Lord. Why then

the other process, 'and all were made to drink of one Spirit'? What's that got to do with the formation of the Body of Christ?

How do we get into the Body of Christ, and how is it maintained?

Let me draw aside a bit and consider with you these processes of being baptized, and then being made to drink. Allow a humble little demonstration. Here's my pen and I'm about to 'baptize' it in water. You see what happens, don't you? The pen goes into the water, and if I am baptized in the Holy Spirit, I go into the Holy Spirit. That's one process. And then, if I drink of the water, the water goes into me. These are two complementary processes. When Christ puts us—baptizes us—in the Spirit, we go into the Holy Spirit. And when we're made to drink of the Spirit it's the converse process—the Holy Spirit goes into us. That's simple, isn't it?

You say, 'What's that got to do with the Body?'

Here I must invite you to consider what may not be an aesthetically happy experience, but look at this human body that stands in front of you. It's one body and it has many members. What keeps all these members, fingers and things, all together in one body?

Some wise person says, 'It's your bones and muscles and tendons that do that.'

I understand what they mean, but it isn't really true, because if you put a bullet through my brain and laid me out on the floor and came back in ten years, you'd find that some of the members have dropped off, in spite of the bones and the muscles and the tendons. To put it simply, the thing that keeps all the members in my body together as one body is because I'm in the air and the air is in me. That's true, isn't it? I need the air to supply oxygen right to the remotest part of my body, and if the oxygen supply is cut off my body will begin to disintegrate.

The air is all around me and it's filling my lungs and oxygenating my blood. The blood is carrying it to all the muscles and keeping me together. But if you came and throttled me I would still be in the air, but the air wouldn't be in me and I should go black in the face. Conversely, if you took me to NASA and said, 'Gooding, we're going to send you up into space, but we want to do an experiment. We're not going to put you inside the shuttle, but strap you to the outside. Take a deep breath, you're about to blast off'—now the air would be in me but I shouldn't be in the air and I'd go 'pop'. My body requires that dual thing: I must be in the air and the air must be in me. Both have to be simultaneous, because the body depends on it. You can't have a body without it.

'In one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body'—Christ has put us in the Spirit; 'and all were made to drink of one Spirit'—he puts the Spirit in us. We are in the Spirit and the Spirit is in us. Lest you should think I am talking of some fanciful doctrine that I thought up in the confines of my own study or something, listen to what Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans. 'You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you' (Rom 8:9). Do you see the double thing—in the Spirit, and the Spirit in you?

The wonder of being in the Spirit and the Spirit in us

That's enough hard thinking for the moment. Let's pause and ponder the wonder of it. It's not dependent on feelings, though at times it may lead to very deep-seated feelings. It is still

true of the dear saint of God who's lying in bed riddled with arthritis or terminal cancer, and whose mind is filled with the pain of it. They are in the Spirit of God and the Spirit of God is in them. What a magnificent salvation it is; who other than God could ever have devised it? Shout a 'hallelujah' in your heart. It's enough to get us through life and all the way home to glory, just as the servant took Rebekah and equipped her, and led her all the way home until he presented her to Isaac.

The implications of being in the one Body

We are not just individuals doing our own thing, so various implications follow.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body' (1 Cor 12:14–15)

How did it become a foot if it wasn't in the body to start with? You don't find odd feet lying about, except artificial ones. It had to be in the body to be a foot. If it said, 'I'm not a heart, I'm not a brain, therefore I'm not of the body,' it's got it all the wrong way round. You don't get into the body by qualifying as a foot, with a degree in 'footery'; you get in the body first, and then find out that you are perhaps a foot. So if the foot should say, 'I'm not a hand and therefore I'm not of the body,' it's talking illogical nonsense. It's got it the wrong way round.

And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? (vv. 16–17)

The thing would be grotesque, if the whole body were an eye or an ear. We mustn't insist that all believers have one and the same gift.

What determines the gift I have?

Well, verse 18 says, 'But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.'

Some ten years ago the BBC ran a series, and people were given this very direct question: 'If you weren't you, who would you like to be?' It was very interesting what people said. I had no hopes of being interviewed by the BBC, of course, but I pondered the question. I said to myself, 'Gooding, if you weren't you, who would you like to be?' And one can get all sorts of wild ideas and aspirations far beyond any possibility. I said to myself, 'I would like to be Billy Graham', and then I thought of various others I'd like to be, I'm ashamed to tell you. But when I had thought about it a lot I came to this conclusion: if I weren't David Gooding, I would prefer to be David Gooding. If I were asked, 'Would you prefer to be somebody else, or would you like to go back to being just ordinary Gooding?', I decided I'd like to be ordinary Gooding.

You say, 'That shows a fantastic opinion of yourself.'

The choice is God's

It doesn't at all. I didn't choose to be me. It was God who decided what gift I should have in the Body of Christ and what I should be. On what ground did he decide it? He decided it 'as he chose'. It dawned on me then that Billy Graham himself couldn't do more than exercise his God-given gifts to please God. And whatever gift you have, my dear brothers and sisters, that's what you can do too. You are what he decided you shall be. The archangel himself has no bigger office than to please God, and it pleases God that you are the member he has made you. What bigger ambition could you have? It follows therefore that other spectacular gifts, as we may count them, in the Body, cannot say to you, 'I have no need of you.'

In my darker moments that comforts me, when I give way to inferiority complexes and think of myself as a little worm and all those things. Perhaps you don't know that feeling. When I say to myself, 'not even the Apostle Paul could turn round and say, "I don't need Gooding"', I smile all over my face. Paul has great knowledge, and yet he can't do without me; nor will he for all eternity, I might say. The wonder is not that you've got a gift: the wonder is that you're in the Body of Christ at all. There by divine appointment, to serve God as it has pleased him.

Just as it is in the human body, so it ought to be in the Body of Christ, 'that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together' (vv. 25–26). They have no choice, do they, because they're in one body with the same nervous system? It is true that sometimes the grit of unpolished personalities get in the way, and we're not yet what we should be. Instead of one member suffering and all suffering with it, sometimes we cause suffering to the other members. God help me, lest this very topic of gifts in the church leads to division and hurting of the Body.

vv. 27–31—Some gifts are greater¹

Paul indicates the sheer practical fact that some gifts are greater than others, which is true also of the human body. Cut off my foot, and I would hobble along as best I could without it. If you cut out my eyes I should find life more difficult; but if you cut out my heart or my brain, I should die. Some members of the human body are greater than others, and so it is in the Body of Christ. Paul indicates, therefore, that we are to seek the greater gifts, and he will tell us in chapter 14 what makes them greater, and how to measure comparative greatness. Before he does that, he says, 'But earnestly desire the higher [greater] gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way' (v. 31).

