

# **Spiritual Gifts**

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Salt and Light Ministries

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## Foreword

“What is hidden in the roots will be revealed in the shoots.”

This has been one of the lifelong principles by which I have sought to live and build. Experience tells us that what the roots of the plant are like, and what they feed on, determines what sort of fruit grows; where the foundations of a building are shaky, time and disaster will reveal it; where the most simple flaws are not spotted, dreadful disasters can follow – as when a basic defect in the fuel system of the Challenger space craft cost the lives of seven brave astronauts.

So it is with people. What we believe in our hearts will eventually determine how we live, how we build and what we end up with.

This “Roots and Shoots” series is not so much an attempt to define the distinctives of our family of churches, but rather to ensure that all our beliefs and practices are firmly rooted in the Scriptures.

Many people have asked us over the years: “Who are you and what do you believe?” While our structure may appear to be somewhat nebulous, nevertheless the understanding of our common beliefs needs to be clear and unambiguous.

We are a family of churches that believe we are to be “sons of the kingdom” sown into God’s earth. The key that transforms “the word of the kingdom” into “sons of the kingdom” is *understanding* (Matthew 13:23). In the Lord’s first parable of the kingdom (the Sower), the ‘word’ of the kingdom – the seed – when properly received and understood produces fruit. In the second parable of the kingdom (the Weeds), we discover that the fruit has become the seed, and that the seed is “the sons of the kingdom”. The word, bearing fruit, producing seed as sons of the kingdom, planted in the world! That is our prayer for this series of books.

Barney Coombs

## **Introduction**

### **The Giver and the Gifts**

#### **The Tools for the Job**

Some time ago, John's dishwasher broke down. Being rather inept when it comes to mechanical things, he did the smart thing and phoned a repairman. When he arrived, John was struck by what it was that he did first. His first task was not to poke his head into the machine, or knock around trying to figure out why it was refusing to wash the dishes. The first thing he did was to unpack his tools. Before he made any attempt to fix the dishwasher, he laid out an impressive collection of wrenches, screwdrivers, pliers and other gadgets - and only *then* inspected the dishwasher. John stood there (duly impressed), resisting the urge to ask, "What's that thing for?" The man set to work; and in less time than it would have taken John to unscrew the machine's back panel, the repairman had it fixed. John thanked him (and paid him!), and off he went to his next customer.

As he loaded that morning's breakfast dishes into the now functioning machine, John thought, "That guy knew what he was doing. And he had the tools to do it." *The tools to do it.* He had more than a knack for mechanical things. He had the right equipment.

#### **The Tools of the Spirit**

This booklet is about the gifts of the Holy Spirit that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 12 to 14 - the tools he gives us for the job. We will examine each of these nine supernatural gifts in turn, look at how they work, and how they

contribute to the life of the church. But before we look at the individual gifts, we need to understand, in a general sense, what they are really all about.

Paul introduces his teaching on the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. He uses two words to describe them. One is *pneumatikoi*, which literally means “spirituals.” Most Bibles rightly translate this as “spiritual gifts”, as in 12:1. The other word is *charismata* - literally, “graces”, or “grace gifts”. This is the term Paul uses in 12:4, “There are different kinds of *gifts*.” He goes on to list nine of these ‘graces of the Spirit’ in v8-10: the message of wisdom, the message of knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues. (It is interesting to recall that he also lists nine “fruit” of the Spirit in Galatians 5!) But Paul’s main point in these introductory paragraphs (1 Corinthians 12:4-11) is to lay out an important truth: *the gifts are given by the Spirit for the building up of the church.*

Remember John’s dishwasher repairman? Imagine him as he gets ready to leave his shop to come to the house. Before he leaves, his supervisor says, “George, make sure you take all the right tools. Here - take this tool box. It’s got everything you’ll need.” Now, that supervisor is rather like the Holy Spirit. And George is like the church. And that collection of tools is like the gifts of the Spirit. The assignment is to get the job done - to see the saints grow in faith and maturity in Jesus. The tools are the equipment to make it all possible.

It is impossible to over-emphasise these two points: *The Spirit is the Giver of the gifts, and his motive in giving them is to build up the church.* Listen to what Paul says: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.” (12:4) “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” (12:7) “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.” (12:11) “Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.” (14:12) Do you see Paul’s point? The Giver and Orchestrator of the gifts is not the pastor. It is the Holy Spirit. And the purpose of the gifts is not to promote certain ‘gifted’ individuals, nor to give Christians a lot of ‘charismatic goose bumps’. It is “for the common good” (12:7), “to build up the church” (14:12). It is to help the church grow in maturity, Christlikeness and power.

## **A Church Fully Equipped**

As we write this booklet, we are nearing the end of a decade, and of a century, and of a millennium. In terms of the calendars of history, these are pivotal, turning point days. And they are pivotal days too for the church. The fulfilment of the Great Commission is more within our reach than ever before. Statistics from missions agencies point to numbers of people coming to Christ like never before in church history. Opposition to the gospel is increasing in many areas, but God is also faithfully opening doors for the proclaiming of his word. We live in exciting times.

One very important part of the church being ready for the challenge of this hour is for it to be moving wisely and powerfully in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The church is God's means for reaching his world. And part of his means for building up his church is the Spirit's gifts. It is our prayer that this little book will help the saints understand better the tools the Holy Spirit has given them, so that they may get on with their task more effectively.

## Chapter 1

# The Word of Wisdom

### Lord, What Do I Do?

Have you ever felt stuck? We mean *really stuck* - immobilised by some situation, unable to move because you just plain didn't know what to do. Everyone has. Dave feels this way when he faces messy relational problems at church. While some people seem to have an inner sense of how to sort out problems like this, he doesn't. He gets muddled. He keeps thinking, "Well, on the one hand ... but then, on the other hand ..." Inevitably, he has to send up one of his not-so-fine-sounding prayers for divine guidance: "Lord, what do I do?" And every time, the Lord comes through. Thankfully, the Lord our God is mighty in the muddle!

Solomon wrote, "The Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." (Proverbs 2:6) The Hebrew word for wisdom in this verse is *hochma*. It referred to a skilful and godly handling of life. That is what we need when we're stuck.

The first of the nine gifts of the Spirit that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians is what he calls "the message [or word] of wisdom" (12:8). A word of wisdom is a fragment of *God's* wisdom imparted to man. It is what Solomon received when the two women came to him claiming to be the mother of the same baby. His "cut the child in two" ploy instantly revealed who was really the baby's mother (see 1 Kings 3:16-28). That was a word of wisdom. In the New Testament, Paul shows us that this gift is available to all

the saints. It is the Holy Spirit's answer to our cries for guidance in the muddle.

### **A Trick Question**

Of course, the one person who never got muddled was Jesus Christ. He was never confused or lacking in wisdom. His communion with God the Father was perfect, enabling him to draw, moment by moment, on the actual thoughts of God. We find an excellent example of Jesus drawing on the Father's wisdom in Matthew 22:15-22. His opponents, the religious leaders of the day, wanted to trap him with a trick question. "Teacher," they said, "... Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

Their goal, of course, was to place Jesus in a no-win situation. If he said it was right to pay taxes to Caesar, he would appear to be betraying his own countrymen, the Jews. But if he said it was wrong, he would be guilty of sedition against the Romans. So he answers their hypocritical trick question with a brilliant word of wisdom. He takes a coin, and asks: "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." His opponents' trap was instantly demolished - little wonder they "left him and went away." This is what is meant by wisdom - a skilful and godly handling of a difficult situation. Jesus' reply unravelled the tangled knot that his enemies had handed him. And that same resource of wisdom, Paul says, is available to the church. Here are two examples:

### **Her Brother's Will**

In the sixteenth century, Scotland and England were engaged in a religious and political war. The Scottish 'Covenanters' sought to worship God independently from the Church of England. The English were in control, however, and made things very difficult for anyone caught attending unauthorised religious meetings. During this time, a young Covenanter girl was once on her way to a secret meeting. To her dismay, she was caught by English soldiers. "Where might you be going?" they demanded. Now the girl faced a real problem. Her obedience to the Lord forbade her to lie. But revealing her true destination would betray not only herself, but also send

her friends to certain imprisonment. What should she say? She silently asked the Lord for wisdom, and suddenly found herself saying, “My elder brother has died, and I’m going to listen to the reading of his will.” To her, the ‘older brother’ meant Jesus Christ. And the ‘will’ meant the New Testament. But to the English soldiers, the words sounded like no more than family business, and they let her pass. That was a word of wisdom!

### **Seeking God’s Will**

A second example is more recent. It happened to Dave. Some years ago, the church he is part of was seeking God’s will about the future of its Christian school. The early years of the school had been very uneven in terms of growth, and the leaders were facing some very basic questions about the whole project. Did God want the school to grow? Did he intend it to serve its local church only, or the wider body of Christ in the city? Dave asked God to speak to him, and was drawn to Jeremiah 29:6-7. “Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city...” It was clear that this verse was ‘prophetically applicable’ to the school. Today, the same school has some 140 students, from churches all over the city. What was that verse from Jeremiah? It was a piece of God’s wisdom, given to his servants to meet a specific situation. It was a word of wisdom.

### **For us all**

This gift of wisdom is not just for Jesus, special people, or church leaders. It is not just for life-threatening situations or major points of decision. It is not even just for ‘religious’ occasions! It is for us all and for all situations. Whatever situation we find ourselves in, James tells us that “if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault.” (James 1:5) The word of wisdom is one way in which God answers that prayer. No situation is too small or too mundane. The ‘tool’ of the word of wisdom is there to help us in it.

## Chapter 2

# The Word of Knowledge

### God Knows, We Don't

One of the distinguishing marks of the God of the Bible is that he knows all things. “The LORD is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed.” (1 Samuel 2:3). “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.” (Isaiah 46:10). One of the distinguishing marks of mankind, however, is that he doesn't know everything! God knows. We don't. Unless, that is, God chooses to tell us! And the good news is that he often does. His Holy Spirit will release to us what Paul calls a “word [or ‘message’] of knowledge”.

