

Church of God, The Eternal

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The Gifts of God's Holy Spirit

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Dear Brethren:

By the time you receive this letter we will have just completed the observance of Pentecost once again, having rehearsed the meaning of this most Holy Day in the plan of God, and the significance of God's Holy Spirit in the operation of our spiritual conversion.

God inspired the Apostle Paul to instruct His people concerning spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians, chapter 12. We understand that these appropriately are called gifts of the Holy Spirit, meaning abilities given by God to particular members of the Church through the action of His divine power. Paul said, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant" (1 Corinthians 12:1). And so neither should we be ignorant about this important topic. Since Pentecost is the Feast picturing that gift of the Holy Spirit to the true Church, it is profitable for us to analyze the attributes of those particular gifts enumerated by Paul to the first-century Church, and then consider them as they apply to the last-day Church at this time.

1 Corinthians 12 Background

The very context of Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts in chapter 12 is actually the continuation of his subject from the previous chapter. In chapter 11, Paul strongly criticized the church in Corinth for polluting the Passover observance, reminding them of the proper procedure and mental orientation required to partake worthily of that sacred ordinance. Because too few had properly examined themselves in preparation, they did not truly discern the Lord's body (verse 29)—meaning they did not recognize who the true Christ really was, how He and His commands differed from the world, how their own violation of those commands had made them guilty, and how much they desperately needed atonement through His personal sacrifice.

Paul confirmed (verse 30) that such neglect had made them weak and some were even spiritually dead—without fruit. Verses 31 and 32 then admonished them to apply the meaning

of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, judging the self against the perfect standard of Christ's example, putting out the spiritual leavening identified, and thereby avoiding condemnation in the judgment to come through the hard work of personal self-mastery.

An Introduction to Chapter 12

Then in the continuation of this thread in chapter 12, Paul begins to address the attributes of the Holy Spirit in the form of spiritual gifts. It is impossible for us to judge ourselves and to overcome sin (the meaning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread) if we do not have the power of God's Holy Spirit operating in our lives. That is why Pentecost follows Passover, but is likewise one of the *spring* Feasts. It is connected inexorably with Passover, together showing the collective recipe of true conversion. Pentecost pictures the spiritual begetting of that firstfruits harvest—the Church—through the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit. It is the gift of that Spirit—not offered to those former generations of human beings—that now makes it possible to bear real spiritual fruit (to overcome).

Therefore, Paul is addressing the topic of gifts of the Holy Spirit in the context of our Passover obligations. Here is confirmation at the beginning of chapter 12. Paul said, "Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led" (1 Corinthians 12:2). He reminds them they had to come out of the deception of this world—spiritual Egypt—and accept Jesus Christ as the new standard of Truth in their lives.

But what Christ must we accept? Can we interpret Jesus Christ any way we want, suiting ourselves? Never! "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy [Spirit]" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Does this mean that anyone who uses the name of Christ and literally utters the words, "Jesus is the Lord," is automatically speaking by the power of God's Spirit? Absolutely not. The Holy Spirit is not manifested in those who talk about Christ, or even profess to be Christians, but only in those who demonstrate by their *actions* that they truly believe and accept what Jesus Christ represents. How then do we distinguish those led by the Spirit and those only making a profession? Jesus Himself gave us the means to know:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matthew 7:21–23).

What were these people doing which caused Christ to reject them? Working iniquity! That means breaking God's laws. For all their claims of respecting Christ, they were not obeying His commandments. Notice further:

Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation *bringing forth the fruits thereof*. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder (Matthew 21:42–44) [emphasis mine].

What specific fruits will He require of us to prove we are truly His children?

If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that [it] may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him (John 14:15–17, 21).

So the true disciples of Christ—those offered the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit—are those who keep the commandments of God, and do not pervert or corrupt them through their own interpretations. It is confirmation that the law really does matter. God's law was manifested in the Person of Jesus Christ. He was the Word made flesh (John 1:14). One cannot respect Christ if he disrespects the law which He embodies.

Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall *know of the doctrine*, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself (John 7:16–17) [emphasis mine].

How Is Christ Called Accursed?

