

Ecclesiology

Semester 2 – Topic 5 – Spiritual Gifts

Randy Thompson
Valley Bible Church
www.valleybible.net

Introduction

There has been much discussion on the subject of spiritual gifts in recent years, particularly on the topic of cessation versus non-cessation of the sign gifts. Teaching on spiritual gifts is extremely popular in churches. There are seminars, videos lectures, guest speakers, and surveys offered in many churches to teach about the gifts and to help you discover what gifts you have. Many churches get so carried away that teaching on spiritual gifts is overemphasized and the pursuit of holiness in one's life is ignored. The Scriptures present clear teachings on spiritual gifts that are important for us to understand if we are to function properly within the body of Christ (see key passages in Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12-14; Eph 4:11; and 1 Pet 4:10).

Definition and Characteristics of Spiritual Gifts

There are several Greek terms used in 1 Corinthians 12:1-7 that refer to spiritual gifts, either the gifts themselves or the characteristics of the gifts.

¹Now concerning **spiritual gifts**, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. ²You know that when you were pagans, *you were* led astray to the mute idols, however you were led. ³Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴Now there are **varieties of gifts**, but the same Spirit. ⁵And there are **varieties of ministries**, and the same Lord. ⁶There are **varieties of effects**, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. ⁷But to each one is given the **manifestation** of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Cor 12:1-7

1. Spiritual *gifts* [pneumatikon] – The term means, “things pertaining to the Spirit”. The word “gifts” is absent in the text, but is given by the context. This speaks of the spiritual ability/giftedness given to believers.
2. Gifts [charisma] – This term means, “grace gifts”. It is simply translated “gifts”, but is built off the Greek term for “grace”, unmerited, undeserved favor. If it is a grace gift, then it is something that cannot be earned or deserved, just freely bestowed.
3. Ministries [diakonia] – The root of this term speaks of service. It is the same basic Greek term as serve, servant, and deacon (one who serves). In this context, it would give the idea of a service-oriented gift.
4. Effects [energeima] – This term means, “what is worked out or energized”. It emphasizes that the one who gives the gifts provides the energy or power to make the gift effective.
5. Manifestation [phanerosis] – This term has the basic idea of making known, making clear or evident. So, spiritual gifts are not hidden or private. Rather they are a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. They put Him on display as He works through the believer's life.

A spiritual gift then is a freely bestowed spiritual ability given to believers by the power of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of service to the body of Christ.

“A spiritual gift, then, is any ability and accompanying spiritual ministry and effect that God, through Christ, enables a believer to use, or motivates him to use, for His glory, in the body of Christ, through the energizing work of the Spirit.” *Spiritual Gifts: Definitions and Kinds* by James F. Stizinger, TMSJ 14/2 (Fall 2003) 143-176

“A spiritual gift is a God-given capacity through which the Holy Spirit supernaturally ministers to the body. ... Your spiritual gift is not cooking -- there are good cooks who don't even know God. It is a human ability. Your gift is not being a violin virtuoso. It is a terrific ability, but not a spiritual gift energized by the Holy Spirit. Your spiritual gift is a unique capacity to minister to the body of Christ through the channel of the Spirit of God, who supernaturally touches the lives of other people.” *Spiritual Gifts – The Source of Spiritual Gifts* by MacArthur, Tape GC1850

Spiritual gifts are not natural talents, but are special Spirit-empowered abilities for service to the body of Christ. Talents are abilities that God has given each person as a result of general grace poured out on humanity (c.f. Matt 5:45). Talents may or may not be used to serve the body, but are not specifically Spirit empowered (other than through general Spirit-filling). Ryrie in *Basic Theology* compares talents and spiritual gifts:

Talents	Spiritual Gifts
Given by God through our parents	Given by God independent of parents
Given at birth	Given at spiritual birth
To benefit mankind generally	To benefit the body (church) particularly

It should be noted that spiritual gifts are a NT phenomenon that have been given to each believer since Pentecost (see Eph 4:7-8) and are not related to OT Spirit empowerment for a specific task (e.g., Ex 35:30-36:2).