So much then for our first study, and we've heard enough to think and ponder and digest and to worship and pray that these realities may be implanted in our minds, our hearts and in the depths of our souls, to conform our spirits to the Spirit of God.

¹ For continuity, this last section has been taken from the early part of the next talk.

The Purpose of Gifts

1 Corinthians 14

Introduction

This morning we were considering together the wonderful entity that is the Body of Christ, and Scripture was reminding each one of us that membership of the Body of Christ is an integral part of our salvation. We no more merit being in the Body of Christ than we merit the forgiveness of our sins. Membership of the Body of Christ is given to us by the grand mercies of God and the saving work of our blessed Lord.

This afternoon we must give ourselves to some hard, rigorous thinking, as the Holy Spirit invites us to think with him through the practical implications of our being members of the Body of Christ. This session has to be shorter than our first one and therefore I shall not read the passage of Scripture but refer to each verse as we come to it. I'm delighted to see that you all have your Bibles open in front of you.

I'm encouraged by the advice, indeed the command, given to us by the Holy Spirit: 'Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking [intellect] be mature' (1 Cor 14:20). We shall come across it later in detail. Says the ancient Scripture, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might' (Deut 6:5), but we are also to love the Lord our God with all our mind [intellect] (see Matt 22:37).

It is a false idea that, to be spiritually minded, one must go easy on the intellect. God the Holy Spirit was involved in our physical creation, and he gave us intellects to use. The capacity varies between one and another, but we are responsible to use what intellect we have for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. When it comes to intellect, the Holy Spirit urges us to be adult, and nowhere more do we need to use our intellect than when it comes to thinking through our actual use of the gifts that God has given to us.

The use of gift should be motivated by love for others

In chapter 12 we were told that every member of the Body is necessary and we must not say of any member, 'I have no need of you.' Every gift is necessary. That is true of the human body physically; every member is necessary for the complete health and activity of the body. So it is with the Body of Christ.² At the end of the chapter Paul indicates the sheer practical fact that some gifts are greater than others, but before discussing what he means by 'greater'

² The section that is in the recording here has been included at the end of the previous talk.

he introduces chapter 13 to tell us of this *more excellent way*. We shall reserve that chapter to our third session, but we can pick out at once its motive.

In the seeking and exercising of gift, there is only one acceptable motive and that is love. Paul makes it evident that love is not love of myself; it is love of my fellow Christians, fellow members of the Body. If my quest for gift is genuine, then love will drive it, and my question to myself will be, 'How will this gift benefit others?' When it comes to the use of gift in the meetings of the church, this must predominate, and the use of gift in the church is altogether banned by the Holy Spirit, unless it is motivated by love.

Paul says, 'The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself' (14:4). The use of the gift of tongues can edify the user. There's nothing wrong in that, but if you're talking about activity in the church, then my own edification is not the acceptable motivation. The only use of gift in the church that is acceptable to God is that which is motivated by love for the other person.

I don't need the gift of an evangelist to believe the gospel and be saved. The only reason I would need the gift of an evangelist is so that God might use me to the salvation of others. I don't need to be a teacher in order to profit from the study of Scripture. The only reason I need the gift of teaching is that God would use me to teach others. The motivation that controls us must invariably be love, that is, love of others.

vv. 1-4—Working out the logic of love

So now we go on to chapter 14, to see the Holy Spirit work out the logic of love in our use of gifts in the church. 'Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy' (v. 1). Why rather prophesy? He goes on to explain, 'For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God' (v. 2).

You say, 'But that's a preferable thing to do, surely? Come, come, Mr Lecturer, do be careful. Surely it's more important to speak to God than to other people?'

But wait a minute, look at the rest:

for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.
(vv. 2-3)

I would point out to you that God needs none of those three things. By definition he doesn't need upbuilding and encouragement and consolation, but my fellow brothers and sisters do and I'm to remember that in the church. Why the preference for prophecy and speaking forth the word of God? Because it brings edification, comfort and consolation to the other members of the church. That's why it's greater. It is not our preference, it's God's command: 'But earnestly desire the higher gifts' (12:31). To emphasize the point he's making, Paul adds, 'The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church' (14:4). Given the option, which would you choose: to edify yourself or to edify the church? Love doesn't hesitate to answer; it must be to edify the church.

If you came to my study and you should catch me by myself, you should hear the sermons I preach. They're marvellous sermons, but I'm preaching to myself. I'm saying, 'Gooding, do you see that? Oh, how wonderful that verse of Scripture is,' and I might be inclined to dance for joy.

And if you say, 'Well, Gooding, we heard you muttering up there in your study. What on earth were you doing?'

I would say, 'I was preaching a bit.'

'To whom?'

'To myself.'

You'd say, 'Are you feeling well?'

I'm edifying myself, but I'm not to do that kind of thing in the church. I must be aiming to edify others and to teach the word. Let an old, old teacher tell you that to teach the word just to show off how much knowledge you've got is contrary to the basic principle of true Christianity. Love says I must teach to edify others, not because I enjoy it.

vv. 5-17—The better gifts and how to use them

And so, using a Hebrew idiom, Paul says, 'Now I want you all to speak in tongues, *but even more* to prophesy' (v. 5). That's a Hebrew way for expressing a preference for one thing beyond another—A is all right, but B is better. And what is the better thing?

The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up. Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? (vv. 5-6)

Unless I convey these spiritual benefits I'm not profiting you and I mustn't do it. Conveying an understandable message must be the rule. This is not me giving my preference; it is the Holy Spirit expressing his Lordship in the church to tell us how we must use the gifts he has given us.

But if I must thus convey a revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching, what are the practical guidelines for doing so? Paul is going to talk about a message that we convey by speaking, and so first he concentrates our attention on what you might call the *transmitter* and the rules that apply to the transmitter, and then he will turn to the rules that apply to the *receiver*. If a radio station is going to convey a message, then it must come clearly out of the transmitter. But not only must it come clearly out of the transmitter, it must be intelligible to the receiver. Both things are important.