### Knowledge and Wisdom

We saw in the previous chapter that wisdom is the skilful and godly handling of life. And a “word of wisdom” is a fragment of God's wisdom imparted to man. It is a perspective or insight from God that guides us. Knowledge is somewhat different from wisdom. It involves the knowledge of actual facts. *Wisdom* had given Solomon a way of determining which of the two women was the child's true mother. But if God had chosen to give Solomon *knowledge*, he would have whispered into his ear, “It's the one on the left!” He would have revealed the facts. Wisdom involves handling life. Knowledge has to do with actual information. When someone receives actual information from God, they are receiving what Paul calls a “word of knowledge”.

A message or word of knowledge is a fragment of God's total knowledge, which he chooses to reveal to man. It is not a human hunch, or an insight or a guess. It is something totally supernatural, and usually instantaneous.

### **“You have had five husbands”**

Let's look at some biblical examples. First, from the ministry of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> When he speaks to the women at the well, Jesus draws out of her the admission that she has no husband. He then faces her up with facts about her life - facts he could only have known by revelation. “You are right when you say that you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you have now is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true!” (John 4:17-18) The woman responds by acknowledging that Jesus must be a prophet (verse 19). Again, she is speaking the truth! He is indeed a prophet - and he has received prophetic revelation from God through a word of knowledge. When we read the rest of the story, we see that large numbers of people in that woman's town came to believe in Christ as a direct result of his supernatural knowledge of her life.

### **“You have lied to the Holy Spirit!”**

Our second example of the word of knowledge comes from the book of Acts. In chapter 5, we read that Ananias and Sapphira make a deceptive attempt to appear spiritual and generous in the eyes of people around them. They sell some land and bring a portion of the proceeds to the church, but claim that this portion is in fact the entire purchase price. By a word of knowledge, Peter sees through their deception. “Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit have kept for yourself some of the money for the land?’” (v3) Ananias is so shocked by the exposure of his sin that he falls over dead. Shortly afterwards, continuing the deception, his wife meets the same fate.

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<sup>1</sup> Some will say, “If Jesus was God, then he must have known everything. How could he need a ‘word of knowledge’? A fair question! But the Bible gives a clear answer. It is plain that during his earthly mission, the Son of God did not exercise his divine omniscience (knowledge of all things). It was ‘on hold’. This is implied in such verses as Mark 5:30, 9:21 and 13:32. Jesus’ examples of supernatural knowledge are therefore best explained as being revelation from the Father through the Spirit (the same as with his teaching - John 14:10,24; 17:7-8) - what Paul would call “a word of knowledge”.

The immediate consequences of this word of knowledge are, of course, radically different than the one in John chapter four! There a woman was redeemed. Here, two people are judged. Different immediate consequences, but notice the secondary results. In John we read, “Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I ever did.’” (John 4:39) In Acts, after the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, we read “Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events....No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.” (Acts 5:11-14) In both of these stories, the secrets of peoples’ hearts are exposed. In both, the character of God is revealed. And in both, many people come to Christ!

### **Still Happening Today**

John Wimber, well-known leader of the Association of Vineyard Churches, tells in his book “Power Evangelism” about being on a plane and turning to glance at the man sitting across the aisle. To his surprise, John saw the word ‘Adultery’ written across the man’s forehead! John describes what followed:

“I blinked, rubbed my eyes, and looked again. It was still there. ‘Adultery.’ I was seeing it, but not with my natural eyes, but in my mind’s eye. No one else on the plane, I am sure, saw it ... By now the man had become aware that I was looking at him (‘gaping at him’ might be a more accurate description).

“What do you want?” he snapped. As he spoke, a woman’s name came clearly to mind ... Somewhat nervously, I leaned across the aisle and asked, “Does the name Jane [not her real name] mean anything to you?” His face turned ashen. “We’ve got to talk,” he stammered.”

John and the man made their way to the lounge, where the man admitted that he was carrying on an adulterous relationship with a woman named Jane. But the story has a happy ending. The man was so struck (and terrified) that God had exposed his sin that he gave his life to Christ. “O God, I’m so *sorry*,” he said, and launched into the most heart-rending repentance John had ever heard.

How did this example of ‘power evangelism’ begin? Through the exercise of the word of knowledge. The exercise of this gift is not restricted to exposing people’s sins however! On one occasion, Jesus used a word of knowledge to commend a man’s righteousness (see John 1:47)! Nor is the word of knowledge limited to high-profile leaders and life-changing situations. John Micklefield’s wife Val once asked the Lord to help her find a lost ring. Right away, she sensed in her spirit the words, “Look under the bed, at the top end on the right side.” She went and looked, and there it was! Our God can be so practical!

### **Some Practical Tips**

First, *remember* the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit: to build up the church. The word of knowledge is perhaps the most easily abused of all the gifts. It can be imitated by human ingenuity, for example by disguising something we simply came to know in an ordinary way as a word of knowledge. It can even be counterfeited by occult power. Even when used by sincere Christians, it can easily degenerate into little more than a spiritual parlour trick. The word of knowledge is to be received gratefully and used in humility and in the fear of God.

Second, we must *realise* that the word of knowledge is not a spiritual pill designed to remove all the perplexity from life. (There will be times when we won’t find that ring!) God is often more interested in imparting maturity and patience to us than in giving immediate solutions to every challenge we meet. Nor is the word of knowledge a substitute for the first gift, the word of wisdom. Sometimes God will give us insight or perspective rather than actual information, and expect us to act accordingly.

Third, we must *believe* that God is still in the business of speaking to his people! “Now one way, now another” (Job 33:14); but always for the building up of his Son’s church, and always for his glory.

## Chapter 3

### **The Gift of Faith**

#### **“I’ve Got Faith to Get this Tent Up!”**

Some years ago Dave helped lead a group of elementary school young people on a camping trip. On the first night they were late getting the campsite set up. It was already getting dark, it was windy, and the sky was threatening rain. Some of the group were starting to whine, complain and feel homesick. But one lad refused to be discouraged. As Dave helped Jeff pitch his tent (in the face of sharp winds that kept blowing it down!), Jeff looked at him and laughed, saying, “I’ve got faith to get this tent up!” In a few minutes, Jeff’s faith proved real. His tent was up - and it made it through the night too!

Simple though this example may be, in that moment that young fellow received an impartation of confidence from God. He felt a specific assurance that the Lord would help him with his very practical need, setting up his tent. He had received the gift of faith.

#### **“To All” Faith ... versus “To One is Given” Faith**

This impartation of confidence is, we believe, what Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 12:9 - “...to another faith by the same Spirit...” He is not thinking here of saving faith, which all believers have. He is not thinking of the faith which all believers are expected both to grow in (2 Corinthians 10:15) and to have grow in them (Galatians 5:22-23). He is thinking of something else. To understand what, let’s go back a few verses and take the words in context.

In v7-9 we read, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. *To one* there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, *to another* the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, *to another* faith by the same Spirit...” Paul’s repeated use of the words “to one ... to another” shows that these gifts are given quite distinctively to various individuals. Therefore he cannot be thinking here of basic ‘saving faith’ which he knew God had given to them *all*.

In his introduction Paul had addressed his letter “to the church of God in Corinth ... together with *all* those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus...” Notice the wording: it was ‘to all’. There is a ‘to all’ type of faith; that is, the saving faith by which God calls all of us into fellowship with His Son (1 Corinthians 1:9). But in chapter 12 Paul is talking about something quite different — a “to one is given” type of faith. “*To one* ... is given faith...” This is special faith, a distinct gift of the Spirit to a particular individual - temporary, sovereign and supernatural, for a specific time, place and situation - just like the faith Jeff received to get his tent up.

### **Examples from Scripture**

The Bible is full of examples of people receiving and exercising this gift of the Spirit. Jonathan exercised the gift of faith when he attacked the Philistine garrison (1 Samuel 14). David had the gift of faith when he challenged Goliath (1 Samuel 17). Peter had the gift of faith when he stepped out of the boat to meet Jesus on the water (Matthew 14:29). All these had an impartation of confidence in God that others around them lacked.

Luke gives us an example of this “to one is given” type of faith in Acts 14:8-10. “In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, ‘Stand up on your feet!’ At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.” Notice how Luke describes this event. The man “had faith to be healed”. He was like Dave’s young friend Jeff, who had faith that God would help them set up his tent. This crippled man in the city of Lystra had faith for something very specific. He had faith that God was going to heal him. And God did! That is the gift of faith.

## **Whose faith is it?**

Jesus taught an important lesson about this sort of faith on the occasion of his disciples seeing the fig tree he had cursed the previous day because of its fruitlessness. “In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig-tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, look! The fig-tree you cursed has withered!’ ‘Have faith in God,’ Jesus answered. ‘I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.’” (Mark 11:20-23)

The reply that Jesus gave to Peter in response to his astonishment was “Have faith in God.” A more literal translation of the text would be “Have the faith *of* God.” This is clearly a type of faith over and above the normal growth level! Derek Prince, in his book ‘Faith to Live By’, describes it like this: “Through the gift of faith, the Holy Spirit imparts a portion of God’s own faith, directly and supernaturally, to the believer. This is faith on a divine level, as high above human faith as heaven is above earth.”

Immediately following his command to “have God’s faith”, Jesus then tells them: “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.”

Jonathan faced Philistines; David faced Goliath; Peter faced waves; but all disciples face mountains! They may be mountains of sickness, financial need, opposition or despair. When they come, and when they are too big for us to overcome ourselves with the faith that has been steadily growing as a fruit, it is time to borrow “the faith of God”!

## **Mustard Seeds and Mountains**

When Jesus came down from the mountain with Peter, James and John after the Transfiguration, he found the other nine disciples trying to deliver a boy who was possessed by a demon which threw him into seizures; but all their praying and commanding had been futile. They were faced with a mountain; and their faith was inadequate to move it. Once Jesus had freed the boy, the disciples asked why they had been unable to help. He said, “Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as

small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:20-21)

Was Jesus saying here that their faith was almost none existent, not even as big as the tiny mustard seed? No. He was saying that they had been drawing on the wrong kind of faith. They had been relying on the faith that had been growing in them, which wasn’t enough for this situation. They should have been looking to God for his faith. That sort of faith, even the size of a mustard seed, will blast any mountain away! Have God’s faith!