Distribution of Spiritual Gifts

The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts supernaturally and sovereignly (1 Cor 12:11; Heb 2:3-4) distributing spiritual gifts to each believer (Rom 8:9) individually just as He wills.

¹¹But one and the same Spirit works all these things, **distributing to each one individually just as He wills.** 1 Cor 12:11

²For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, ³how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, ⁴God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles **and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.** Heb 2:2-4

⁹However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. **But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.** Rom 8:9

Each believer is given at least one permanent (Rom 11:29) spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:7) which is to be employed to serve other believers as a good steward of God's grace (1 Pet 4:10).

²⁹**for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.** Rom 11:29

⁷But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Cor 12:7

¹⁰**As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.** 1 Pet 4:10

Spiritual gifts are given for the advantage of all (1 Cor 12:7), the edification of the church (1 Cor 14:26), the equipping of the saints (Eph 4:7, 12), and, ultimately, the glory of God (1 Pet 4:10-11).

⁷But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the **common good.** 1 Cor 12:7

²⁶What is *the outcome* then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. **Let all things be done for edification.** 1 Cor 14:26

⁷But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ... ¹¹And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; Eph 4:7, 11-12

¹¹Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving **by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever.** Amen. 1 Pet 4:11

There are a variety of spiritual gifts among the body that God uses to build His church. God has designed the body so that each individual is vital to the church's growth – no believer is more significant than another. There is strength in diversity.

⁴Now there are **varieties of gifts**, but the same Spirit. ⁵And there are **varieties of ministries**, and the same Lord. ⁶There are **varieties of effects**, but the same God who works all things in all persons. ⁷But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Cor 12:4-7

¹²So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, **seek to abound for the edification of the church.** 1 Cor 14:12

⁴For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶Since we have **gifts that differ according to the grace given to us**, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; Rom 12:4-6

¹⁴For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 1 Cor 12:14-18

There are “varieties” of grace gifts, ministries, energizings, and visible manifestations. “Varieties” means apportionments, allotments, or distributions. There is no reason to believe that each believer has only one gift, but instead has an apportionment of gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit. A way to think of this is each of us have a unique percentage of multiple gifts that makes our contribution to the body of Christ unique.

There is no direct statement that tells when spiritual gifts are given. However, since they are only given to believers and there seems to be some link with the baptism of the Spirit being mentioned within the context of Spiritual gifts, then the best conclusion is that just as we are baptized with the Spirit, indwelt by the Spirit and sealed by the Spirit, so also are we gifted by the Spirit at salvation (1 Cor 12:11-13).

¹¹But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. ¹²For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 1 Cor 12:11-13

Details of Spiritual Gifts

Paul says that there are varieties of gifts (1 Cor 12:4) and goes on in 1 Corinthians 12 (see also Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10, 28-30; Eph 4:11, and 1 Pet 4:10-11) to give examples of these varieties.

Since there are “varieties” there is no reason to believe that the lists given are compete (similar to the elder character qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1), but are characteristic of the types of gifts.

⁸For to one is given the **word of wisdom** through the Spirit, and to another the **word of knowledge** according to the same Spirit; ⁹to another **faith** by the same Spirit, and to another **gifts of healing** by the one Spirit, ¹⁰and to another the **effecting of miracles**, and to another **prophecy**, and to another the **distinguishing of spirits**, to another **various kinds of tongues**, and to another the **interpretation of tongues**. 1 Cor 12:8-10

²⁸And God has appointed in the church, first **apostles**, second **prophets**, third **teachers**, then **miracles**, then **gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues**. ²⁹All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not *workers of miracles*, are they? ³⁰All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? 1 Cor 12:28-30

⁶Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if **prophecy**, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷if **service**, in his serving; or he who **teaches**, in his teaching; ⁸or he who **exhorts**, in his exhortation; he who **gives**, with liberality; he who **leads**, with diligence; he who **shows mercy**, with cheerfulness. Rom 12:6-8

¹¹And He gave some *as apostles*, and some *as prophets*, and some *as evangelists*, and some *as pastors and teachers*, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; Eph 4:11-12

¹⁰As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹Whoever **speaks**, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever **serves** is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Pet 4:10-11

There are two general groups of spiritual gifts: sign/revelatory gifts and edifying gifts.