If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. (vv. 7-9)

The transmitter of the message

So now the rules relating to the transmitter, the one from whom the message comes. 'If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played?' (v. 7). We can take an example from the military. In the ancient world, before we had computers and all this kind of stuff, the Army used bugles for communication. In the thrust and pandemonium of a battle, a man's voice could scarcely be heard, so they would use a trumpet to indicate advance or retreat. But though, in a sense, they were just sounds, they weren't just mumbo jumbo sounds. They had to convey a very distinct message. Sound isn't language. Language is a very carefully ordered systematic series of sounds, so organized as to carry a message. The trumpeter had to be an expert at his job, for if the sound coming out of the bugle was all confused and mumbo jumbo, the Army wouldn't know whether it meant retreat or advance.

Even that little ditty that we used to mimic as schoolboys, 'Come to the cookhouse door, boys, come to the cookhouse door'.³ A simple enough message and often well received. It had to be a very recognizable tune; not any old tune or noise, like the creaking of a barn door at random. It had to be the very careful transmission of a deliberate system of sounds, devised to convey a message. When soldiers gather round a fallen comrade and play *The Last Post*, that is not an unintelligible procession of sounds. Everyone knows what it means when that solemn farewell is sounded.

When it comes to speaking in the church then, from the transmitter's point of view it must be carefully arranged to deliberately convey a message. Otherwise, it does no good.

The receiver of the message

The transmitter could be in order and transmitting a very carefully arranged message that other people could understand, but the receptor has to be capable of taking in the received message.

Suppose you come to my church and you stand up to exhort us in impeccable Japanese. It's quite clear to any Japanese people present what you are saying, and it's a beautiful language. But I'll give you advance warning, we're not Japanese and we don't understand Japanese. It's no good you getting up and speaking beautiful Japanese, so well ordered and crystal clear, if we don't understand Japanese. For the message to come home, it must not only be in a well ordered language, it must be in a language that the recipients understand. So the Holy Spirit is saying through Paul that, when you are speaking in the church, this is what is required if you love your brothers and sisters.

It's not about oratory

I haven't forgotten what Paul said in chapters 1 and 2. 'When I came unto you, I didn't come with artistic rhetoric, "with words of eloquent wisdom"' (1:17). The Greeks liked rhetoricians and orators. They wanted entertainment, and they would gather in the great amphitheatres, sitting on stone seats all day long listening to a succession of orators holding forth in their

³ The Army bugle call for the Orderly Men from each barrack room to report to the cookhouse to draw rations.

typically Greek sophisticated way. They could convince you of anything. In the morning one speaker would convince you that something was black, and in the afternoon he would show his cleverness by convincing you that it was white. It got the Greeks confused, and the Romans even more, but they loved the sound of the wonderful rhetoric. That's why some of the Christians admired Apollos, because he was an orator. Like I heard one woman say, 'The preacher was marvellous. He said *Mesopotamia* so beautifully.'

Paul didn't covet that kind of oratory. Read his Epistles and you'll find that, according to the rules of Greek, the syntax is rather broken sometimes. He's not talking about polished rhetoric but his message is clear, and if he preached to you you'd understand what he was getting at before he'd finished. He preached the message of the cross, which is divine wisdom to those who are growing up in Christ (see 1:23–24).

In the church someone must interpret/translate what is said in a tongue

So, the transmitter must be clear and the message it emits must be understandable by the audience. Paul sums it up: 'So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret' (14:12–13).

I am not aware what Bible versions you are using and whether they use the verb *translate* or the verb *interpret*. In English these two words can sometimes be used in the same sense. If you are speaking to a foreign audience and you don't know their language, then they will provide you with what they call an interpreter. That person is there to translate what you say—though in my experience some interpreters, when they don't know what you say, make up their own interpretation, and that can be great fun sometimes for them. However, in that sense, the word 'interpreter' means a translator.

Later in the chapter Paul says, 'If any speak in a tongue . . . let someone interpret' (v. 27). What is the Holy Spirit saying here? The one who speaks in a tongue must have a—what? I submit my judgment to you; I think what the Holy Spirit means here is, he must have a *translator*. I'm told that sometimes when someone speaks in a tongue and there is an interpreter, if he's asked has he understood the message that he's been given to translate, he could say 'no'; he's now speaking a message which he feels the Holy Spirit has given to him. That's not translation, is it? It's another message. How would you know if it was true to the original message? Well, you wouldn't know. Therefore, if the business of speaking in tongues is to be effective, I judge that what Paul says here is that there must be a translator who understands what is said and translates it. Why is that necessary? 'For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind [understanding KJV] is unfruitful' (v. 14).

Notice the distinction the Holy Spirit makes between a man's spirit praying—'my *spirit*', says Paul, and his intellect—'my *mind* is unfruitful.' What should we draw from that? Should we say, 'Yes, it's good to speak with the understanding and the intellect, but wouldn't it be far better to speak with one's spirit'?

Oh, but wait a minute. The Holy Spirit says the opposite:

I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can

anyone in the position of an outsider say 'Amen' to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? (vv. 15–16)

Paul says, 'I will pray and sing with my spirit, but, *in addition and as well*, I will pray and sing with my understanding also.' Notice that. Then he says, '*Otherwise*, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" at my giving of thanks, if he doesn't know what I'm saying?'

Saying the Amen at the end of a prayer that someone else has said in public is, of course, a serious business. It's not just a reflex action; it means that you are in agreement with what they say. Saying the Amen before God is a delightful thing. I know preachers who wish there was more of it.

You say, 'How do you know that?'

Well, I am one! Saying Amen means, 'Before God, I approve of this.' Therefore, it demands that you understand what has been said. If the man has spoken in a tongue and you don't know what he has said, how shall you say Amen? You wouldn't know what you were saying Amen to.

Somebody says, 'Yes, but you're forgetting that if I pray with my spirit in an unknown tongue—unknown, that is, to the audience—they will be edified.'

'No, they won't,' says the Holy Spirit, and we need to face this.

It's no good saying, 'The Spirit was so present there was some kind of osmosis and, although the people didn't understand, they were edified.'

'No,' says the Spirit. 'For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up' (v. 17). If love dictates that what we say and do must be for the edification of others, then I must not speak in church in a language that the others do not understand, and I must not pray in a language that the others do not understand, because they will not be edified by it.

vv. 18–19—Getting the proportions right

Paul has said that some gifts are greater than others. What kind of greatness, and what is the proportionate difference?