What does all this have to do with the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Remember, Paul begins 1 Corinthians 12 by saying, "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed . . ." (1 Corinthians 12:3). What does it mean to call Jesus accursed? To deny the true doctrines which He represents in Himself!

All too many today who profess Christ—especially those who were once called to be part of the true Church—are actually calling Him accursed today. How so? Not by defaming His name outwardly, but by accusing Him of being mentally ill and sickly.

We are told by many former members of our parent organization today that doctrine does not really matter—that debating over "true" doctrine is the recipe for division—and that we should set doctrinal differences aside and simply focus on "loving each other." While such an orientation is highly attractive to carnal human minds, it flies in the face of what God commanded His people to do.

But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because *ye know it*, and that *no lie is of the truth*. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. *Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning*. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father (1 John 2:20–24) [emphasis mine].

The Apostle John confirmed that the true Church had Truth given to it—the very revelation of Jesus Christ and the doctrines He personifies. The obligation of every true Christian is then to *hold fast* to that Christ which was revealed in the form of sound doctrine, and never to change. Those who hold fast attest their belief in the unity and soundness of Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church, and of the healthy nature of His Personage.

On the other hand, those who claim we have never had pure doctrine, claim we cannot know what true doctrine really is, or who believe that God changes His doctrine over time, are all accusing Christ of being defective—accursed! It matters not how much they coo and fawn over Christ with their words. Their rejection of the very basis of Christ's image in the form of sound doctrine is an accusation that He Himself is without soundness—sick and afflicted.

We understand this principle as it applies physically. An individual who has rheumatoid arthritis (to name one of many afflictions), suffers from an autoimmune disease characterized by severe pain, stiffness, inflammation, and swelling of the joints. Although man's best medical wisdom still does not understand what causes it, the body's own immune system is literally attacking itself, as the white blood cells move from the bloodstream into the synovial membrane, causing the membrane to become inflamed. The long-term result is major deformity and destruction of the joints.

The same holds true with mental illness. When we see an individual who has a mental disorder, it is often apparent through irrational and bizarre behavior. Medical doctors may diagnose someone as being schizophrenic, bi-polar, manic-depressive, or one of a host of other labels. But the common denominator is a lack of mental control, manifested by a warring within that mind—one element against the other. Rather than those body systems working together in unity, they instead fight against each other, causing dysfunction, disability, and incapacity. Whether mental or physical, we understand these principles as they apply to the human body.

Why then is it so hard to recognize these same principles as they apply to Jesus Christ? After all, He used this very corollary of the human body to represent Himself!

Christ and His Body

The Apostle Paul was inspired to use this very example of a healthy human body to symbolize the workings of Christ and His Church:

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body (1 Corinthians 12:12–20).

Yes, many members, yet one cohesive body, each member working together in unity toward a common goal, playing his assigned part for the good of the whole. Jesus Christ is the Head of that Body, and that Body is a reflection of His very Being. When a body is healthy, the autoimmune system does not attack the joints. The immune system performs its role to protect the body from harm, and the joints do their part to provide a painless, full-range of motion. There is no internal conflict causing pain and disability. All systems within that physical body support harmoniously the will of the head (mind and brain) that gives it direction. So, too, is the image of Jesus Christ and His Body.

And understand that the Body of Christ—while a spiritual organism—is manifested in a *physical* assembly of human beings, in which dwells the Holy Spirit. "For we are members of his body, *of his flesh, and of his bones*" (Ephesians 5:30) [emphasis mine]. Yes, flesh and bones, which confirms we are talking about a work God is doing among physical beings. Many former members claim there is no physical vestige of His Body left today in an organized assembly. They seek to "spiritualize away" the concept of the Body of Christ. But a faithful remnant was promised to endure until the end. If that is not so, then God has lied. (For confirmation of this principle, please see the December 2001 *Monthly Letter* entitled, "The Faithful Remnant—Accept No Counterfeits.")

Therefore, one who claims that Jesus is accursed is really saying His mind and Body are confused, conflicted, and without unity of purpose. It is exactly what many of God's people are claiming about Christ today, fulfilling this very prophecy. Again, Paul said:

Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy [Spirit] (1 Corinthians 12:3).