Passage	Rom 12:6-8	1 Cor 12:8-10	1 Cor 12:28-30	Eph 4:11-12
Sign / Revelatory	Prophecy	Word of wisdom Word of knowledge Faith Gifts of healing Effecting of miracles Prophecy Distinguishing of spirits Tongues Interpretation of tongues	Apostle Gifts of healing Miracles Prophet Tongues	Apostle Prophet
Edifying	Service Teaching Exhortation Giving Leading Showing mercy		Teaching Administrations Helps	Evangelist Pastor-teacher

Note: Much of this information was gleaned from the VBC position papers on prophecy, tongues, and healing; “Spiritual Gifts: Definitions and Kinds” by Stitzinger, TMSJ 14/2 (Fall 2003); “The MacArthur NT Commentary – 1 Corinthians”; and “Spiritual Gifts Study Guide” by MacArthur.

Temporary Sign/Revelatory Gifts

The Scriptures indicate that the sign gifts were related to the founding of the church. The purpose of sign gifts (apostle, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues) was to confirm the gospel message.

¹²The **signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.** 2 Cor 12:12

³... After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,⁴**God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.** Heb 2:3-4

²²So then **tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.** 1 Cor 14:22

¹⁸For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, ¹⁹**in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit;** so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum **I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.** Rom 15:18-19

Apostle (Eph 2:20; 4:11-12; 1 Cor 12:28; 2 Cor 12:12)

¹¹And He gave some *as* **apostles**, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; Eph 4:11-12

Apostle is considered by many to not just be an office or calling, but a spiritual gifting. It means one sent forth from/by another, often with a special commission to represent another and to accomplish his work. It can be a delegate, envoy, or ambassador sent out on a mission or orders or commission and with the authority of the one who sent him. This is one of the foundational gifts in the church (Eph 2:20) given only to a select few (2 Cor 12:12).

¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰having been **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, Eph 2:20

¹²The **signs of a true apostle** were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. 2 Cor 12:12

Apostles had seen the resurrected Lord (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor 9:1). They were called by God specifically to be His messenger (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1).

Word of Wisdom and Word of Knowledge (1 Cor 12:8)

The definition of the gifts of "word of wisdom" and "word of knowledge" are obscure making the meaning difficult to determine. Clearly, the Corinthians understood what these gifts were, but much of the meaning today is speculation.

⁸For to one is given the **word of wisdom** through the Spirit, and to another the **word of knowledge** according to the same Spirit; 1 Cor 12:8

It is observed that both gifts are listed with the other sign gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. Also, knowledge seems to be linked to prophecy, seemingly indicating that the gift was revelatory in nature (1 Cor 13:8).

⁸Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of* prophecy, they will be done away; if *there are* tongues, they will cease; if *there is* knowledge, it will be done away. 1 Cor 13:8

"Wisdom" is associated with mysteries and what is hidden in 1 Corinthians 2:6-13 indicating that "word of wisdom" is also revelatory in nature.

Faith (1 Cor 12:9)

The definition of this spiritual gift is also elusive to us today, but was not to the Corinthians. Its inclusion in the list of miraculous sign gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 seems to indicate more than extraordinary trust.

⁹**to another faith** by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 1 Cor 12:9
Later in Corinthians, Paul speaks of “faith to remove mountains”.

²If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 1 Cor 13:2

Jesus also spoke of such faith.