I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. (vv. 18–19)

Five words in a language they know is worth more than ten thousand words in a language they don't know. This is the Apostle Paul, who tells us that he spoke with tongues more than all. Here is practical, spiritual sense, and love is practical. We must get our proportions right, therefore.

vv. 20–25—Intelligent use of gifts

And so he comes to verse 20: 'Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.' Intellect without spirit is barren indeed; but spirit without

intellect is not an advantage in the church. My dear brothers and sisters, because I am an academic by profession, I fear that, as you hear me say these things, you will say, 'Well, he would say that, wouldn't he?' I therefore remind us all that these are the words and commands and assessments of the Holy Spirit, who is the giver of gifts: 'Do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.'

Tongues are a sign for unbelievers and prophecy is a sign for believers

In the verses that follow, Paul particularly asks them to think through the spiritual tactics, to understand what the point of gifts is and to use them intelligently, according to their basic intention. I know that there can be some overlap in the use of gifts. A teacher is not necessarily an evangelist, but, in teaching the word, very often a teacher is expounding the gospel. It might need an evangelistic approach and methods of communication to get that message really through to the hearts and minds of the congregation. So there can be some overlap.

In the Law it is written, 'By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.' (v. 21)

Paul is quoting from the Old Testament's observation on the use of different languages. God is speaking to Israel in the time of their apostasy: 'For by people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue the LORD will speak to this people' (Isa 28:11). In the context, he's referring to the Assyrians, who came up with their foreign language that Jews couldn't understand, and they were God's judgment upon Israel. The foreign tongues that they heard around them were meant to be a warning to Israel, 'yet they would not hear' (v. 12).

Paul draws the analogy, 'Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers' (1 Cor 14:22). Taking it in its double historical context, it was to apostate Israel that God brought up the Assyrians to speak in their foreign tongues a warning that judgment was near. And when, on the day of Pentecost, Peter and his fellow believers spoke in different tongues that they had never themselves learnt, members of the great crowd that stood around them found that they were the tongues of their birth countries (see Acts 2:6-11). One apostle was maybe speaking in Parthian, though it was evident the apostle didn't know Parthian himself. But he was speaking in Parthian and they understood, and similarly with the other languages.

Then Peter stood out to explain this phenomenon.

But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, . . .' (vv. 16-17)

Then he goes on to speak of what would happen subsequently:

'And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.' (vv. 19-20)

You will notice the reference to the coming judgment. It was a solemn occasion as Israel stood before him on the day of Pentecost. They had murdered the very Christ of God (v. 23). You could not imagine a bigger feat of rebellion than what Israel officially had done through her rulers. What must inevitably be the result? Peter picks up the warning of the prophet, that 'that great and notable day of the Lord [shall] come' (v. 20 KJV). As a warning therefore, the believers are empowered to speak in these foreign languages. It was a mercy and yet a warning to the Jews from many countries, who spoke these different languages. They could see it in front of their eyes, and realized that it was a miracle, 'we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God' (v. 11).

When Peter explained that this was the Holy Spirit poured out by the Lord Jesus, whom they had crucified, many in Israel were cut to the very heart (v. 37). What a solemn occasion it was to stand there in the crowd, knowing that fifty days before they had shouted in this very city centre 'away with him, crucify him!' (John 19:15). Now they had evidence in front of their very eyes that the one they had crucified was the Christ of God, and God had made him both Lord and Christ. Being convicted that Jesus was in fact the Messiah, they cried out, 'What shall we do?' and Peter told them what they would do. They would repent and show evidence of their repentance by being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Publicly they had shouted for his condemnation. Now, if they did repent, publicly they would be baptized in the name of Jesus to show that their repentance was genuine. Quoting from Joel 2, Peter was warning them that they'd better start repenting because the day of the Lord was coming when God would deal with a nation and a world that had crucified his dear Son.

Tongues, therefore, were a sign; 'but even so', said the prophet, 'they will not repent'. We know what happened to the rulers in Israel. They did not repent. Thousands of ordinary folks and some of the priests got converted, but the rulers maintained their opposition to Christ and forty years later God allowed their city of Jerusalem to be destroyed.

So Paul says, 'tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers' (1 Cor 14:22). He imagines a day when the church has met for edification and comfort and consolation, and so forth. A Greek, walking in the city, sees this place where the Christians meet and perhaps overhears their singing. He wonders what these curious people do inside these doors and decides to go in and see. Being a Greek himself, he speaks Greek, and he knows that all the Christians present there are Greeks too and speak Greek. When he gets in, however, they're not speaking Greek, they're speaking in what sounds like curious foreign languages or something. Then he perceives that a lot of them don't themselves understand what is being said. What does he conclude? He says they are *bonkers*. The word in Greek is a very serious word. It can mean to be out of your mind, or it can mean demon-possessed, for in Greek mysticism a sign of being possessed by a god was that you went temporarily out of your mind.

So, the Greek comes in and someone is prophesying, not just that it's going rain tomorrow or something like that, but a word from God. Perhaps it's an interpretation of Scripture, not just as mere theory or theology but coming home to the heart with power from the living Holy Spirit. He understands what the Holy Spirit is saying to him and, 'falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you' (v. 25).

'I plead with you,' says Paul, 'do be grown up in your intellect. Seek with God what the purpose of his gifts is, and if you use those gifts intelligently for the purpose for which they were given, all will be edified.'

vv. 26–40—Orderly worship

The rest of this chapter is given over to very practical implications for the ordering of speaking in the church, but it seems to me that their meaning is self-evident.⁴ I have emphasized what I think is the major point of this passage of Scripture. It is that, in seeking and exercising gifts in the church, we must be motivated by love; not love of self, but love of others. We must therefore give special attention to this, and what we say must itself be clear and in a language that is understood by the people who listen.

The same ruling applies to our praying, as well as to our preaching and teaching. Yes, we are to pray in the Spirit. May God save us from dry as dust, mere theological theorizing. We are dependent upon the Spirit, let us be moved in spirit ourselves; but let us be sure that in the church it is not just the spirit, but the Holy Spirit using the intellect, the mind, of those whom he directs to speak.

Lest I should be misunderstood, I have freely used the word 'intellect', and I mean it simply in its older sense and not only those who are called *intellectuals* these days. When people call you an intellectual, they're not necessarily meaning it as a compliment, are they? I am not talking about specialized academic intellectuals, or something. I'm talking about the brain, and I thought intellect was a better word to use than brain. Of course, in having brains, we thereby have intellects. It's using what brains, what thinking powers, God has given to us.

I'm not going to insult you, but one day God used a donkey to speak to Balaam. Instead of its usual 'hee-haw', which could mean anything, the donkey was empowered to speak a language that Balaam understood. It was only a short message, but Balaam got the point.

'I'd rather speak five words in a known language,' says Paul, 'than ten thousand in a language people do not understand.'