So those truly being led by God's Holy Spirit and playing their parts in the Body of Christ will acknowledge the unity of His *sound* mind—definitively revealed doctrine—and be working in unison—not competition—with all others in that Body, fulfilling their assigned roles. This is exactly the point Paul makes in his next statements:

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal (1 Corinthians 12:4–7).

There were different administrations in the first century, as God commissioned twelve apostles and sent them each into distinct areas of the world. There were not different administrations because converted leaders could not get along, as some today attempt to assert—using the separation of Paul and Barnabas as evidence. Such conclusions only confirm they believe Christ is accursed, with different Spirit-filled parts of His Body fighting against each other. No, those different administrations were ordained by God for reason. And although separate by geography, language, or whatever distinction is involved, those Spirit-filled members of the Body are all unified in their doctrinal agreement and love for each other. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

Therefore, the proof of God's true Spirit working is the unity of purpose manifested by different administrations and operations, acting cohesively together. It is not unity based upon "tolerance" for different interpretations of doctrine—as advocated by this world—but unity based upon a common belief in the singular and unalterable revelation of Jesus Christ. When people truly agree on doctrine, and when they really want to serve Christ—not self, they are *drawn together* by the unity of that common Spirit, not driven apart. Where division and separation exists it is proof that one, the other, or both parties involved are not being led by God's Spirit. To say otherwise accuses Christ of being accursed.

Specific Gifts of the Spirit Listed

Next, Paul then lists nine specific gifts that have been used as part of God's purpose and plan in the work of His Church—that physical assembly of Spirit-filled children. They are all important parts of the whole.

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will (1 Corinthians 12:8–11).

Following, at the end of the chapter, is another list including both offices and specific gifts, overlapping to a significant extent with the first list.

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:28).

The first list gives exclusively an itemization of gifts, without relation to particular offices. The second provides God's order of importance of specific offices, and of certain of those gifts. What can we know about these gifts and offices as they originally applied in the first century, and how do they apply today within God's Church in this age?

The first two gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8 are *the word of wisdom* and *the word of knowledge*. The word of knowledge refers to the revelation of right vs. wrong. It includes an understanding of God's laws—those things He requires us to do, and those things He requires us to avoid doing: ". . . for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). The word of wisdom is the ability to apply those laws in real life—understanding how to take stated laws and make judgments when it may not be clear on the surface.

One example would be the knowledge of the weekly Sabbath. To grasp the necessity of keeping the Sabbath *and what it represents in the master plan of God* is an example of revealed knowledge through God's Spirit—the word of knowledge. But what is permissible to do on the Sabbath and what is not? While God provided black and white principles (knowledge) to tell us what to do and what not to do, there are many things that challenge God's people in the form of "gray areas." How then can we clarify these issues? By the word of wisdom—the inspired ability (gift) of interpreting the law and making judgments in more specific areas. It requires an understanding of the true *spirit of the law* to give such guidance. In this regard, knowledge and wisdom then work hand in hand, and those gifts edify the body to help us understand both what God expects of us, and how to apply those principles in our daily living.

The next gift of the Spirit listed is *faith*. Faith is, ". . . the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). It means the ability to make daily decisions based upon true belief that invisible things are real. Human beings cannot manifest real faith and conviction in the plan and purpose of God without the gift of the Holy Spirit. Trusting that God

is our promised Healer (for example)—that it is sin to go to Satan's counterfeit doctors and partake of their invasive surgeries and medications—takes strong belief in the invisible God, especially when faced with life-threatening or painful illness. Who is truly willing to place himself in harm's way physically and trust in an invisible promise of an invisible God? Only one who has been given and is cultivating the gift of real faith.

Paul lists next the *gifts of healing*, meaning the ability to act as an agent of Jesus Christ for His promised intervention to miraculously correct physical damage to our bodies from injury and disease. It is not the individual human being who heals, but that person is merely used by God as the representative for Christ, by whom we are truly healed (1 Peter 2:24).

Verse 10 lists next, *the working of miracles*. Apart from physical healing (in itself a miracle), this includes all supernatural acts of God performed through a delegated human representative. Such miracles of Jesus Christ and the patriarchs of old have included, turning water into wine, walking on water, pulling a coin from a fish's mouth, turning a staff into a serpent, turning the sea into blood, making the sun stand still, shutting up the heavens from rain, calling fire down from heaven, just to name a very few.