²⁰And He said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, **if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.** Matt 17:20

²²And Jesus answered saying to them, “Have faith in God. ²³**Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him.** ²⁴Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you. Mark 11:22-24

Whatever this gift refers to, it appears to have been associated with performing miraculous deeds.

Miracles and Healing (1 Cor 12:9-10)

These two gifts are the ability to perform supernatural acts that are outside of God’s natural laws.

⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, and **to another gifts of healing** by the one Spirit, ¹⁰and **to another the effecting of miracles**, and to another ... 1 Cor 12:9-10

Miracles are the ability to intrude into the natural world in a supernatural way outside of natural laws as a special sign. Healing is the ability to directly and immediately heal with touch or word as Jesus, the apostles, and those closely related to the apostles did. These healings would have been *immediate, complete, and visible to all*.

Paul performed miracles at Ephesus.

¹¹God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹²so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. Acts 19:11-12

Yet he did not, or could not, use the gift to heal Epaphroditus (Phil 2:27), Timothy (1 Tim 5:23), or Trophimus (2 Tim 4:20).

²⁵But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; ²⁶because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. ²⁷For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. Phil 2:25-27

²³No longer drink water *exclusively*, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. 1 Tim 5:23

²⁰Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus. 2 Tim 4:20

See the VBC position paper “Healing” for a study on how Jesus and the Apostles healed and a comparison to modern day false “faith healers”.

Prophecy (1 Cor 12:10, 28; Eph 4:11)

Prophecy is the ability to speak directly the utterances of God as new revelation.

¹⁰and to another the effecting of miracles, and **to another prophecy**, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 1 Cor 12:10

Prophecy in the Bible was an authoritative communication by God to His people through an individual (cf. Rev 10:7; 16:15; 22:7). A literal rendering of the Greek word for prophet is “one who speaks before God,” that is, someone who speaks in the name of God. The message of a prophet was a direct revelation from God. OT prophecies consisted of two basic elements: fore-telling and forth-telling. That is, they were God’s revelation about the future and God’s revelation about the present. Both aspects were God’s direct revelation to man.

In the NT, prophets ranked second in importance only behind the apostles (1 Cor 12:28-31; Eph 4:11). With the apostles, the NT prophets were considered the foundation upon which the church was built (Eph 2:20). NT prophecies were identical in nature to OT prophecies. Both were God’s direct revelation to man and both included new information regarding the present and the future.

Distinguishing of Spirits (1 Cor 12:10)

This gift appears to have a connection to prophecy and parallels the connection between tongues and the interpretation of tongues.

¹⁰and to another the effecting of miracles, **and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits**, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 1 Cor 12:10

²⁹Let two or three prophets speak, and **let the others pass judgment.** 1 Cor 14:29

¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.** 1 John 4:1

It seems that the prophet had the gift of prophesying, and the gift of distinguishing of spirits was given to hearers of prophesy to maintain purity in the body by determining if the prophesy was from a true prophet (i.e., from God).

Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues (1 Cor 12:10)

The biblical gift of tongues is understood as always referring to a miraculously given ability to speak in an actual human language that was foreign to the speaker. Whereas interpretation of tongues is the ability to understand an unlearned language.

⁸For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another **various kinds of tongues**, and to **another the interpretation of tongues.** 1 Cor 12:8-10

The typical charismatic view of the gift of tongues is that it is an ecstatic utterance: a “heavenly language” or “the tongues of angels” or a “prayer language to God” (1 Cor 13:1 and 1 Cor 14). There is no indication in the Scriptures that the gift of tongues is an ecstatic utterance.

¹If I speak with the **tongues of men and of angels**, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 1 Cor 13:1

Elsewhere, Paul uses the term “tongue” as a figure of speech for a statement made in a human language (Rom 3:13; 14:11; Phil 2:11). Other NT writers use “tongue” as a figure of speech for a statement made in a human language (Acts 2:11; Rev 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). In addition, the Greek translation of the OT has thirty references to tongue that refer to normal speech and none that refer to unintelligible speech. There is no place in the Scripture where the word “tongue” means ecstatic speech.