So may God bless his word to our hearts.

Shall we pray.

And now, Father, as we have read thy word and sought to understand the Holy Spirit's teaching, in all humility we bow before thee. Forgive, if we have said anything amiss or with wrong emphasis. Be pleased in thy kind perseverance to teach us ever more fully, and grant us powers to understand ever more clearly the wonderful gifts thou hast given to thy people. Help us to use the gift thou hast given us, whatever it may be, to the glory of the Saviour and to the edification of the church.

So bless our study, we pray, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

⁴ For vv. 33–37 see 1co.008 *Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 34–41.

The Motivation for the Use of Gifts

1 Corinthians 13

Introduction

A week or so ago, when I enquired of the organizers of this conference, it was pointed out to me that the three sessions were like the phases of the moon: the first one was a full hour, the second one diminished, and the third has come to small proportions. So, just let us recap for a moment what we have studied so far.

In Chapter 12 we heard Paul talk about the gifts of the Spirit, and from the start he emphasized their diversity saying that the diversity of gift is a reflection of the diversity of the persons in the Godhead. But, just as the persons in the Godhead are distinct and yet are one God, so the gifts in the Body of Christ are diverse and yet there is only one Body. And because there is but one Body, it is necessary that the gifts in the Body should be many and not just one or two. A body that was composed of one member only would not be a body, and if one member predominated over all others it would be grotesque.

That being so, we reminded ourselves again of how we enter the Body of Christ. We don't qualify for that entry by having a special gift; we enter by the grace and mercies of God, through the salvation that is in Jesus Christ our Lord. When we come in repentance and faith to him as our Saviour he baptizes us into the Spirit and makes us to drink of the Spirit. Being in the Body of Christ therefore, is an integral part of salvation and not something that is added on as a deluxe edition.

In chapter 14 we heard the Holy Spirit exhort and instruct us as to how we are to use our gifts in the church, as distinct from using them at home or elsewhere. The preeminent rule was laid down, that, in our seeking of gift and in exercising it, the only acceptable motive is love. Since that love means not love of ourselves, but love of others, love insists that when we exercise our gift in the church it shall be to the spiritual benefit of others. Therefore, if the exercise of gift in the church is not aimed at the benefit, the spiritual edification, comfort and consolation of the other believers, it is by that definition outlawed. It mustn't be done in the church. It is an offence against love, and we sought to gather the practical implications of that by following the detailed argument of 1 Corinthians 14.

But now we revert to what is possibly the most important of all three chapters, the link chapter between chapters 12 and 14. As Paul finishes chapter 12 he reminds the believers that, though all gifts and all members of the Body are necessary, some gifts are greater than others, and the measure of greatness is determined by the public edification that such gifts

produce. To put it in plain practical terms, when we exercise our gifts in the church, the Holy Spirit will ask, 'What use is it? What spiritual benefit does it convey?'

So now let us go through chapter 13 together, for Paul tells us, 'Yes, seek the greater gifts, but follow after love.'

vv. 1-3—The futility of the use of gift not motivated by love

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (vv. 1-3)

It's making a lot of noise, but empty and profitless noise. Notice the difference of phraseology. The first verse said that if I do these things without love I'm just empty noise, but the second one doesn't say that if I do these things it's empty. If I do remove mountains by my faith that is something, isn't it? Paul reminds us that if we have faith, so we can remove mountains, but have not love, we are ourselves nothing; we count for nothing in the order of gifts. In the third verse he doesn't say that other people do not profit. If I give my money or clothes to someone who is impoverished, even if I do it without love it is of some benefit to those who receive it. But in God's calculus it does me no good, 'I gain nothing'.

vv. 4-7—The characteristics of love

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (vv. 4-7)

I would fear to comment on them, and certainly to preach them to you. First of all, I should need to consider whether I myself am marked by these things, and you may likewise care to consider yourself as we read them.

vv. 8-9—The permanence of love

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. (v. 8)

These verses now contrast the *permanence* of love with the *transience* of the gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge, and Paul specifies the differences. Presumably in this context he is speaking of the gift of prophecy in believers, and the gift of knowledge in the sense of special knowledge that is given to some.

v. 10—The amount of knowledge

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. (vv. 9–10)

Paul is talking here about the amount of knowledge that we have now, as distinct from ‘when the perfect comes’. A lamp is useful in the dark, but when the sun rises its little light is merged and becomes indistinguishable from the light of the sun. The question is of the amount of light; so here it is the amount of knowledge compared with ‘when that which is perfect is come’ (KJV).

v. 11—The mode of thinking

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. (v. 11)

Here it is the mode of thinking and seeing and perceiving; not so much the amount of knowledge. Have you ever heard a little boy come from school and he tells his mum and dad that there’s a lovely little girl called Mary in his class and he’s going to marry Mary? And the parents nod wisely and they say, ‘That’s a nice idea, Johnny.’ Well of course, what Johnny thinks about marrying and what the reality is are two rather different things. He’s speaking as a child. He knows that there’s something about marriage; he knows his mum and dad are married, so he’s thinking of marrying Mary. But his mode of thinking, his mode of perception, is rather limited compared with what it will be when he becomes a grown-up man.

Metaphors

I do love those metaphors of Scripture that describe eternity and the glorious eternal city. I believe them, for they’re God-given and I learn to be content with them. I can trust them, but I realize they are metaphors. ‘He that sat upon the throne . . .’—this is a simile—‘was *like* this’, ‘was *as* that’. I perceive that these are similes or metaphors. I look forward to seeing the reality of what it will be ‘to dwell above, and with the Lord of glory reign’⁵, but for the moment I must be content to know that my perception is limited. When we see him the knowledge we have now will not be proved false; it will disappear in the brilliance of adulthood and seeing the Lord face to face. When I became a man, therefore, I put away childish things.

v. 12—The medium of our seeing and knowing

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (v. 12)

⁵ Joseph Swain (1761-1796).

First he says, 'We now see in a mirror dimly [darkly, KJV].' The English word 'darkly', which translates the Greek *en ainigmati*, means an *enigma*, a *riddle*. A riddle has to be interpreted, so, 'seeing in a mirror dimly' is different from seeing directly 'face to face' and 'knowing fully, even as I have been fully known'.

What does 'the perfect' mean?

So there is a distinction between the transience of the gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge, and what is here described as 'the perfect' (v. 10). But we know that, when it comes to understanding what Paul means, Christians have differed, and I shall put before you two of those interpretations.