### **“I Believe God has Given me Faith ...”**

Some years ago a prominent and well-liked couple in our fellowship (we’ll call them Roger and Joy) had separated. Strains in the marriage had reached the point where Joy abruptly left Roger, taking their children with her. Everyone was devastated. We did not know how to make sense of the situation, or even how to pray. About this time, Barney Coombs came to visit us. At an early morning breakfast meeting with the men of the church, Barney related how he felt the Lord had spoken to him during the night about Roger and Joy. In front of all the men, Barney addressed Roger, and said, “I believe God has given me faith that your wife will be restored to you.” At this point in time there was no evidence of any possible reconciliation. There was only faith - the gift of faith. Less than six months later, Joy returned to Roger. They are in the church today, and growing in God.

Barney had what Jeff had - and what David and Jonathan and Peter and the crippled man of Lystra had - the gift of faith. And notice what happened in all of these cases. Jonathan defeated the Philistines. David overcame Goliath. Peter walked on the sea. The lame man of Lystra received his healing. Jeff got his tent up. And Roger and Joy were reconciled. In case after case, the gift of faith was part of God breaking into a situation with his power and his grace.

## Chapter 4

# Gifts of Healing

### **She Touched her Toes!**

By the time Val was 13, she was an accomplished athlete. She ran and jumped for her school and was set to represent the County. One day when she was getting out of bed, she noticed a sharp ‘click’ in her back and felt excruciating pain. The doctor diagnosed a slipped disc and ordered six weeks bed rest. At the end of the six weeks, she tried to get up, with the same result all over again! Things got worse. The doctors discovered a cracked vertebrae, a misshapen pelvis, and a leg a full inch shorter than the other! As time passed, they tried traction treatments, spinal injections, osteopathy, a special steel lined corset, orthopaedic shoes; but nothing worked. She missed months of school. Before long, Val gave up hopes not only of running, but of pursuing a career in nursing. The doctors told her that her only medical hope was twelve months bed rest (six of them in a plaster cast) followed by surgery and rehabilitation.

About this time a minister friend and his wife asked Val if they could pray for her. Now Val was from a very conservative religious background. ‘Divine healing’ was not part of her experience. But she was desperate - and she knew that the Bible spoke about God healing the sick. So she agreed to receive prayer. As the minister laid his hands on her head, Val felt (in her own words) “a great heat surging down my spine. It was like being plugged into an electric socket. There was an intense heat and an intense feeling of power. Sometimes it felt like a huge finger stroking down my spine.” “Is

there something specific that you've not been able to do?" the minister asked. "Yes! Touch my toes!" Val replied. Then, to her amazement and joy, she effortlessly - and painlessly - reached down and touched her toes. She jumped in the air. She twisted around. She bent over again and again. Val had been totally, instantaneously healed. And she remains healed today, as John Micklefield knows all too well, since the Val in question is his wife.

This testimony is just one of millions from all over the world and from all across history - of God healing the sick. The gospels record hundreds of healings in the ministry of Jesus. According to Paul, "gifts of healing" (1 Corinthians 12:9) are a gift of the Spirit, just like wisdom, knowledge or faith. Of all the nine gifts in Paul's list, healing is often the gift that makes the most dramatic difference in the lives of people - especially sick ones!

## **Full Redemption**

Some while ago Dave noticed an advertisement in the financial section of the local newspaper which read, "Notice of Partial Redemption". A company was allowing its shareholders to 'redeem' (or cash in) some of their shares - but only some! They could not redeem all of them. As he read the notice, Dave thought, "Well, I'm glad the gospel isn't an offer of 'partial redemption'!" And it isn't. Jesus forgave people's sins *and* healed their bodies (see Mark 2:1-12). At the End, he will return and "transform our lowly *bodies* so that they will be like his glorious body." (Philippians 3:21) Paul calls this great event "the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:23). God created man in a body (Genesis 2:7), and he will redeem man in a body (1 Cor 15:35-54). God is not into 'partial redemption'! He is committed to restoring his entire creation in all its dimensions. That is why Jesus healed the sick - as a foretaste of all that is to come. And that is why the Holy Spirit gives "gifts of healing" to the church.

## **Why does Paul say "Gifts"?**

The alert reader will have noticed that Paul refers to the healing gift in the plural: "gifts of healing", not 'the gift of healing'. In fact the Greek is doubly plural - "gifts of healings"! Why?

We would suggest two reasons. First, Paul speaks of a plurality of healing gifts because he envisages many believers exercising this ministry. In the Old Testament, healing is associated mainly with high-profile names like Moses, Elijah and Elisha. But in the gospels, we find Jesus authorising not only the Twelve to heal the sick (Luke 9:1-6), but also the Seventy (Luke 10:1-9). The healing ministry of the Seventy is especially important, since it shows that healing was not reserved for the ‘inner circle’ of the Twelve Apostles. No doubt there will be, in every generation, the Elijah’s and the Elisha’s and the Reinhard Bonnke’s — individuals uniquely anointed in the ministry of healing. But there should also be the Seventy’s - ordinary Christians who step out in faith and pray for the sick.

There is a second reason why Paul speaks of “gifts of healings”; and that is because healing is such a varied ministry. In fact, it is just as varied as the people that get sick, and as the people who pray for them! There is no single cookie-cutter model for the ministry of healing. Some healings will involve anointing with oil; some will not. Some will involve laying on of hands; others will simply come through prayer. Some will come through physical impressions in the body of the person praying. Some will be instantaneous; some will be gradual. Some may come as a result of bold commands; others, through earnest petition. And some healing gifts will apply to just specific diseases. (One man we know has an impressive ‘success rate’ in praying for people with migraine headaches!) All these are “gifts of healings” - part of “God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10) to his church. “Gifts of healings” may take the form of city-wide healing crusades or of ordinary Christians quietly asking a sick friend, without great fuss, “Could I pray for you?” In fact, any Christian can pray for the sick - even little children.

### **Jesus Loves Max, This We Know!**

Several years ago the four year old son of one of Dave’s neighbours was rushed to the hospital. He had had a seizure, and had stopped breathing for nearly 5 minutes. The doctors ran tests, and told the devastated parents that the brain damage was so severe that little Max would never recover. He would not speak or walk again. He might not even regain consciousness.

That was on Friday night. Max's parents stayed by his bedside all weekend. On the following Sunday morning, Dave and his wife Velma determined to get the entire church praying for little Max. Then, as is common in our city of Winnipeg in the winter months, their car refused to start. Velma went along to church with friends, saying that she would have her Junior Church class (3-4 year olds) pray for Max, leaving Dave to get the church to pray. But Dave never made it to the meeting and so the adults never even heard about little Max. Only the 3 and 4 year olds in their Junior Church class did. But here is what happened.

"Boys and girls," Velma said, "this morning we're going to pray for a little boy named Max. Max is very sick, but we are going to ask Jesus to heal him." Velma then led the children in a simple prayer for Max's healing. Then she said, "Let's sing that song we all know, 'Jesus Loves Me'. But this time, let's sing, 'Jesus loves Max!'" So they sang, with voices that made the rafters ring,

*Jesus loves Max, this I know,  
For the Bible tells me so!  
Little ones to him belong,  
They are weak but he is strong!*

Over and over they sang - at the top of their voices. This was about noon on Sunday. About an hour later, at the hospital some five miles away, Max opened his eyes and asked where his mother was! She was in a room down the hall (exhausted after two sleepless nights), trying to find a few minutes rest. The nurses ran and got her. Needless to say, she and her husband were overwhelmed with joy and relief. "Tell your friends their prayers really worked!" she said later. But whose prayers was it? The adults had been blissfully singing hymns and listening to the sermon, completely unaware of Max's desperate need! A case of debilitating brain damage, which the doctors said was irreversible, had been healed within the hour in response to the faith of 3 and 4 year olds. Today, Max is one hundred percent well. Jesus loves Max, this we know! And Jesus' Spirit gives gifts of healings to the church. This we know too.

## Chapter 5

### Works of Power

#### “Just Pray!”

Our friends Stan and Marge were on a driving holiday when their eight year old daughter Jackie began to have a severe nose-bleed. It was not the typical childhood type, with blood dripping from her nose. This one had the blood literally spurting out several inches away from her face! Stan drove through the town, urgently trying to find a hospital. In the stress and panic of the moment, no one thought to pray - except Jackie. At the very moment Stan pulled up to the front of the local hospital, Jackie cried out, “Forget the doctor! Just pray!” Not wanting to set a bad example as Christian parents, Mom and Dad obediently laid hands on Jackie and asked God to stop the nosebleed. The nosebleed stopped - instantly and completely - and did not start again - a clear example of modern day ‘works of power’.

#### “Workings of Powers”

“Miraculous powers” (literally, “workings of powers” - *energemata dunameon* in the Greek) may be defined as the release of divine power that overrules natural law. Paul seems to be thinking here of a category much bigger than healing the sick, since he lists this gift separately after “gifts of healings”. In the Old Testament, miracles such as Moses’ staff becoming a snake (Exodus 4), water being brought forth from the rock (Exodus 17), Elijah calling down fire from heaven (1 Kings 18), would come into this category. In the New Testament, it would include such things as Jesus changing

water into wine (John 2), calming the storm (Mark 4), and walking on the sea (Mark 6). We also know that miracles were common in the early church. Luke tells us that “many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.” (Acts 2:43) The Spirit of God empowered Paul and Barnabas to do “miraculous signs and wonders” to back up their preaching (Acts 14:3). On the island of Cyprus, Paul even performed what we might describe as a ‘reverse healing’ as he rebuked Elymas, an occult sorcerer who was opposing them, causing blindness to come upon him (Acts 13:11-12).