In addition, the verb “speak” in 1 Corinthians 13:1 is in the subjunctive mood. The subjunctive mood in Greek assumes an unreality or something not presently the case. Paul was not speaking of tongues of angels, but only used that phrase to make a hypothetical case based on a hyperbole. Furthermore, there is no evidence that angels use a heavenly language; when they communicate in Scripture they use normal human language (Luke 1:11-37, 2:8-14).

Tongues need to be interpreted (1 Cor 14:5, 13) which normally has the sense of “translation” (cf. John 9:7; Acts 9:36, Heb 7:2) and indicates a translation of a foreign language. Ecstatic speech or gibberish cannot be translated. While 1 Corinthians 14 describes the problem of the speech being unintelligible (vv. 9, 14), it is unintelligible because there is no one with the gift of interpretation, not because it is in essence ecstatic and unknowable. Furthermore, it is obvious that the gift of tongues was not an uncontrollable ecstatic utterance since Paul gives instructions on the control of the gift (1 Cor 14:27-28).

In addition, Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11-12 in 1 Corinthians 14:21, which is referring to the strange tongues of the Assyrians, an actual foreign language.

Cessation of Sign gifts

The relevant question concerning the sign/revelatory gifts is, “Are these gifts active today? Did the gifts extend beyond the apostolic age?” Much of what follows is from the VBC position paper on tongues.

There are many historical and logical reasons as to why sign gifts have ceased with the end of the apostolic age. The OT depicts periods of special revelation, which ceases with the passing of prophets. The book of Acts describes miracles, signs, and wonder at a decreasing rate in the history of the early church. Church history validates the ceasing of prophetic revelation and the gifts that confirmed this revelation. However, the more relevant information is: what do the Scriptures teach?

1 Corinthians 13:8-13 specifically teaches that prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will cease to exist. However, when the ceasing will occur is debated.

⁸Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away*; if *there are tongues, they will cease*; if *there is knowledge, it will be done away*.⁹**For we know in part and we prophesy in part;**¹⁰**but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.**¹¹When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.¹²For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.¹³But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love. 1 Cor 13:8-13

There are two basic views:

1. the second coming of Christ
2. the end of the apostolic age and completion of the NT

Both interpretations regarding the timing of the cessation of sign gifts rest on the understanding of the word “perfect” in 1 Corinthians 13:10. Does “perfect” mean a completing of what was incomplete, or a perfecting of what was imperfect? The word for “perfect” (TELEIOS) in 1 Corinthians 13:10 has a well-established meaning of “complete.” In addition, Paul never uses TELEIOS to mean absolute perfection, which occurs at the return of Christ. The completion of the God’s revelation fits Paul’s usage of TELEIOS.

Understanding TELEIOS in 1 Corinthians 13:10 as “complete” makes more sense than “perfect” because of the contrast with “partial.” The completed Scripture is the reason why the partial, or incomplete, prophecy and knowledge are done away, for they are no longer necessary. This is better than trying to contrast the perfection of Christ’s return with the imperfection of prophecy and knowledge. Prophecy is not imperfect; it is rather incomplete. In other words, since prophecy is not partly perfect, but rather part of a whole, it makes more sense to understand “perfect” as “complete.” We know in part before the completion of the NT (1 Cor 13:9) and with the completion of the canon the partial revelation of prophecy will be done away (1 Cor 13:10).

Also, 1 Corinthians 13:11 describes a development from childhood to maturity, which is not instantaneous but gradual. This does not fit the return of Christ. It rather fits the gradual reduction of prophecy as the NT was being written and the apostles and prophets passed on.

1 Corinthians 13:12 is why most interpret this passage as referring to the return of Christ. Phrases like “face to face” and “knowing fully” can make people jump to this conclusion. However, it is important to note that even if 1 Corinthians 13:12 is speaking about the return of Christ this does not undermine the view that tongues will end with the completion of God’s revelation with the apostolic age. The partial being done away does not need to mean that we then know fully (1 Cor 13:12). This final knowledge could be a separate occasion at the coming of Christ with 1 Corinthians 13:11 describing the increasing completeness of God’s revelation and 13:12 describing the absolute completeness at the return of Christ.