I want to say that both views are held by godly men and women, whose motives are to understand what the Holy Spirit is saying and let it govern their behaviour. If you find that you disagree with me, I hope you'll love me still, even if you never invite me to come again, and I shall try to love you just as much as I did before. Let us not divide the Body of Christ by our variance of understanding in verses like this. Since differences of opinion on this matter will govern practice in the churches, let us respect the good faith of our fellow believers and be careful with their consciences.

1. The completion of the risen Lord's revelation of his truth through the Holy Spirit

In favour of that view, you could quote what our Lord said to the apostles about the coming of the Holy Spirit.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (John 16:13)

According to our Lord's promise the Holy Spirit came, and one of his functions was to guide believers into all the truth. Hence the authority behind our New Testament Epistles and behind the ongoing revelation to and through the apostles of the whole truth of God.

In this view, when Paul was writing 1 Corinthians that 'guiding of the church into all the truth' was not yet complete. Hence the need for the *special* gifts: the gift of knowledge, the gift of prophecy, the gift of tongues and the sign gifts of miracles and healings. According to this view, when the revelation of truth was finally complete and the faith was 'once for all delivered to the saints' (see Jude v. 3), the need for these temporary gifts ceased and they were no longer available to the church. When Jude appeals to the Christians 'to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints', he seems to indicate that, by the time he wrote his letter, the church had the complete revelation of the truth that our Lord promised the Holy Spirit would bring to them.

The implication of view number one, therefore, is that once this revelation, the Holy Spirit's guidance into all truth, was accomplished, and the faith was once and for all delivered to the saints, temporary gifts would cease.

Of course, the giving of that truth is one thing, the spread of it throughout the world is another. There are parts of this world where the gospel has gone to, and as yet the believers do not possess a complete New Testament. They're very fortunate if they have just one

Gospel, and, although the truth has once and for all been delivered to the saints as a matter of objective fact, it wouldn't be true to say that all believers everywhere have the full record of that complete objective truth.

That is one view. I emphasize that it is held by godly men and women seeking to understand Scripture as exactly as they can and acting upon it.

2. *The Lord's coming*

There are several smaller views, but the other main one is that the 'the perfect', 'seeing face to face' and 'knowing fully as we are fully known', refer to the Lord's coming, 'when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2). You are all agog to know which view I espouse. I daren't not tell you, hence my elaborate preamble to avoid the slings and arrows from opposing interpreters.

I believe that it refers to what shall happen when the Lord comes. One of the considerations that moves me in that interpretation is this. When Paul sat down and penned 1 Corinthians, how much did he know? He knew all about justification by faith. Surely he did, he had written Romans, perhaps when he was in Corinth. He already knew the truth of Galatians. He knew the truth of Thessalonians: he had preached it in Thessalonica before he left, and in his letter he reminds them of what he taught them when he was with them. True, he hadn't yet been imprisoned, so he hadn't written the *Prison Epistles*, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, nor the *Pastoral Epistles*, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.

Now I ask a question. Comparing what Paul knew when he was at Corinth with what he would know when the whole New Testament was complete, would it be good to say that when he was in Corinth he was thinking like a child—he only thought childish things? That if only he had had Philippians, Ephesians and Colossians, he would have been a grown-up man? I personally find that view very difficult to accept, but I've been honest and told you what I believe.

These are things for us to think about seriously and patiently with one another. I rejoice, particularly with my viewpoint, but it's true whatever yours may be, that one day we shall see the Lord, and when we see him we shall be like him. What glory and rapture that will be!

v. 13—Faith, hope and love

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (v. 13)

How long will love last?

Paul ends his chapter with these words, and opinions differ, as they so often do, on what he means by the verb 'abide'. 'So now . . . abide . . .' Does it mean just now, at this present time, and love will last until the Lord comes, even though prophecies, tongues and miracles have ceased (see v. 8)? Does he mean that? Hardly, for love is of God and it shall *abide* for all eternity, shall it not?

What about faith and hope?

Now I must be very careful, because if I get this wrong it won't just be slings and arrows that come at me! Do the faith and hope abide only while we are yet here on earth?

Hope

Says Paul, 'For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?' (Rom 8:24). We are looking forward with ever increasing hope to what we shall have when the Lord comes.

So hope won't exist in heaven? Oh, if you say that, you'll disappoint me, but never mind, my disappointment is not an important thing.

Faith

You say, 'My dear good preacher, we shan't need faith in heaven. I mean, we walk now by faith and not by sight, but when we see the Lord we shall be like him, and we shan't need faith any more when we get home to glory.'

It's a marvellous observation, isn't it? But are you sure you'll not need faith when you get home to glory? I don't want to pry too deeply into your hearts, but when you're in heaven and the Lord tells you something about what the Father has decreed for the next five million years, will you be at liberty to say, 'Well, that's what you say, Lord, but can I trust that?', or will you still have to go on believing him? What would you say about that?

'Lord, I've trusted you all my life and you maintained my faith through thick and thin. I'm in heaven now, and I don't need faith any more?'

Really? In order to refine our faith God allows all kinds of circumstances in our lives, because for him it is as gold.

you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 1:6–7)

Because our faith is so important, God allows suffering to remove the dross. When the irrelevant excitement and all the second-handedness is removed at the cost of much suffering on our part and some on his, and what is left is real, personal and unalloyed faith, will God take that gold of faith and throw it into oblivion forever?

Though in one sense we shall no longer walk simply by faith but will see many things, I think it is more likely that, in his eternal relationship with us, God will use the faith he has perfected in this vale of tears.

You say, 'Well, you might be right, Mr Preacher, but it's very doubtful. I don't think we shall need faith, and we certainly won't need hope. We shall have everything, shan't we?'

Tell me, how long are you proposing to be in heaven? Will you be like God and know everything? Will you be infinite in your knowledge, and fully aware therefore of the 'future' of eternity? By that perversity that I have, I hope not. I want eternity to be typical of God, for God is so big he's always doing the most unexpected things, is he not?

There was a time when he hadn't created the universe, and then he went and created it. What a new thing that was. There was a time when the second person of the Trinity was not

human. Can you really believe it? Do you believe it? In one sense God is changeless in character and never changes, yet in another sense he is so big that he is forever doing new things. What a startlingly new thing it was, when God became human without ceasing to be God. You'll not tie that God down, never to do anything fresh throughout all eternity, will you?

I'm hoping that eternity will be a vast succession of the variegated wisdom of God, with God doing new and wonderful things. If I'm wrong, deal with me gently, but don't remove or undermine my faith or my hope.

