

**PREFACE**

I cannot recall another passage in which understanding what the words mean, hence applying the truth to one's life, is contingent less on burrowing down into the original text than on interpreting them from one's faith-standpoint. By that I mean defining the Greek text notwithstanding, a mainstream evangelical, such as a Baptist or Evangelical Free, is going to read this list of nine gifts of the Spirit very different from a Pentecostal charismatic. And to further muddy things up, even within those groups there will be shades of interpretation based on how one interprets other portions of God's word.

Then, as if that weren't enough, we are also faced with a situation not unlike our familiar understanding of the two kinds of sanctification: the immediate, once-only sanctification that takes place at conversion (positional), and the ongoing work of God in a life, the sanctification that represents our gathering maturity in Christ (progressive).

How does this apply to our text? An illustration would be the brief conversation we had during our class last week. I offered, as an example of "the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (v7), the occasions when the pastor is really pumped, on fire more than usual; old-timers would say "he had the unction." And Dennis rightly pointed out that the Spirit is *always* at work in every one of us—because every believer has the Spirit within. True, very true. However, there can be *degrees* of manifestation.

- Even if we have identified the gift(s) the Spirit has given us, that does not mean that it will be manifested the same in us as in another person with the same gift.
- Nor does it mean the gift will be manifested in us the same ten years from now as it is today. That is, the implementation of our gift(s) should mature along with our progressive sanctification.
- There also may be times when the Spirit is not as active in us as at other times—that is, the manifestation of the Spirit will be in proportion to the work or service that He means to accomplish at the moment.
- More often than that, however, it will be the vagaries of our weak flesh that will get in the way of the effectiveness of the Spirit's gift(s). He remains, but we have eroded the connection.

**Read 1 Corinthians 12:7-11.**

If this is the first (extant) letter Paul wrote to a church, and most scholars believe it is, then this would be the first of his several lists to churches, and the first of two in this letter alone. This letter contains two lists: here, and 12:28-30. The other lists are in Romans 12:6-8 and Ephesians 4:11. None of these lists are exhaustive—obviously, since the lists are different from each other—and the gifts listed in this letter have a relevance to the Corinth church specifically. One clue to this is that the very first gift on this list, “the word of wisdom,” “does not appear again in any further list or discussion in any of Paul’s letters” (Fee).

### *For to one is given...*

Let us not miss in all this that familiar verb in the present tense: “given” (*didotai*) As we discussed in our last session, none of this is based on our inherent abilities, our personal worth, any physical skills we might possess. It is all of God; He is the one who has, by means of His Holy Spirit, granted, bestowed any of these gifts to an individual.

*the word of wisdom*      *the word of knowledge*  
*logos sophias*              *logos gnoseos*

Paul places these two gifts first in the list for two reasons: 1, these are the most important “for the common good” (v7) of the church and 2, they are especially pertinent to *this* church. They can be considered separately, but they also can, in a sense, be considered as simply variations on the same gift, for they both have to do with speaking the truth about God.

In the first two chapters of this letter, beginning with v1:18, Paul rails against the “wisdom” that has so impressed, so *entranced* some in the Corinth church—the glowing, rhetorical eloquence of the Hellenistic philosophers. He then contrasts this with himself.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.**

It has taken him until Chapter Twelve to really dig into this topic, but Paul cued it up in Chapter Two. Do you want to speak a “word of wisdom”? Listen to the Spirit dwelling within.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 2:10-13.**

As to “knowledge,” Paul earlier in his letter commended the Corinthians on their knowledge of God—and he even tied it to their gifts of the Spirit.

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, (1 Corinthians 1:4-7)

Later, however, in Chapter Eight, Paul takes them to task for their being puffed up, and misusing the knowledge they have, instead of loving and caring about their brothers and sisters in Christ.

### Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-3.

Depending on one's particular flavor of Christianity, one can read "the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit" as referring to a "special understanding of the 'deeper things' or 'mysteries' of God" (Fee), that this gift grants to the recipient something unknowable by other more mundane means. Thus the Pentecostal and charismatic denominations understand this to be a special word of insight, given by the Holy Spirit, to help the church passing through a time of decision or difficulty.

For the rest of us it makes more sense to interpret this with our feet still on the ground as referring to Spirit-inspired and -guided teaching and preaching—that which can only be accomplished by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The plain truth of God in His word, illuminated by the indwelling Spirit and available to all *with* that Spirit, is sufficiently astounding without layering on top of that a supernatural gift *unknowable* to all.

One piece of evidence points us to this latter interpretation: If the supernatural, "charismatic" interpretation was what Paul intended, he probably would not have used the words for wisdom or knowledge (*sophias, gnoseos*) but instead the word "revelation" (*apokalypseis*)—which in a later verse he differentiates from the former two.

### Read 1 Corinthians 14:6.

v9

*to another faith by the same Spirit,*

Here again, does Paul refer to *saving* faith, which is indeed supplied by the convicting Holy Spirit, or does he refer to some extraordinary manifestation of faith well beyond that of the average Christian? We get no help from the Greek, which is simply the standard NT word for faith, *pistis*.

We can once again draw upon the example of sanctification to understand the gift of faith.

Every follower of Christ has been given the gift of faith, since the faith that saves us in Him is given by the Holy Spirit. The individual's salvation (justification) comes by faith (Romans 1:17, 3:28), but it is not the faith inherent in him, but the faith *given* him by God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

[Jesus said,] "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:44)

This gift of faith can be likened to our positional sanctification that occurs once at regeneration.

This, however, is not the faith Paul mentions in v9. Most commentators associate this with what Paul says later in Chapter Thirteen.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 13:2.**

Jesus says much the same thing in Matthew 17:20, but since the gospel of Matthew was penned *after* First Corinthians, Paul did not get it from Him (unless by hearsay). The image of "moving of mountains" in reference to overcoming great obstacles, was a proverbial saying (as today) that surely informed both the apostle and Jesus.

This refers to a deeper level of faith—a supernatural level of faith akin to our progressive sanctification—that calls upon God to work miracles. "It probably refers to a supernatural conviction that God will reveal divine power or mercy in a special way in a specific instance" (Fee). [e.g., [Elijah on Mount Carmel \(1 Kings 18:37-39\)](#)]

I would suggest, however, that there are individuals given a faith that falls somewhere between. All Christians have the first, only a rare few have the second, but many have this third level, which is simply a deeper level of trust in the Lord on a day-to-day basis. We have all met them; they may not be able to call down fire from heaven, but they seem to possess and experience a level of trust in the Lord that at times puts the rest of us to shame. They seem to have fewer moments of doubt, of questioning—fewer moments of spiritual instability.

And as with the other two kinds of faith, this deeper trust in the Lord is not of flesh, but from God through the ministry of the Spirit.

In our next session we will resume v9, and finish our examination of this passage.