However, the better explanation is to view 1 Corinthians 13:12 as teaching that with the completion of the biblical revelation, we will know ourselves fully, as we are fully known. The metaphor of the mirror (ESOPRON) is used only in one other place in the NT, in James 1:23, where it refers to God’s revelation in the Bible. Moreover, we look at ourselves in a mirror, not at God. In addition, when the phrase “face to face” is used about God and man in the Bible, it normally means God’s revelation to man, not God’s fellowship with man. God’s complete revelation enables us to see ourselves as in a mirror face to face, completely, rather than as in a mirror dimly, partially. With God’s complete revelation, we are able to understand God’s view of us in a way not possible before.

Finally, this view explains the contrast of 1 Corinthians 13:13. In contrast to the three gifts which will not endure throughout the church age (prophecy, tongues, and knowledge) are the three virtues which will endure throughout the age (faith, hope, and love). This temporal understanding of the virtues is further affirmed when we learn that love is the greatest, in that it alone is permanent while faith and hope will be fulfilled when we see Christ face to face (cf. 2 Cor 5:6-8; Rom 8:24-25).

If prophecy and knowledge will be done away with when the canon of Scripture is completed, then it follows that the ceasing of tongues will occur also at that time since they are grouped together in verse eight. The significance of the terms “cease” for tongues and “done away” for knowledge and prophecy is in regard to the process of how the cessation will occur, not with regard to timing of when the cessation will occur. This minor distinction is due to the nature of tongues as validating sign of the messenger and message of God’s direct revelation. After God ends the revelation of knowledge and prophecy, the evidence affirming the revelation is no longer necessary and thus ceases to exist all by itself. The ceasing of tongues as taught in 1 Corinthians 13:8 is the natural result of the end of God’s special revelation in the age of the apostles.

The reason why we believe the gift of tongues has ceased to exist with the passing of the NT apostles and prophets is based on what the Bible says. 1 Corinthians 13:8 teaches the gift of tongues is no more in operation today than is prophecy and knowledge. There is no longer a need to validate God’s revelation since the end of the NT has brought the end of direct revelation from God during the church age. There will be prophecy occurring again after the church age, during the seven-year tribulation period (cf. Rev 11). Tongues is not an active spiritual gift because its very purpose for existing is no longer active.

Since God is not giving new revelation today through His appointed messengers, He is likewise not enabling anyone to speak supernaturally in a language they do not know. This is because biblical tongues speaking served the purpose of affirming the messengers and their message by demonstrating His miraculous power in association with their prophetic ministry. The conclusion of prophetic revelation produced an end to the gift of tongues that had served to validate the revelation.

Permanent Edifying Gifts

Among the edifying gifts there appears to be two categories: speaking and serving (1 Pet 4:10-11).

¹⁰As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹Whoever **speaks**, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever **serves** *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Pet 4:10-11

However, the exact nature of each gift is difficult to define clearly. In addition, some of the gifts depict ministries or offices and others effects. Also, the listings of gifts are not complete indicating that the list is representative.

Passage	Rom 12:6-8	1 Cor 12:8-10	1 Cor 12:28-30	Eph 4:11-12
Edifying	Service Teaching Exhortation Giving Leading Showing mercy		Teaching Administrations Helps	Evangelist Pastor-teacher

Evangelists (Eph 4:11)

“Evangelist” is related to the word for “gospel” and means the proclaimer of good news. It occurs three times in the NT (Acts 21:8; Eph 4:11; 2 Tim 4:5). This gift is a Spirit-empowered ability to communicate the gospel to the unsaved. The purpose of evangelization is to simply help unbelievers become aware of their sinfulness and lostness and through the proclamation of the Gospel proclaim Jesus as the only Savior and Lord. Human manipulation is absent in biblical evangelism.