These incidents are all examples of ‘works of power’. They are supernatural interventions by the Spirit in the natural and normal way of events. They demonstrate both the sovereignty of God over natural law and also show his love and power at work, both to bless his people and to challenge the unbelieving.

### **Smith Wigglesworth - and Jackie (Again)**

Our own century has examples of this gift in action. Smith Wigglesworth, an English plumber from the town of Bradford, was famed as a worker of miracles. In one incident, Wigglesworth was a witness to a traffic accident that left a man lying on the road with his intestines literally hanging from his body. Amazingly, the man was still conscious. “My friend,” Wigglesworth said, “you shall have tea with me today!” In moments, those standing by were flabbergasted to see the man’s organs move back into his body, and the gash in his abdomen heal without a trace. He then went with Wigglesworth to a nearby house for his cup of tea!

Works of power are still happening in our own day. Carlos Annacondia, one of the leaders in the much publicised revival in Argentina, has seen many people receive gold fillings in their teeth - just through prayer! Dentists have documented some of these cases (and testified to the fine quality of the fillings - sometimes complete with a Christian symbol on them!) Nothing is too small for God to concern himself with.

Don’t be surprised if you read such stories and think, “I simply can’t believe this sort of thing. It strains credibility.” Take heart - we have all felt like that! (and no doubt will again too!) What is important is that you believe in the Bible’s miracles, recorded faithfully in God’s Word for us, and that

you believe God means it when he says that the gift of miraculous powers is still for today. Keep open to him and let him increase your faith in this area.

Now back to Jackie for another example. One day the family drove into a small town in rural British Columbia, Canada, to visit Marge's Uncle Bob. Now neither Stan nor Marge had ever been to Bob's house. He lived on a difficult to find mountain road, and their plan was to phone him from a local restaurant and ask him to drive into town and guide them back to his house. When they phoned, however, the line was busy. And half an hour later, it was still busy. They tried again and again. From ten o'clock in the morning till late afternoon, they tried and retried Uncle Bob's phone number. Again and again, it was busy. By now little Jackie was becoming more and more frustrated. She eventually dissolved into tears of exasperation, and blurted out (once again!) "Why don't you just pray?" So they did. Then, one more try on the phone - and they got through! Now before you dismiss this as a not-so-amazing coincidence, listen to the rest of the story.

After the phone call, Uncle Bob soon arrived at the restaurant and led them back up the mountain to his house. The next morning a telephone repairman knocked on the door. "Well, you'll be glad to know we restored your line," he announced. "What do you mean?" asked Bob. "The line has been down. You were completely cut off. Your daughter had been trying to reach you for days, so she called our office and we went and checked the line. It was down. We only got to it today." "But my niece phoned here yesterday," Bob objected, "and it worked fine!" "Sorry, no one could have phoned you yesterday," the man insisted. "The line was cut. Nothing could have gotten through." He was pleasant but insistent. He said goodbye, got into his truck, and drove away.

Stan and Marge, and especially Jackie, knew exactly what had happened. They had asked God to make the call go through, and he had done it. How? No one knows. It was a work of power, contrary to the laws of physics - and the opinions of the telephone repairman!

We believe this is a perfect illustration of "miraculous powers". It shows that God will cause this gift to operate for ordinary people, even children, and in the context of ordinary, everyday needs. Miraculous powers are not reserved for career missionaries and high-profile leaders in tent

crusades. This gift is for the whole church, if the whole church will receive it!

### **For Whom and For What?**

Some people ask, “Is this gift for everyone, or just a few selected and special individuals?” If we take seriously Jesus’ words about faith having the power to cast mountains into the sea (Mark 11:22-24), then we must say that all Christians can perform works of power. The only prerequisite Jesus assigns in this passage is faith. On the other hand, Paul presents this gift in the context of various gifts being assigned to specific individuals. This is the point of his words “*To one ... to another*” in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. So, which is it? Can we all do works of power? Or only those who have ‘the gift’?

We would answer this way: Anyone who exercises faith can move in works of power, but certain individuals will operate in this gift on a more regular basis, in the same way that some do so with prophecy or words of knowledge, as part of their contribution to the upbuilding of the body of Christ. All *can*, from time to time, do works of power. But only some are *assigned* works of power as their ‘gift’ within the life and ministry of the church.

Finally, some words of advice. The gift of miraculous powers is, in immature hands, a dangerous gift indeed. Because it can sometimes be manifested in truly remarkable ways, there is always the risk of the miracles themselves becoming the focus, rather than the Lord who is behind them; or, even worse, of the person the Spirit used making himself or herself the focus. We must steadfastly resist this. Paul is very clear about the purpose of this gift (as with all the gifts). They are for the upbuilding of the saints, to help them grow in Christ and fulfil their mission on the earth. God’s gifts used God’s way will always promote the maturity of his children, the progress of the gospel, and “the praise of his glory”.

## Chapter 6

# Prophecy

### **An Ace into the Enemy's Court**

A group of pastors had set aside several days to seek God together and to hear from him. It happened that their meetings coincided with the famous Wimbledon tennis tournament in London. During one of their times together, the presence of God in the meeting was particularly intense. As they waited on the Lord, one of them stood and called out in a loud voice the following message. (For those who are unfamiliar with tennis, the term “ace” refers to a ball hit so strongly and accurately into the opponent’s court that he is unable to hit it back.)

“You are hearing much in these days about the game of tennis. You are hearing much about men raising rackets and hitting balls into their opponents’ courts. The Lord says that he is in the process of weaving you together, and stretching you and tightening you, so that you will be the mesh in a strong and firm racket in his hand. The pressures you are enduring in these days are all part of his weaving and stretching and tightening. For the day is coming when he will raise you in his hand, and use you to serve an “ace” into the enemy’s court!”

One of the pastors quietly asked, “But Lord, what if the enemy hits it back?” And the Lord said to him, “He can’t!” “Why not?” asked the pastor again. “Because I’ve taken away his racket!” came the reply. When the pastor shared this, the other men gathered there burst into laughter, applause and praise. But the message was more than a vivid and somewhat humorous

picture. In the view of those in the meeting, it was an actual “Word from God.” It was what Paul calls “prophecy”.

### **What Exactly is It?**

Prophecy is man, by the enabling of the Spirit, speaking the Word of God. The apostle Peter describes Old Testament prophecy this way: “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but *men spoke from God* as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:21) Prophecy is God himself, through the ministry of the Spirit, bringing his Word to his people.

The Old Testament prophets brought messages of judgement and hope, promise and prediction. The prophetic gift Paul describes in 1 Corinthians can move in any of these dimensions, but there is one overall proviso about the New Testament prophetic gift. Paul says: “But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort ... he who prophesies edifies the church.” (1 Corinthians 14:3-5; see also 14:26)

### **How the Gift of Prophecy Works: Seven Guidelines**

How does this gift work in the life of the church? Here are seven guidelines which seek to summarise the main points of the Bible’s teaching. Since some of them can equally well apply to the exercise of other spiritual gifts too, we will devote some pages to them.

*Guideline Number One: Prophecy is the work of the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:11)*

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given ... To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom ... to another prophecy ...” (1 Corinthians 12:7&10). Note two things. First, prophecy is, like all the gifts, a “manifestation of the Spirit.” It is not an emotional outburst from the mind of man. Second, it is “given.” We do not dream up prophecy; we receive it. The same Holy Spirit who participated in the creation of the universe (Genesis 1:2), who anointed David to be king over God’s people (1 Samuel 16:13) and who moved the prophets to declare the word of the Lord to Israel (Isaiah 61:1) now dwells in Christian believers. He enables them

not only to speak *to* God in prayer, but to speak *from* God in prophecy. This leads us to Paul's second guideline.

*Guideline Number Two: All Christians can prophesy. (1 Cor 14:31)*

While not all will exercise prophecy as their main gift, all believers do have the ability to receive and speak forth the word of God. Peter (quoting the prophet Joel) declares: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit *on all people*. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, *and they will prophesy.*" (Acts 2:16-18, quoting from Joel 2:28-29)

These words clearly apply to more than a designated group of 'prophets'. While there certainly are people who have a particular calling to a prophetic ministry (see Acts 13:1), Peter's words here apply to the entire Spirit-filled community: young and old, male and female - "all people". *Every* Christian should be listening to the Holy Spirit, seeing if he will give him or her something for the building up of the body.

Some interpret Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12:29 to mean that not all Christians can prophesy, for he says, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?" (And the Greek phrase he uses clearly expects the answer no - "Not all are apostles, are they?..." ) But when we weigh this verse against what Paul says elsewhere, we see that this cannot be what he means. For instance in 14:5 he says, "I would like *every one of you* to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy." In 14:24, "But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in *while everybody is prophesying...*" These verses clearly imply that prophecy is not reserved for the select few. Certainly there are those whose main gift is the prophetic, to the extent that they can even be called 'prophets'. Not all Christians will be 'prophets' in this sense, hence Paul's question, "Not all are prophets, are they?" But all Christians can, and should, seek to hear from God for words for the encouragement of the body.

*Guideline Number Three: Prophecy is for the common good. (1 Cor 12:7)*

The Bible is crystal clear about the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit: they are for the "good" of the saints, for their "strengthening, encouragement

and comfort” (14:3). “All must be done for the strengthening of the church.” (14:26)

Here is a good test for whether a thought that comes to you during a meeting is really from the Lord: will speaking it out promote the good of the people? God’s heart is always to do good to his people (Jeremiah 29:11), and true prophecy will always promote the common good.

*Guideline Number Four: Prophecy must be weighed.*

Probably most of us have heard “weird” prophecies. Sometimes they are funny. One man, intending to allude to the prophetic naming of “Ichabod” in 1 Samuel 4:21, stood up and said, “The Lord says, ‘Repent, lest I come and write “Michelob” over this church!’” Michelob, of course, is the brand name of an American beer! Whether a misguided prophecy is funny (as this one was!), or distressing (as they can sometimes be), it highlights the need for discernment in the use of the prophetic gift. The fact is that because of our human frailty, our prophecy is imperfect, unlike the perfect “God-breathed” prophecy inscribed in the Scriptures. Paul says, “For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.” (1 Cor 13:9-10) The word Paul uses here for “in part” suggests incompleteness and imperfection. This is why he says later that prophecy must be weighed: “Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.” (1 Cor 14:29) The word “weigh” here means to evaluate or discern, or even judge.