The next gift listed is *prophecy*, the ability to reveal specific details about events that will transpire in the future. While the root word translated as "prophecy" can also mean simply *inspired speaking*, the context here seems to imply the special gift of forecasting future events.

Paul then lists *discerning of spirits*. This is the ability to recognize the difference between a Godly influence and a demonic influence. In its most dramatic form, it involves reading the thoughts of an individual and knowing their source. There are only two spiritual influences—God and His Holy Spirit, or Satan and his rebellious spirit. Given that fact, it might seem that the distinction should be obvious. But recall that Satan is the master of deception, and he is effective at deceiving human beings because he disguises his diabolical influence so well. "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:13–14). This text also emphasizes that one of the most lethal manifestations of Satan's deception is that of false prophets—men claiming the authority of Jesus Christ to teach. God's church at large has been devastated by the seduction of false prophets—even many who were called originally to be legitimate ministers of God, but who have since been seduced to depart from the faith and now teach their corrupted doctrines with the help of Satan. One given the special gift of discernment of spirits can differentiate the source of inspiration, regardless of how clever and convincing the outward appearance may be.

The eighth specific gift Paul lists is *divers kinds of tongues*, meaning simply the ability to master many different languages, besides one's native tongue. It is true that certain human beings have the natural ability to learn foreign languages without being in God's church or being inspired

by His Holy Spirit, so this is not necessarily a unique gift that is manifested only by a true servant of God. But Paul is emphasizing that the gift of diverse language mastery is one which God has at times given through miraculous means, to accomplish a particular work within His Church.

The ninth and last gift listed in the early part of chapter 12 is *the interpretation of tongues*. How does this gift differ from mastery of diverse tongues described above? Many people may be able to learn one or more foreign languages, but the ability to *translate* between two languages for the benefit of others who are not bilingual is a very special gift indeed. This is likewise an ability which is not unique to a Spirit-filled servant of God, but is one that God has inspired at times through miraculous means to accomplish His will and purpose.

Then in verse 28, Paul lists two additional gifts (not including offices for the time being) which are not included in the earlier list of nine. Miracles, gifts of healings, and diversities of tongues are repeated, but then we have two new ones mentioned.

The first is simply called *helps*. To what service can this be referring? The Greek word from which it comes means "relief." It very likely refers to the ability to provide comfort and aid for those who are troubled and distressed. We are all aware of individuals who seem to have a special "knack" for comforting others. Many might feel awkward and unprepared to be able to say and do the right things when someone is suffering. But certain others just seem to have that special ability to calm, reassure, encourage, and console. They know what is needed and make wonderful aides to the sick and the troubled. This too is a trait that can be manifested without a special gift of the Holy Spirit in peoples of the world, but is listed as a particular gift that God often inspires for the benefit of His Church.

The second unique gift listed in verse 28 is *governments*. It comes from a Greek root meaning directorship, including the ability to pilot or to lead. As it applies to God's Church, it refers to the special gift of organizing and directing functions and operations for the benefit of the collective Body. For organizational purposes, God has inspired certain ones at given times with the ability to structure administrative functions to accomplish His will.

Understanding Offices in the Church

The second category addressed by Paul—in his description of God's work through the Holy Spirit—involves offices of authority.

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers . . . (1 Corinthians 12:28).

These offices have become a source of great contention among God's people in this age. Anytime the issue of government and authority arises, you can almost see a perceptible bristle of negative reaction among many former members of our parent body. Given the gross abuse of those offices in times past by ministers who did not really serve the people as Christ commanded—but used their authority for self-aggrandizement—is it any wonder so many have become hostile? But the solution is not to deny the legitimacy of those authoritative offices as God revealed them—seeking to justify democracy or "mob rule" in the church—but to identify where God is still working through His Holy Spirit to preserve a faithful remnant. Wherever you find a *legitimate* remnant of God, you will find a leadership applying Christ's example of love and self-sacrifice for the good of the brethren. That leadership will be forceful and authoritative in confirming the Truth, but will be kind, supportive, and long-suffering in its dealing with the people. Do not throw the baby out with the bath water just because of past failings of men. That too was prophesied to occur (Jeremiah 23), and is a primary means by which Satan has divided and scattered Israel.