Let us conclude now with a brief prayer before we turn to our questions.

Our Father, we thank thee for thy word; for him who is the personal Word of God and for his condescension that he came and spoke our language so that we might know thee. And for these wonders—that we are linked with him and part of his Body and gifted by thy Spirit—we bless thee again. Help us to be thy responsible children, we pray, and to wisely use the precious gifts thou hast given us, with adult thinking and in touch with thy Spirit for the benefit of all the members of the Body of Christ.

And even as we have thought of these things this day and thank thee for the understanding that thou hast given us, we confess our ignorance before thee and pray the gracious teaching of thy Spirit that we might constantly learn further of thy truth, and not become mere frozen relics of the past.

Bless us now, as we turn to discuss with each other the questions that have arisen. Give us wisdom and understanding, we pray, that in all things we may glorify thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Questions

1. If speaking in tongues is one of the gifts of the Spirit, why is it that some people in certain Pentecostal churches speak in tongues and other Bible-believing churches don't believe in this?

DWG: My answers must be short as our time is limited. The short answer is that some Christians believe that the gift of tongues is still available. Some go further than that, and they think that the gift of tongues ought to be used in the church. You have heard my answer to that question already. In the church, there is to be no speaking in tongues unless there is a translation given. And when it comes to desiring gifts, we are to seek the greater gifts.

For my part, that impresses me very strongly and has done for the last forty years. I say this with all Christian charity, I hope. I have not understood why thousands of people have been encouraged to seek tongues, when the Holy Spirit's directive is, 'But earnestly desire the higher gifts' (12:31), which he then explains in chapter 14 to be not tongues, but other gifts.

2. *Would you explain 'For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God' (14:2)?*

DWG: I take Paul to be saying exactly what he says, so that's how I understand it. He's talking, we observe, of speaking in the church, and makes the point that, if there's no translator present, they must not speak in tongues because the rest are not edified by it, and edification is the *indispensable* requirement of speaking in the church. So, if there's no translator present, he speaks to himself and to God, but not to the church as a whole.

3. *Is the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians not given there for today's church?*

DWG: I'm not the sovereign governor of the church. I mean that seriously — the Lord is still sovereign to use what he pleases. I notice that sometimes in countries where they do not have the Bible, for instance, God speaks in visions to those who do not have Scripture.

I would not deny supernaturalism; I believe God can heal supernaturally. But I don't think there is a universal gift that Christians never need to be ill, and if they only had strong enough faith they would always recover. I have witnessed the disastrous undermining of faith that that has caused among true believers who have remained sick, and to the gospel in countries in Eastern Europe, when evangelists say that, if they only had enough faith, everyone would be healed.

I remember a case in Bulgaria, where a paralyzed man propelled himself in a wheelchair for eleven kilometres to come to meetings where it was advertised that everybody would be healed. The preacher said, 'In the name of Christ, rise up and walk.' He gave him a hand and pulled him up and the man stood, but when the preacher let go he collapsed. The atheist press was around them in a minute, asking, 'Why was the man not healed?' The preacher said, 'Because he didn't have enough faith,' and the press said, 'Are you really telling us that a man who propelled himself in a wheelchair for eleven kilometres didn't have enough faith?'

So we must be exceedingly careful. We must not deny supernaturalism on the one hand, but we must, as the Holy Spirit exhorts us, use our minds to understand what is in order and what is profitable.

4. *When Paul spoke in tongues was it different from Acts 2? Did he need an interpreter?*

DWG: I think the prime purpose for the use of tongues as given in the New Testament is such as was manifested on the day of Pentecost. The unconverted crowd could see that it was a miracle, because they could understand the language that was being spoken and were aware that the speakers did not themselves know that language. It was a self-evident miracle and a very powerful use of tongues. I don't say it cynically, but if you have the gift of tongues and can use it in that fashion, there's a big world out there, so use it as much as you can.

'But in the church,' says the Holy Spirit, 'what is its point?' It is useless in the church unless there is an interpreter, a translator. Then why use it? Listen to the exhortation, 'Seek the greater gifts,' and what he means by 'greater' is the Holy Spirit's own interpretation.

5. *You mentioned that God has made this same Jesus both Lord and Christ. Was he not always Lord? Please explain.*

DWG: The second person of the Trinity was always God. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1:1). Don't interpret that sentence as if it means the Word *was* God but isn't any longer. That would be a false emphasis. The emphasis in Greek is that the Word was *God* and nothing less. 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (1:14); he became what he wasn't before, human, but without ceasing to be God. But now Acts is talking about his exaltation, and God has *made* him, that is, *demonstrated* him to be, both Lord and Christ (see 2:36).

In the immediate context, it is by the fact that our blessed Lord poured out the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not so much *stuff*; I say it reverently. The Holy Spirit is the divine third person of the Trinity. If Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit, who must Jesus be? No other than one who is God could do it. In raising him from the dead, seating him at his own right hand, and giving him to pour out the Holy Spirit, God has made him both Lord and Christ—in the sense of demonstrating it to the world. He has given him a name which is above every name (see Phil 2:9).

6. *If the function of tongues is primarily as judgment upon unbelieving Jews, why did Paul wish they all spoke with tongues?*

DWG: 'I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy' (14:5). Paul has a preference and the preference is dictated by the Holy Spirit.

It is not, 'I wish you all spoke with tongues and that you prophesied as well.' It is, 'I wish you could all speak with tongues, *but even more . . .*'. This is a preference, and I suggest we listen to the preference expressed by the Holy Spirit. Why, rather prophesy? Because in prophecy someone speaks to the edification, comfort and consolation of his fellow believers.

7. *Has prophesying ceased? If not, why do we not have it in our churches today?*

DWG: It depends, my good fellow Christian who wrote the question, what you mean by 'prophesying'. To some people, prophecy is prediction, and there was that element in the early church. In Acts we read of a prophet who came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. He predicted that there would be a famine, and as a result the Gentile Christians took up a collection of money to ease the distress of the believers in Judea (Acts 11:27–30). The prophecy therefore was a very helpful prediction in the ancient world, and provoked that response in the believers to help their Jewish fellow believers.

Incidentally, those who claim to be prophets in that sense, and predict the future, will know that it is a serious thing to do. A prophet who predicts the future and his prophecy doesn't come true, the Old Testament has some very severe penalties upon that kind of behaviour. It is not something to be played at irresponsibly. If a prophecy doesn't come true, that prophet, said the Old Testament, must be executed.