How might this imperfection show itself then, and how should we handle it? Well, suppose someone gives what he feels is a ‘word from the Lord’ in a meeting. Much of what he says is very biblical and very edifying to the people there. But in the midst of his prophetic utterance there is something that is not Scripturally correct. If the people in the meeting are on their toes, then they will pick up the error (unconscious though it may be) themselves and they will be able to evaluate, discern and judge what was said. If the error is not too serious, it can be adjusted privately after the meeting by one of the leaders or the individual’s personal pastor. A non-threatening way of doing this might be to ask, “What were you trying to get across in your prophetic word?” This gives people the opportunity to correct themselves (they will often know they didn’t get it quite right!)

If the error is rather more serious, one of the leaders may need to stand up there and then in the meeting and, in a sensitive and appropriate way (not with harsh rebuke!), bring biblical balance to what was shared. Or, perhaps at a future meeting, after there has been time for the leaders to carefully “weigh” the imperfect part of the prophecy or the direction it sought to bring, they may need to bring adjustment to it. Wherever any correction or adjustment is needed however, we must remember that it should always be done constructively and redemptively.

How can we tell if something is wrong in prophecy? There are a number of signs of human error that we should always be alert to:

- a) Any word which brings condemnation, or which leaves a sense of heaviness or hopelessness on the people.

While prophecy may bring rebuke and correction, it will always point the way to restoration and hope. Its divine intention will always be, as Paul says, “the strengthening, encouragement and comfort” of the church (1 Corinthians 14:3).

- b) Any word which calls someone to do something ethically, financially or morally questionable.

God will never contradict the clear principles and ethics contained in his written Word, no matter how good the prophecy might seem or how persuasive the prophet might seem to be. Unstable and unrighteous ‘prophets’ will sometimes ‘prophesy’ for their own selfish gain. So be wise in how you receive words.

- c) Any word which is in any way unbiblical.

Have you heard of the man who prophesied, “The Lord says, ‘Don’t feel bad if you are discouraged. It’s OK. Sometimes I get discouraged too!’” While the man’s motive was no doubt good - to comfort the people - he undercut his message by making an unbiblical statement about God, for the God of the Bible is never discouraged!

d) Any word which is inappropriate for the present needs of the people.

When the sheep are bleeding, they need comfort not criticism, encouraging not beating. The word of the Lord is always timely - appropriate to the situation at hand.

*Guideline Number Five: Prophecy may take different forms.*

The Bible does not promote a cookie-cutter uniformity to the style and form of prophecy. God's Word came to his people through the Old Testament prophets "in various ways" (Hebrews 1:1). For example, Isaiah lived for three years "stripped and barefoot" (representing disgrace and shame) as a prophetic sign of God's impending judgement on Egypt (Isaiah 20:1-6). Ezekiel used a clay model of the city of Jerusalem to portray the siege of that city (Ezekiel 4:1-3). God directed Hosea to marry a promiscuous woman as an illustration of Israel's covenant breaking with himself (Hosea chapters 1-3). Some prophets wrote their prophecies down (like Isaiah and Jeremiah). Others, like Elijah and Elisha, apparently spoke their messages orally, leaving others to record them. Their style of writing or speech was often very different too. Elijah declared God's Word in fiery, unvarnished prose; but Isaiah used a sometimes sophisticated literary style, complete with parallelisms and other poetic devices. As different as these prophets and their prophetic styles were from one another, they had one thing in common: they all declared God's Word by the power of the same Spirit.

In the New Testament, we find an 'acted out' prophecy in Acts 21:10-11 where a prophet named Agabus uses Paul's belt to dramatise the persecution and trials that God said were awaiting him. Other prophetic words came in more straightforward verbal ways, as with, for example, John the Baptist, or the disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:6).

The varied nature of prophecy shows us that God will use each of us in different ways. The eloquent, the educated, the poetic, the "slow of speech and tongue" (like Moses! - see Exodus 4:10), the artistic, the rustic, the uneducated, the senior citizen and the young child, can all, *in their own ways*, speak forth God's Word. If a church adopts a particular *style* of prophesying, some will think, "I simply can't express myself that way. I guess God must not be giving me anything." Not true! A thundering, Elijah-style oracle, presented by a barrel-chested football-player type, and a gentle,

three sentence word about the tender heart of Jesus (given by an eight year old girl) can both be true prophecies - in the very same meeting! Some Christians, due to their background (rather than their spirituality!), will prophesy in the formal style of King James' English. Others will use their everyday words and style. Either one is fine, as long as it helps to express the Word of the Lord. Styles vary, and methods vary (dance, drama, poetry, object lessons, etc.). God will use each of us, and he will use us as we are, not as copies of someone else. "There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men." (1 Corinthians 12:6).

But along with divine variety, there is also divine order; which brings us to our sixth guideline.

*Guideline Number Six: Prophecy must be done in an orderly way.*

Without some wise controls, prophecy can become chaotic and confusing. In 1 Corinthians 14:29-33, Paul gives the following instruction therefore: "Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace."

When the creative Holy Spirit is at work, he will sometimes give prophetic words to many people in the same meeting. The sheer wealth of revelation can, if not handled wisely, produce confusion or, quite simply, be lost. To avoid this problem, Paul says that the church should allow two or three prophets to bring what the Lord has given them. (Whether Paul *literally* means two or three, or whether the phrase is the equivalent of our 'a handful' is debated; but you should follow the guidelines of your own church on this matter.) Further prophesying should then wait until people have had time to digest and weigh what God has been saying to them. This may at times mean that some may need to retain their prophetic message for a future occasion.

"But," someone may ask, "Doesn't the Spirit sometimes move so powerfully that people simply can't restrain themselves from prophesying?" No! says Paul! "The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets."(14:32) The word "spirits" here refers to the human spirit of the

prophets, not to the Holy Spirit. He is not subject to our control! But our own spirits are. We cannot regulate when a message will be given to us, but we *can* control how and when we will deliver that message to others. This is where a notebook can come in handy - either to write down prophetic words you have received but not had opportunity to give, or to write down words you have heard from others.

*Guideline Number Seven: Prophecy is of particular value to the church.*

All of the gifts of the Spirit are vital to the life of the church. Prophecy, however, is of special value. Paul says: “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.” (1 Corinthians 14:1) And then: “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like everyone one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy.” (v4-5) And again: “Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy...” (v39).

The reason Paul says this is that there is nothing more valuable than hearing from God. In the book of Revelation, the ascended Jesus says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says (or, ‘is saying’) to the churches.” (Revelation 2:7) We simply cannot overstate this truth: *The church needs to hear what the Spirit is saying as an ongoing part of its corporate life.* Of course, systematic Bible teaching will be the meat and potatoes of God’s nourishment of his people. But alongside the teaching of the Scriptures, there needs to be a hearing of what God is saying through the Spirit to particular congregations at any given time. He may not be saying the same thing to your church today that he was saying a year ago. He may not be saying the same thing to your church that he is saying to the church across the street. This is why the church needs to hear God’s ‘present Word’, or God’s ‘now word’ as some Christians refer to it. Part of God’s enabling of his people to “hear what the Spirit is saying” is through prophecy, and this is why Paul sets such a high value on it.

## **Getting Started**

We have seen that all Christians can prophesy (1 Corinthians 14:1,5, and Acts 2:17-18). While some will be particularly gifted to contribute with this gift to the life of the church on a regular basis, none should think that

they will never receive a word from the Lord for the church. If you have never prophesied, then listen again to what Paul says in the verse we just quoted: “*Eagerly desire* spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.” *Desire* to prophesy! *Believe* God to give *you* a word for the church! He wouldn’t tell you to desire what he doesn’t want to give!

Start simple. If you have never prophesied before, don’t expect to bring a word like the ‘tennis racket’ prophecy the very first time you prophesy. Don’t think you have to bring a life-changing word for the whole church. Just open your heart to God. If you sense him giving you a message for the church, it may be helpful to share it quietly first with a leader or with someone more experienced in prophecy. Having done that, speak it out with confidence, for the building up of the saints. In your early stages you may need some help or adjustment in the exercise of your gift. But don’t let that bother you! God is patient. If you desire to prophesy, and want to edify the church and glorify the Lord, then he will help you.

## Chapter 7

# Distinguishing between Spirits

### **By their Fruits you will Know them**

Jack has a ministry of praying for people under the control of evil spirits. One day he received a call from the mayor of a nearby town: “Jack? This is Fred.” The voice sounded dull, almost dead. “I’ve made a decision. I’m going to commit suicide. I’ve even decided where to do it.” Even before Fred began to explain his chosen place to die, Jack knew where it was. He knew the family and the town. Fred’s family owned a farm that was sometimes called the “Farm of Death.” Fred’s grandfather, father and a brother had all committed suicide there, and even a delivery truck driver had been accidentally electrocuted there. The Farm of Death had justly earned its reputation.

Jack and others felt that there was more at work there than emotional depression and accidental misfortune. There was something spiritual - and evil - powerfully at work. Jack managed to gain a promise that Fred would not hurt himself in any way until he arrived. He drove quickly to Fred’s house and as soon as he entered the room, he knew what he was up against. “It was a spirit of suicide,” he said. It was a demon that ‘specialised’ in feeding thoughts of death into people’s minds. The family background was clear evidence of such a spirit, and Fred’s countenance confirmed it.

Jack and Fred talked, and then began to pray. “I addressed the spirit of suicide and ordered it, in Jesus’ name, to leave.” Within the hour, Fred’s urge to die was gone. Once again, he wanted to live.