⁸On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of **Philip the evangelist**, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. Acts 21:8

⁴Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵Philip went down to the city of Samaria and **began proclaiming Christ to them.** Acts 8:4-5

¹¹And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and **some *as* evangelists**, and some *as* pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; Eph 4:11-12

⁵But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, **do the work of an evangelist**, fulfill your ministry. 2 Tim 4:5

Pastors-Teachers (Eph 4:11) and Teaching (Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28)

Since the Holy Spirit is the One who both gifts and makes shepherds, it is consistent to think of pastor-teacher as a gift.

²⁸"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to **shepherd** the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. Acts 20:28

Many believe the phrase in Ephesians 4:11 speaks to one giftedness of pastor-teacher and refer to the Greek construction to support this view. According to this position, all pastors teach (since teaching is an essential part of pastoral ministry), but not all teachers are pastors.

¹¹And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and **some as pastors and teachers**, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; Eph 4:11-12

This is a Spirit given giftedness to shepherd the body of Christ. "Shepherd" is literally is one who herds sheep and tends flocks as a shepherd. It is translated "pastor" only in Eph 4:11 where the English word comes from the Latin meaning herdsman. Metaphorically it refers to one who performs functions including feeding, oversight, protection, leading, and guiding.

This is also a Spirit given giftedness to teach to the Scriptures. Teaching is more than simply a transfer of information; it is with the expectation of acceptance and a change of life. Biblical teaching carries direction and an exercising of authority (cf. 1 Tim 4:11; 4:16; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Titus 2:15; 3:8). Teaching should be a careful, accurate explanation of the biblical text for the purpose of transforming the life of the hearer.

While pastor-teacher is a gift, there is also the lone gift of teaching.

⁶Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: ... ; ⁷if service, in his serving; or **he who teaches, in his teaching**; Rom 12:6-7

²⁸And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, **third teachers**, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, *various* kinds of tongues. ²⁹All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not *workers of* miracles, are they? ³⁰All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? 1 Cor 12:28-30

Service and Helps (Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28)

"Service" means to minister by way of rendering service in any form; to take care of by rendering humble service; rendering or assistance or help by performing certain duties. It represents service of whatever character, and especially voluntary service. It is used of spiritual ministry (Acts 1:25, 6:4), physical ministry (Acts 6:1), hospitality (1 Cor 16:15), giving (2 Cor 8:4), and a general preaching and teaching ministry (Acts 20:24).

⁶Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷**if service, in his serving**; or he who teaches, in his teaching; Rom 12:6-7

"Helps" means to take a burden off of someone else and place it on yourself or helpful deeds.

²⁸And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, **helps**, administrations, *various* kinds of tongues. 1 Cor 12:28

In general, these mean the ability to lovingly support someone, to take a burden off someone else and place it on yourself. In both cases with "service" and "helps", they are put in lists next to the more spectacular, showy gifts. These gifts are vitally important to the body. We must have supernatural, Spirit-empowered loving service within the body.

Leading and Administrations (Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 12:28)

“Lead” has the idea to preside over, to conduct, to govern, and directing, but also to protect, to give aid, to assist, to care for, and to be active in helping.

⁶Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; **he who leads, with diligence**; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Rom 12:6-8

“Administration” carries the idea of management, guidance, and directing.

²⁸And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, **administrations**, various kinds of tongues. 1 Cor 12:28

These gifts give the Spirit-empowered ability to make decisions and determine direction, to mobilize a group to reach an objective. This is servant-leadership and care for people and the ability to organize them and programs to accomplish a goal.

Exhortation (Rom 12:8)

“Exhortation” carries the sense of giving aid, urging someone to take action. It can mean “encouragement, exhortation” (1 Thess 2:3), and “comfort, consolation” (2 Cor 1:4-7). This is the ability to come alongside someone who has a problem or difficulty or who is weak and build them up, encourage them, comfort them, and strengthen them.