But prophecy is more than that, isn't it? 'The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation' (1 Cor 14:3). I think that is exceedingly important. A teacher will teach you the *facts* of doctrine, and very necessary it

is. But it is one thing to expound the facts of Scripture; it is another thing when God uses a servant of his, not simply to increase our knowledge of the facts but to speak to the heart, so that the believer knows, 'God has spoken to me today'.

I have known that kind of ministry happen in a church. Sometimes, unknown to the speaker, the Holy Spirit has laid something upon his heart and it has not only encouraged all the believers, but has spoken with powerful force to somebody there who knows personally that it is of the Lord. I hold that ministry of prophecy to be exceedingly important among the people of God. We must beware of all fanciful imaginations, but in my estimation that is one of the functions of the Holy Spirit's gift to the church in this present time. When I say that, let me add another thing.

At the end of 1 Corinthians 14 Paul says, 'Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh [judge] what is said' (v. 29). Sometimes I have been led to question my dear friends who advocate tongues and prophecy, and I say to them that we're told to judge. That is, in a friendly way, to criticize. Sometimes they respond and say that I should accept it as the message of the Holy Spirit.

So I reply, 'I am charismatic.'

They say, 'What do you mean, you're charismatic?'

'Well, 1 Corinthians 12 says that all these *charismata* are of the Holy Spirit, and one of them is teaching (v. 28). I think, if I'm anything, that I'm a teacher, and therefore I'm charismatic.'

They say to me, 'No, you're not.'

They have the notion that straight teaching is not somehow charismatic. But it is one of the gifts, and I am in that sense *charismatic*.

Let us not get these things out of proportion, and my point in mentioning that is this. When I stand up and dare to teach in the company of my fellow believers, no one should ever say, 'Gooding said it, so it must be true.' Woe betide them if they take that attitude. You have to criticize what I say. Not in a carnal way, but you have to judge what I say by taking it once more to holy Scripture. 'Well, that bit he said was self-evidently of the Scriptures, but that other thing was very doubtful.' You must judge it, and you must judge the other gifts too. Just because someone says it's a prophecy, it doesn't mean that they are exempt from being examined very closely. We are to do it, says the Holy Spirit.

8. If interpretation of tongues is translation, then how is it a supernatural gift? Is it a supernatural understanding of a language you don't know?

DWG: It could be that, I imagine. What I'm stressing is that it must be a translation of what was originally said and not a different message altogether. We have heard, haven't we, of instances where people have given a message in a tongue and it's been recorded, and then someone has taken the recording and played it back to someone who professed to have the gift of interpretation, and they have given one interpretation? They've then taken it to another person who professes to have the gift of interpretation and they've given a completely different interpretation, and so with a third. Some people say, 'Serves them right. They oughtn't to have been so carnal as to do that.'

But the Holy Spirit says we have to judge even that; and it can't have been the original message translated, if the result is three different messages. So, once more, the Holy Spirit says, 'In malice be infants, but in intellect be grown-up men' (see 1 Cor 14:20). You must test the gifts.

9. *In the church today, have believers the right to be sick, that is, depressed? How do we, as brothers and sisters, treat such incidents?*

DWG: My dear fellow believer, I wouldn't say that you have a *right* to be depressed, strictly speaking, but I think I know what you mean. Can a genuine believer suffer depression and still regard himself as a believer? And my answer is a wholehearted, 'Yes, of course.' When our brains go a bit wonky it doesn't prove we are not believers, any more than a stomach ache does.

We must be realistic. 'Our outer self is wasting away' (2 Cor 4:16)—it is subject to the frailty of the body. It is a sad misinterpretation of Scripture to tell people that if only they had strong enough faith they would never be ill and they oughtn't to be depressed, because that shows their faith isn't very strong and they're scarcely believers. I personally have had to deal with people like that. What a sorry thing it is. The Lord comes near to comfort and to help, and we need to support them and to confirm their faith so that the Lord may bring them through.

Have you a right to be depressed? Well, in that sense, yes. Does it mean that if you're depressed you're not a Christian? Certainly not.

I sat in a car once with a dear believer who had been diagnosed with brain cancer. His brain had been opened and they'd taken away what they could of the cancer. He had been told that if he had enough faith God would heal him. He told me this in the car as we motored back after a conference one day.

He said, 'David, what do you think of it?'

I said, 'My dear good friend, (calling him by name), I believe God heals diseases, for he has made our bodies so they can heal. If we didn't have such a system in the body, we never would heal of anything, and when we heal it is God who heals us.'

As the old Latins used to say, 'The doctor treats you; it's God who heals you.'

I said, 'I do believe that God sometimes, in answer to prayer, will intervene miraculously and heal. But I don't believe that it is in *redemption*, in the sense that when we get ill we can claim to be healed because Christ died for us at Calvary. If you say you're not healed because you don't have enough faith, are you telling me that, because my faith is sometimes a bit wonky, I don't have eternal life either, and if only I had a bit more faith I would get salvation? You don't tell me that, do you?' So I told him what I felt.

'David,' he said, 'you're telling me what I don't want to hear.'

We parted company at Heathrow and presently I got a letter in big handwriting: 'Miracle, the Lord has healed me and I thank God for it.'

A few more months passed and I got a letter from his widow. She said, 'David, I feel like somebody who has been led up a mountain by a guide, and after a painful ascent at last I've reached the summit only to find before me a gaping hole, and when I look round the guide has gone.'

We need to get these things right, don't we? Instead of bolstering his faith to endure what the Lord might have allowed, they nearly destroyed his wife's faith by holding out promises that were not according to Scripture.

10. If the church began at Pentecost, why did Christ speak of the church in Matthew 16:18?

DWG: Because he said, 'I will build my church,' not, 'I am building it.' He was prophesying what he would do in the future.

The gift of the Holy Spirit himself who works in our hearts

So may God bless us now, and as I close I would remind you, not now of the gifts of the Spirit, but the gift of the Spirit himself. Let us not be so concerned with the gifts of the Spirit that we forget about the gift of the Spirit and his ongoing work in our hearts.

Paul prays that '[God] may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that . . . you, being rooted and grounded in love, may . . . know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge' (Eph 3:16–19).

So may it be for each one of us. If I'm going to use my gift aright, I shall constantly and daily need the work of the Holy Spirit himself in my heart, strengthening me by 'a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of [Christ], so that I might come to see what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead' (see Eph 1:17–20).

May God bless us one and all, for Christ's name's sake. Amen.

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING (1925-2019) was Professor of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.