“Sometimes discerning of spirits is fairly straightforward,” says Jack. “It is often a case of ‘by their fruits you will know them.’ If you see a strong and chronic bondage to pornography, there is often a spirit feeding that bondage. If someone has a habit of lying, there is often a lying spirit at work. You know the tree by its fruit.”

## **Seeing Beneath the Surface**

Jack’s experience with his friend is an example of what Paul calls “distinguishing between spirits.” The phrase he uses here literally means “the ability to discriminate [or discern, or judge] of spirits”. It means being able to judge what is really going on, to separate appearances from reality. In the practicalities of ministry, “to discriminate of spirits” will mean at least two things:

1. *The ability to discern the true nature of a problem.* Is it simply emotional? Is it physical? Is it psychological? Or are there actual evil spirits at work here? Or maybe even a combination of emotional and spiritual forces at work.

2. *The ability to see, if there are demons involved, what sort of demons they are.* As we will see, there is biblical evidence that there are particular ‘kinds’ of evil spirits. Various demons seem to ‘specialise’ in particular forms of bondage. Distinguishing between spirits means being able to recognise their presence and their nature in order that the stronghold might be broken.

## **The Ministry of Jesus**

We find some helpful examples of this sort of discernment in the ministry of Jesus. Mark’s gospel gives us two stories about Jesus healing people who had been robbed of their ability to speak (see Mark 7:31-37 and 9:14-29). These cases, at one level, were similar: the people could not talk. But Jesus discerned what was going on underneath the surface.

In the first incident some people bring a man “who was deaf and could hardly talk” (Mark 7:32). Jesus touches the man’s tongue and says, “Ephphatha! (which means, ‘Be opened!’)” - and the man is instantly healed. Now notice what Jesus does *not* say. He makes no mention of demons or

spirits. He simply addresses the man's deaf-mute condition. His supernatural discernment showed him what was wrong. It was essentially a physical or psychological problem.

Later, some people bring Jesus a boy who was subject to violent seizures. Jesus ministers to this boy by addressing the root cause of the problem: an evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit ... I command you, come out of him and never enter him again!" The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out." (Mark 9:25-26)

Now notice how Jesus ministers to these two people. He discerns what the real need is. In one case, it was apparently a physical or psychological problem; so Jesus commands the problem to be healed, and it is. In the other situation, the root cause was an evil spirit; so he commands the demon to leave, and it does. In both cases, Jesus exercises the ability to discern what was going on under the surface. That is distinguishing between spirits.

As we have already said, distinguishing between spirits can also mean telling one sort of evil spirit from another. Jesus discerned what he was dealing with here - a spirit that robbed people of their ability to hear and speak. He addressed it as "You deaf and mute spirit." He called it by its descriptive name. Jesus' naming the spirit in this way seems to suggest that there are different 'kinds' of demons. Various spirits seem to have particular ways in which they affect people. Those whom God uses often in deliverance ministry tell us that there are a whole range of spirits - spirits of lust, sexual perversion, mental confusion, fear, anger, oppression, to mention but a few. To distinguish between spirits is simply to discern what is really going on under the surface. Is it a psychological problem? Is it a demon? Is it a combination of the two? And if a demon is involved, what sort of demon is it?

One word of caution: while learning to distinguish between spirits is important, it should not so fascinate us that it becomes the object of our interest or endless research. Jesus is our focus - not demons!

### **Why this Gift is so Important**

The importance of distinguishing between spirits is also seen in the "Legion" story in Mark 5:1-20. When the demon-possessed man comes to

him, Jesus says, “What is your name?” Now, in other cases he does not ask spirits to name themselves. He simply drives them out. (This in itself should caution us against the need to ask every evil spirit to identify itself before we can tell it to leave. But here Jesus does command the spirit to declare its name. Why does he do this?)

We should note that in this particular case the demonic bondage was deeply entrenched. The possessed man lived in a graveyard, shrieking day and night and cutting himself with stones - a chronic case indeed. In fact he was possessed not by one spirit but by many - an entire “legion”. Possibly because of the magnitude of this demonic stronghold, Jesus demands to know its exact nature, that is, its ‘name’. We learn from this that success against deeply entrenched spiritual forces will often require insight into exactly what kind of spirits we are dealing with.

Recognition of the root of the problem can often be a great encouragement to the person needing deliverance too. Suppose someone comes to you and says, “I am always anxious. There is a continuous cloud of fear around me.” As you talk and pray with them, you discern that the problem is at least partly demonic in nature. You say to them, “I sense that there is a spirit of fear at work here.” Even before you see any success in expelling the demon, your friend may well find encouragement in knowing that the fear is a demonic lie. Of course, no one is pleased to learn that they are under demonic oppression! But when it dawns on us that our fear is demonic, we suddenly realise that *our fear is a lie* - and lies do not need to be believed! There often comes a measure of freedom simply in recognising that our fear is not rooted in life itself, but simply in *a lie about life*. Making this discrimination can bring a real measure of freedom and victory. This gift of the Spirit can also save long hours trying to figure out what is troubling someone. When the Holy Spirit tells you, there is no longer any doubt!

## Chapter 8

# Speaking in Different Kinds of Tongues

### **Instant Korean**

In January of 1994 a remarkable renewal broke out at the Airport Vineyard Church in Toronto, Ontario. As word of the renewal spread, people came from all over the world to see what God was doing. Delegations came from Europe, Africa and Asia. South Korea was sometimes well represented. Several rows of seats were often filled with Korean Christians who had travelled thousands of miles to find a new touch of God.

A woman from the United States had also come seeking more of God in her life. She was dry and weary in her walk with the Lord. One night as she worshipped the Lord in the meeting, his presence seemed to suddenly wash over her in a new and dramatic way. She fell from her seat, babbling in a strange language. Seated nearby was the Korean contingent. How surprised some of them were to hear this American woman crying out to God in fluent Korean! Here in the late twentieth century was an example of what they had read about in Acts chapter two: the miraculous gift of speaking in tongues.

### **Tongues: More than One Kind**

This particular form of speaking in tongues is relatively rare. Tongues are more often than not ‘spiritual’ languages, rather than earthly ones, given by the Spirit to deepen our communion with the Lord. But both kinds of tongues - “of men and of angels” (1 Cor 13:1) - are still found.

The Biblical base for our understanding lies in 1 Corinthians and Acts 2. Both these passages refer to tongues - but different kinds. Simply put, the tongues of Acts 2 is essentially *manward*, that is, for making God and his glory known to other people; the tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14 is essentially *Godward*, for helping us express the glory of God in praise and prayer to him.

## **Tongues and God's Purpose**

The gift of tongues is in certain respects a picture of the eternal purposes of God. This is apparent in two ways. First, the gift of tongues symbolically 'reverses' the curse of Babel (see Genesis 11). In Acts 2, God supernaturally restores the communication between men that his judgement at Babel had taken away. Second, tongues is part of God restoring what Adam lost in Eden: intimacy with God. When we pray in our prayer language, our spirits commune with God (1 Corinthians 14:14-15). It is part of "deep calling to deep" (Psalm 42:7). Tongues, then, both represent and help realise God's purpose for his world: the reversal of the effects of sin and restoration of fellowship with him.

## **Tongues in the Life of the Church**

As we will see, tongues is both an individual and a corporate gift. It applies both in our personal communion with God, and in God speaking to gatherings of the saints. In 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul concentrates on the corporate function of tongues, while touching on the individual use of this gift as well. Personal tongues, Paul says, edify the person. Corporate tongues edify the community, functioning (with interpretation) much like prophecy.

For Paul, prophecy has unique value that none of the other manifestations of the Spirit possess. "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified." (14:4-5) The essential difference between the two is that one speaks to, and edifies, those listening, while the other speaks to God, and edifies the person exercising it. Both are valuable, but the potential for

corporate encouragement is greater with prophecy, since it is designed to bless not just the individual, but the entire congregation.

There is, however, one way in which tongues can come near to prophecy in their value to the church, and that is when they are used in conjunction with the gift of interpretation. To quote 1 Corinthians 14:5 once more: “He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, *unless he interprets*, so that the church may be edified.” “For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says.” (14:13) We will discuss the gift of interpretation more fully in the next chapter. For now we simply want to establish that prayer in tongues, if it is interpreted, can edify the church in a similar way to prophecy.

### **Tongues in a Church Meeting: How Do They Work?**

So what would prayers in tongues, in conjunction with interpretation, look like in a corporate gathering? Perhaps like this: You may be sitting in a meeting, and sense that God’s Spirit is stirring something in your spirit. It does not seem like a prophetic message, since the words are not clear to you. Although it is not a burden you can express in words, you feel it is a burden from the Lord, something you must declare or pray about with the help of the Spirit, and something that is for the church and not just for you. So you ask the Lord to provide an interpretation, and you stand up and pray out audibly in tongues. Then, you (along with everyone else) wait for the Lord to give you or someone else an interpretation of your Spirit-inspired prayer in tongues. A few moments pass, and someone begins to pray - in English. He is bringing what he believes is the interpretation of your prayer in tongues. The entire congregation is able to listen to this prayer and join in with it, affirming their agreement.

In this process, two things have happened. First, a prayer according to God’s will has been offered up to the Lord. Second, the church has, through the gift of interpretation, been able to gain a sense of what the Holy Spirit is wanting it to be praying about. The prayer is not a prophecy *per se*, since it is addressed *to God and not to man* - although it is amazing in how many churches you will hear tongues interpreted as though they were a prophetic word from the Lord. However, it does take on prophetic significance, since

it guides the church in its awareness of the will of God, and what he is wanting the church to pray into.

## **Personal and Corporate Tongues**

Paul seems to make it clear that there are both congregational and personal uses of tongues. 1 Corinthians 14:5 speaks of tongues used in conjunction with interpretation, with the intent that “the church may be edified.” Clearly this is a public use of the tongues gift. In 14:18, however, Paul refers to his own use of tongues in his own prayer life. He writes, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But *in the church* I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.” So when did Paul do his frequent tongues speaking if he preferred to speak ‘intelligibly’ in meetings? The obvious answer would seem to be: privately, in his personal prayer and communion with God. In private prayer there is no concern with trying to edify others. There it is right for the believer to “utter mysteries with his spirit” (14:2) and to edify himself (14:4).