⁶Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸**or he who exhorts, in his exhortation**; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Rom 12:6-8

Giving

“Give” means to share and impart that which is one’s own including clothing (Luke 3:11), money (Eph 4:28), the gospel, or one’s own heart (1 Thess 2:8).

⁶Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; **he who gives, with liberality**; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Rom 12:6-8

The gift could be physical or one’s self.

Showing mercy

“Showing mercy” has the idea of mercy, compassion, and pity. It is the ability to sympathize with a suffering person – to come alongside the poor, the sick, the destitute, the orphan, the widowed, and those in prison, and minister to them.

⁶Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; **he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness**. Rom 12:6-8

Others?

Some have identified other “gifts”, but the interpretation of these as uniquely Spirit-enabled gifts is dubious: celibacy (1 Cor 7:7-8), hospitality (1 Pet 4:9), martyrdom (1 Cor 13:3), missionary (Eph 3:6-8), voluntary poverty (1 Cor 13:3), craftsmanship (e.g., Exodus 28:3-4), intercessory prayer (e.g., Eph 6:18; Col 4:12-13), music (e.g., Col 3:16), writing.

The Discovery of Spiritual Gifts

I don't put much stock in spiritual gift tests. The problem with tests like that is that people are generally very poor evaluators of themselves. We most often think of ourselves as better than we actually are. And with tests like this, we sometimes rate ourselves on what we would like to do/be instead of what we actually are. So, how do we discover our spiritual gifting?

1. Walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16-25; Eph 5:18+; Col 3:16+). Since it is the Spirit who energizes the use of spiritual gifts, as we are walking in the Spirit, we have access to that energizing power. Also, as we are walking in the Spirit, we will be obeying God. Ryrie in *Basic Theology* illustrates how the edifying gifts are unique to individuals, but also are commands for all believers. If we are obeying God as we are walking in the Spirit, our giftedness will bubble to the top.

Gifts Given to Some	Commands Given to All
Serving (Rom 12:7)	Serve one another (Gal 5:13)
Exhortation (Rom 12:8)	Exhort one another (Heb 10:25)
Giving (Rom 12:8)	All give (2 Cor 9:7)
Teaching (Rom 12:7)	Teaching (Matt 28:18-20; Col 3:16)
Showing mercy (Rom 12:8)	Be kind (Eph 4:32)
Evangelism (Eph 4:11)	All witness (Acts 1:8)

2. Be a faithful member of your local body and get busy serving (1 Pet 4:10). As we are active in serving and walking in the Spirit, our Spirit giftedness will bubble to the top.
3. Seek the counsel of your church's elders. Assuming you are doing numbers one and two above, your giftedness should be observable by godly, wise, Spirit-walking men. They will observe your ministry involvement and giftedness and be able to direct you to serve in areas that best suit your gifts.

The Developing of Spiritual Gifts

It appears that spiritual gifts can be developed through Spirit empowered effort toward growth.

¹³Until I come, give attention to the *public* reading of *Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching. ¹⁴**Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you**, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. ¹⁵**Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all.** 1 Tim 4:13-15

⁵For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that *it is* in you as well. ⁶For this reason **I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.** ⁷For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. 2 Tim 1:5-7

Whatever Timothy's gift was, it appears that he could leave it unused or neglected and also grow in the use of it. For instance, if someone is gifted with teaching, they need to develop in their Bible knowledge and application (Ezra 7:10) and practice teaching. If someone is gifted with evangelism, they need to understand the gospel and also have a philosophy of ministry that does not try to manipulate people into salvation. If someone is gifted with showing mercy, then need to understand where people are at and how they can care for them in their situations, bringing the Word to bear on their lives. And so on...

The point is: be diligent (2 Tim 2:15) to pursue growth (1 Pet 2:2).

The Bottom Line

Each believer has a unique spiritual giftedness. Are you using your gift to serve the body of Christ?