## **Personal - even in the Corporate!**

Paul seems to imply that, even in a corporate gathering, tongues can function in more than one way. In verses 2-3, he says, “For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit ... He who speaks in a tongue edifies *himself*.” These verses suggest a personal communing with God through the use of a prayer language, whether it takes place in private or in a corporate gathering. The idea of a personal use of tongues, even in the context of a meeting, is also suggested in verse 28. “If there is no interpreter, the speaker [in tongues] should keep quiet and speak to himself and to God.” The implied intent of this use of tongues is not corporate edification: he who speaks in a tongue edifies *himself*. The intent is deepened personal communion with God. Again, this form of tongues may be done privately or quietly in a public meeting. Just as we might pray individually in our native language during a time of corporate prayer or worship (each one perhaps praying as they feel led by the Spirit), so we might individually pray in tongues in a gathering as well. It should not be done in a loud or dominating

way, as though one were addressing the entire gathering (as Paul says in verse 28), but it is certainly allowable to verbalise the tongues rather than internalise them. As long as we are moving sensitively to the Spirit and not intruding on other people's focus on the Lord, individual praying - whether in English or in a prayer language - need not cause confusion or disharmony. Of course, there may be times when the meeting leader asks us all to pray out in tongues at the same time - perhaps to reinforce a declaration of praise, or intercession or warfare. At times like that, we can really let rip together!

### **Speaking in Tongues to Build Up the Church**

In 14:6 Paul goes on to describe the other function of tongues in the corporate gathering. He says, "Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?" Paul here is clearly thinking of something beyond personal communion with God. His words, "If I come to you" and "what good will I be to you?" clearly imply *an intent to edify a gathering of the saints*. Paul is not thinking here of individuals speaking mysteries in their spirits to God, for their own edification (as we saw above). He is thinking now of someone standing up and speaking out loud in tongues to build the people up in the Lord as an interpretation is brought. When we set these words alongside what Paul says in verses 2 to 3, we see the two different ways that tongues can work. One is for personal communion with the Lord. The other is for corporate edification. In the first sort of tongues, no "interpretation" of the message is necessary, since the one speaking is simply uttering mysteries with his spirit to the Lord (verse 2). In the other, interpretation is clearly needed so that the saints may understand the meaning of the tongue, and be built up in their faith.

### **A Second Look at Tongues-Speaking in the Corporate Gathering**

In 14:23 Paul asks, "So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers some in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?" What is Paul's concern here? And just what is he forbidding? Is it, as some have suggested,

a blanket forbidding of people speaking in tongues in a meeting (even fairly quietly) unless it is intended to be interpreted?

If we are correct that there really are two functions of the gift of tongues (personal as opposed to corporate edification), we would conclude that Paul in verse 23 is warning against a misuse of the second, “corporate intent”, use of tongues referred to in verse 6. This interpretation is born out, we feel, by verse 24, where Paul speaks of “everybody ... prophesying.” The tongues that Paul is thinking of in verse 23 is set alongside prophecy - a corporate gift, intended to address and edify the people present. It is unlikely therefore, in our view, that Paul is thinking of the personal tongues gift described in verses 2 to 3 (and 28) in his comments in verse 23. The use of tongues he is thinking of here is comparable to prophecy - that is, that which is intended to address that entire church. It is the corporate tongues described in verse 6. So Paul’s argument in verse 23 would seem to be: If everyone prophesies, then unbelievers will be edified. But if everyone tries to address the gathering in tongues - audibly speaking to the entire meeting, and giving no interpretation - there will be confusion. It would be an unnecessarily rigid application of Paul’s teaching, we feel, to make across the board rules against believers praying in tongues in a meeting as part of their individual worship and communion with God. As long as everyone is sensitive to the leading of the Spirit and to the other people in the meeting, personal tongues-speaking during a worship service need not produce confusion.

### **Keeping Things in Perspective**

Tongues need to be placed in perspective. Several things are clear.

First, this gift has great value. “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself ... I would like every one of you to speak in tongues...” (14:4-5) “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.” (14:18)

Second, prophecy is more valuable in corporate gatherings than is tongues. As far as the corporate life of the church is concerned, prophecy and teaching are of greater value than tongues (14:4-5, 19).

Third, tongues and “prayer with the mind” should be used together. A healthy prayer life will combine prayer in tongues and prayer in our normal language. Paul writes, “So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit [i.e., in

tongues], but I will also pray with my mind [i.e., in normal language]; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.” (14:15)

Fourth, tongues must be exercised in an orderly way. In verses 27-28, Paul says, “If anyone speaks in a tongue, two - or at the most three - should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet and speak to himself and to God.”

Paul seems to sum up the proper place of tongues when he says, “Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (14:39-40).

## **The Power of Tongues**

Although tongues take something of a back seat to prophecy in terms of their role in church meetings, this manifestation of the Spirit is still very important and should not be neglected. It is a powerful part of the believer’s “tool box” in spiritual growth, in communion with God, and in spiritual warfare. Let us look at some examples of “praying in the spirit” (1 Corinthians 14:14) - personal prayer to the Lord, rather than in a corporate setting, and not requiring interpretation:

### *The Groan of the Spirit*

We have all known times when there is a tremendous burden on us to cry out to God - but we can’t find words to express it. Paul speaks of this experience in Romans 8:26-27: “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for [or, ‘how we ought to pray’], but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”

Paul of course makes no mention of tongues in these verses. He speaks of the Holy Spirit “groaning” within us, interceding in a way that goes beyond human language. Sometimes this groan will be just that - a groan! - as we seek the Lord and wait for him. We will not pray in words. The burden is too deep for words. So the Holy Spirit comes to our aid and *he* groans within us, and *his* groaning is a perfect prayer to God - “in accordance with God’s

will.” Sometimes, however, that groan can manifest itself in supernatural words that come not from our minds but from our spirit: a prayer in tongues. The believer who prays in tongues “utters mysteries with his spirit” (1 Corinthians 14:2). He pours out the burdens of his heart - burdens which do not always find expression in human words. The Holy Spirit himself is literally praying *through* him.

### *Tongues in Intercession*

Suppose you are praying for a friend. You know that he has some real needs, but you do not understand all that is going on in his heart, and simple prayers to ‘bless him’ do not relieve the burden the Spirit is placing on you. So what do you do? You pray in *divine words*. You allow the groan of the Holy Spirit for Joe to manifest through you in a language that comes not from your mind but from your spirit in Spirit-directed intercession for your friend. Suddenly your prayer for Joe is no longer restricted by your understanding of his needs or by your ability to think of new ways to pray for him.

### *Tongues in Spiritual Warfare*

This same Spirit-birtherd prayer applies in spiritual warfare. Satan is setting obstacles in your path. What to do? Pray in your prayer language. Let the Holy Spirit intercede through you as you do battle in prayer. In your mind you can focus on the obstacles you are praying about, but your prayers are not limited by your human understanding. They are Spirit-inspired supplication for God’s intervention against the enemy.

### *Tongues in Our Heart Cry to God*

Maybe you are longing for a deeper fellowship with God. You know him, but you know him well enough to know that you *don’t* know him well enough! You long for more of God. It is here, perhaps, that we most acutely feel the “groan” that Paul speaks of. And it is here that we are most conscious of the inadequacy of our own prayers. Our human language prayers take us part of the way there, but there is still a longing to cry out to God even more. What to do? Let the Holy Spirit express his own “divine groan” through you in the form of a prayer language! A cry in tongues will give utterance to the cry of your heart to know God more deeply.

## **Getting Started**

Finally, a few words about “getting started” in the use of a prayer language.

First, if you do not yet speak in tongues, simply ask God to give you one! If you are baptised in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues is one of the privileges you have received. While you are alone, ask the Holy Spirit for a tongue and begin to speak out whatever words or sounds come to your mind. It may seem strange, and you may feel self-conscious (Who cares? You’re all alone!), but just go with it. Some people have sometimes found it easier to get into speaking in tongues by singing out the words rather than speaking them.

Second, give God more credit than the devil. Don’t be overly concerned about “demonic counterfeits” when you start speaking in syllables that sound like gibberish. Jesus said, “Which of you fathers, if you son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?” (Luke 11:11-12) Trust God, and relax in him!

Third, give it time. Your liberty in tongues may be a gradual thing, beginning with a few syllables that seem to repeat again and again. Again, do not worry! Keep asking, keep yielding your spirit to God’s Spirit. When all is said and done, it’s the Holy Spirit’s job! - and he is eager for you to have this gift.

## Chapter 9

# The Interpretation of Tongues

### What Exactly is This Gift?

The last of our “manifestations of the Spirit” is the one about which Paul tells us the least: the gift of interpretation of tongues, which we have already touched on briefly in the last chapter. While he does not give a detailed explanation of this gift of the Spirit, we can nonetheless infer something of what it involves.

To interpret something - say, a poem, a novel, or a passage of scripture - is to *determine its meaning*. When we interpret the Bible, we ask, “What did Paul intend to say here? What is the idea behind his words?” Or, “What is Jesus trying to tell us when he says, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’? What does he *mean*?” These questions are all seeking to do the same thing: to interpret.

Interpretation becomes especially important when the language being used is unfamiliar to the listeners. Both John and Dave have on occasion preached to non-English speaking audiences. How is this done? Through an *interpreter*. The interpreter picks up the sense of what we are saying, and expresses it in the language known by the audience. It may not be a word-for-word translation. The point is to understand and communicate the underlying *sense* of the message as closely as possible.

That is interpretation. And that is something of what Paul is thinking of when he speaks of “the interpretation of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:10). While our example above is not an exact parallel, as we will see, it does give

the underlying idea: sensing the meaning of something, and conveying it in a way that people will understand.

## **Supernatural Tongues, Supernatural Interpretation**

We saw in the previous chapter (on the gift of tongues) that there are various kinds of tongues. There are the “manward” tongues, like those that took place on the day of Pentecost. This tongues gift requires no interpretation, since the speakers are speaking known human languages (see Acts 2:5-11). In 1 Cor 12-14, we come across the “Godward” tongues - tongues that cannot be understood without divine revelation. It can only be interpreted supernaturally. And Paul calls the ability to interpret these tongues the gift of interpretation.

## **The Burden of the Spirit**

How does this gift work? Here we must be clear: the *interpretation* of tongues is not a *translation*. It is not a word for word rendering of a tongue in our native language. The interpretation of tongues is a Spirit-given *sense of the meaning* of a tongue. It is not word for word, but an expression of the burden of the Spirit underlying the prayer in tongues.

An analogy may help us understand this. Let us say you are looking at an abstract painting. It has no words, and no clear pictures; only shapes and splotches of colour. But as you continue to look at it, you pick up a sense of the statement the artist was trying to make. It may have been one of joy, or hope, or love, or loneliness or despair. Your interpretation of the painting is a *sense* of ‘the artist’s burden’.

This is something like what happens with the interpretation of a tongue. The Holy Spirit is birthing a prayer in someone. They begin to pray out in a tongue. If you have the gift of interpretation, you pick up *the burden of the Spirit* behind the words being prayed. It may be one of exalted praise. It may be one of militant warfare against the powers of darkness. It may be one of intercession for the saints. It may be one of longing for more of God. It may be one of grief over sin in the church. Prayers in tongues (as we saw in the previous chapter) are part of the Spirit’s own direction of the prayer life of the saints. The gift of interpretation enables us to sense the burden of the

Holy Spirit as he “intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.” (Romans 8:27) When a prayer in tongues is interpreted, the saints can begin join with the Holy Spirit, and pray - like he does - in line with the will of God.

### **More than One ‘Interpretation’?**

Once we understand how the interpretation of tongues works - that it is an *interpretation* and not a *translation* - it frees us from fears of ‘getting it wrong’. In fact, there may well be two or three ‘interpretations’ of the same tongue brought out by different members of the Body. What has happened in such cases is that the tongue has released an impression in their spirit by the Holy Spirit of what God is wanting to say. Rather like our people looking at the abstract painting, the *overall* sense is the same, but different ones noticed or highlighted different things. So it is often with the interpretation of tongues: the Spirit may prompt just one person to bring the ‘whole picture’, but he may creatively unlock several people to bring out the different emphases, each one perhaps building on the other.

### **By Faith, Not By Translation**

The interpretation of tongues - like all the gifts of the Spirit - must be exercised by faith. We should not focus on *the words* being prayed, in an effort to ‘translate’. We should focus on *the Lord*, and open our spirits to the Holy Spirit. Remember: the correct ‘interpretation’ of the tongue will not be one that reproduces the words of the tongue in our native language (English or whatever). It will be one that truly reflects the heart of God behind the prayer.

All of this should free us from unnecessary pressure in exercising the gift of interpretation. We do not have to become ‘experts’ in understanding tongues. All we need to do is allow the Holy Spirit to line up our hearts with God’s heart.

## Chapter 10

### **Some Final Thoughts**

#### **Tools, not Trinkets**

Do you remember our opening story about John's dishwasher repair man? He came equipped with *tools* to do his work. We have tried to show that that is what the gifts of the Spirit are: tools. They are not like fine china (brought out for special visitors) or interesting trinkets (brought out to liven up a dull meeting). They are the Holy Spirit's equipment for the life and mission of the church - whether in warfare, healing, prayer, or hearing the voice of God. So, some final encouragements on using them.

#### **Practice Makes Perfect**

The idea of 'practising' the gifts of the Holy Spirit may sound rather irreverent! But if we are realistic, we will realise that we all grow and learn. Even Jesus "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men." (Luke 2:52) God is patient. He will not scold us or cast us off if we flop in our early attempts to use the tools he has given us. Most of us can recall falling off our bicycles as we learned to ride. And most mature saints, who now have proven ministries in the exercise of the gifts, can recall embarrassing mistakes or excesses when they were getting started. Remember: the church is God's family. And a wise and good father does make allowances for his children.

### **If in doubt...**

“If in doubt, give it out!” is the saying of one of the leaders in Oxfordshire. What he means by that is this: all of us have at times sat in a meeting with a ‘thought’ going around our minds, wondering whether this was from God or not. Should I speak it out or not? Does it fit? Will it be right? Give me a sign Lord! At the end of the day, the only way we will ever find out whether it is from God or whether it is one of our own ‘spiritual best wishes’ is to speak it out! In fact, experience tells us that ninety-nine times out of a hundred it will be fine; in fact, it may even turn out to be excellent! But you will never know and you will never grow unless you give it a go!

### **But What if I Get it Wrong!?**

This is one of the most paralysing fears for most people. But getting it wrong in life is part of the cost of learning and growing (remember the bicycle!); and getting it wrong in this area of spiritual gifts is no different. In fact, most of the things that people get ‘wrong’ in using spiritual gifts are not horrendous anyway. The wise leader will simply let words that are either unhelpful or that do not take us anywhere simply fall to one side in the meeting. Even if your contribution was more seriously ‘wrong’ it can be dealt with gently and helpfully, so that you can do better next time. In fact, most leaders can count on one hand the number of words they have heard that were profoundly wrong or unbiblical. So don’t be paralysed; risk it!

### **Start Small!**

Remember what we said in the chapter on prophecy; don’t expect to start with a ‘tennis racket’ word! If you are learning to prophesy, you will not see with the same clarity or speak with the same authority as someone who has been using the gift for twenty years. If all God gives you is a single and simple sentence, then let that be all! If you are new at praying for the sick, don’t be afraid to start with things you have faith for. You may not yet have confidence to rebuke terminal cancer, but you may well have faith to pray for a friend’s sore throat, or for the cancer patient’s headache to be relieved! This principle applies in the exercise of all the gifts. Let the Holy Spirit lead you and help you to grow.

## **Keep Simple!**

Some people fall into the trap of thinking that they have to get ‘deeper’ or more complex as their gifting develops. But this isn’t the case! In fact, the most gifted people in this area are those who remain the most clear and simple. Think of Jesus! No one was more simple than him in what he spoke, yet no one was more profound. Don’t try to ‘develop’ your gifting that much that it simply loses everybody! Don’t add to what God gives you to make it sound or look better. Simply stay simple!

## **Be Teachable!**

Having said this, there *is* place for growth in the use of spiritual gifts, and this is where discipleship comes in, as we receive input from others who are more experienced in a particular area of gifting. Fruit grows best when the tree is pruned! So we too need to be open to being ‘pruned’ by the wise observations of others, particularly our leaders or someone more experienced. Determine that you will have a teachable heart; let people encourage you for stepping out, but let them also train you in how it could be even better next time. Make a deliberate choice that you will let God prune you (no matter how painful it might seem at the time!) so that you can bear more fruit for him and be more useful to the Body.

## **Outside as well as Inside**

‘Useful to the Body’ doesn’t just mean, of course, that these gifts are only for use *within* the church. The vast majority of Jesus’ use of spiritual gifts was for people outside! In fact, it is often easier to ‘practice’ on unbelievers, since their expectations are not as high! Remember: you don’t have to get religious to use the gifts. To ask a neighbour or friend “Have you got a headache?” can be an easy way in to using the word of knowledge. If they say, “Yes, how did you know?” then you can tell them that, while it might sound crazy to them, you believe God put the thought in your mind and that he wants you to pray for them. And if they answer, “No, why?” then you can always pass it off by saying, “Oh nothing. I just wondered!” Dare to take some risks in this area; you will find God will be with you!

## **These Tools Aren't Optional**

If all this talk of stepping out and taking risks leaves you somewhat nervous, then you need to remember that using spiritual gifts is not something you can leave to others. God does not consider the *charismata* to be exotic phenomena for fringe groups or super-saints. We are *all* to desire the gifts. If you find yourself indifferent, afraid or even hostile towards the idea of moving in the gifts of the Spirit, then ask God to change your heart and to help you desire all he wants you to desire.

## **The Greatest Gift**

In the middle of his teaching on the gifts, Paul includes the following well-known words: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:1-2)

In our own local fellowship, we sometimes use the term “grace grease”. Grace grease is the Holy Spirit’s lubricant among the saints that keeps them from destroying one another through friction and criticism. Paul says in Ephesians 4:2 “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” That is the way to walk in ‘grace grease’; by being covered with the ‘oil’ of humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and love. If he were using this term, Paul might say to us, “When you move in the gifts, be sure to have them (and yourselves) well-oiled. Rub them all down with grace grease!” In practical terms, this will mean making allowances for one another, being patient with one another, and always believing the best about one another - especially after mistakes! That is love, the greatest gift, and the indispensable prerequisite to operating in the gifts of the Spirit.

## **The Greatest Goal**

None of us is immune to the subtle trap of pride. The thought of someone commenting on our ‘powerful prophetic gift’ appeals to our human desire for recognition. But it is wrong, since it places man at the centre, rather than

God. Remember the reason God does all that he does: for his own glory! He overthrew Pharaoh so that his “name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” (Exodus 9:16) He saved us and filled us with the Spirit “to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:6,14) All that he makes and does is “from him and through him and to him.” (Romans 11:36) The exercise of the gifts is no exception. The gifts, and the church which they equip, exist for the fame and honour of God. “To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Ephesians 3:21)

### **Where Now? ...**

Whether new or not-so-new to spiritual gifts, we would encourage you all to launch out and let God widen this area of your life, worship and witness in his Spirit. For some, (to draw from the picture in Ezekiel 47) that will mean jumping in the river and allowing it to cover your ankles. For others, it will mean leaving behind your place of security and moving in deeper to allow the water to cover your knees. Others still have already progressed to that stage and need to let the flow of the Spirit’s river rise to their waist and start to swim - feet off the security of the ground!

The river is flowing powerfully in these days - let us all ensure we are in it and part of it, as we let the Holy Spirit work in us and through us, giving us his tools that the job might get done!