With that in mind, what is the proper way to understand these God-ordained offices?

Paul lists *apostles* as primary. These were the individual human servants called and commissioned by God to speak in the name of Jesus Christ as His ambassadors, and by whom the Churches of God were raised, established, and preserved. They were ones who did not learn the Truth through other human agents, but who were taught directly and miraculously by Christ Himself. Jesus called and commissioned the original Twelve. They were not volunteers, but were handpicked by Christ. Although Paul was not taught by Him during His fleshly ministry, he likewise was handpicked by Christ and taught directly through the Spirit. He did not learn the real Truth through any other man (Galatians 1:11–20).

The next office in priority is *prophets*. Again, they were those given special inspiration to forecast the future, according to the specific will and purpose of God, or to deliver a special inspired message to God's people.

The third office is *teachers*. It includes those men ordained to teach and reinforce the doctrines of God to the Body on an ongoing basis. These are not men who were taught the Truth directly by God—as were apostles—but who learned the Truth through the apostles, and were then ordained to assist those apostles in the work of the Church. They are counselors who help individual members learn how to apply those principles in their lives. Ephesians 4:11 adds *evangelists* and *pastors* to the list of offices. An evangelist is a preacher of the gospel, one commissioned to assist the apostle in his proclaiming of that message to raise up new churches. A pastor is a shepherd, assigned to take care of the new churches which have been established. While much more could be said about these offices, the focus of this letter is the gifts of the Holy Spirit as they relate to these functions within the Body of Christ.

How Do Offices and Gifts Work Together?

We have analyzed a list of eleven gifts of the Holy Spirit and three offices defined along with them by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. How and when are these gifts used? Are all of these gifts wielded only by ordained ministers? If not, how do laymembers, having such gifts, use them in relationship to the ministry? These are some of the questions that have often confused and perplexed God's people.

First, these gifts should not always be thought of as isolated entities, standing alone. Faith is one of these gifts, and it is a requirement for salvation (Ephesians 2:8). That means everyone in the Body should be manifesting faith. Faith should actually be the most prolific gift, shared in common by all members. The gift of helps is another example. While some individuals might have a special gift from God in this area, by the Holy Spirit dwelling in each one of us we all should be able to manifest increased compassion and willingness to help those in need, as that Spirit increases within us. It is likewise reasonable to expect that particular individuals may have a number of these gifts—not just one—according to the purpose of God. They are not mutually exclusive.

Next, the eleven listed gifts of God's Spirit are not all given exclusively to ordained ministers. Only men are authorized to be ministers in the true Church, but a number of these spiritual gifts are exercised by women. These would include faith, prophecy (for God has used a number of women in the role of prophetesses in times past: Judges 4:4; Luke 2:36), discerning of spirits, mastery of languages, interpretation of languages, and helps. It must also mean therefore that men who are not ordained can also receive these gifts. It is also very probable that the gift of governments (administrative know-how) can be given to members who are not ordained, both to men and even to women, within the proper authority structure.

While it may not be the case in every instance, the other gifts are more likely to be manifested by ordained ministers in God's service. This includes the gift of revealed knowledge, since God has always used commissioned servants—apostles—to teach that Truth with authority. It would also include the word of wisdom, since proper application of God's Truth is not left to individual members to define: ". . . it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). That preaching is done by those commissioned and sent, and any gray area of interpretation is clarified by those servants: ". . . and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Romans 10:14–15).

While it certainly might be possible for the gift of healing to be given to a laymember, an overwhelming number of examples in the Bible show ordained servants of God wielding that gift. As it relates to the New Testament Church, the instruction is:

Is any sick among you? *let him call for the elders of the church*; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him (James 5:14–15) [emphasis mine].

We do not rule out that God can give this gift to a laymember, but the command is not to go to "whichever baptized member" of the church manifests the gift of healing. It is to have *the ministry* lay hands upon the sick, for they are the representatives of Jesus Christ for that function.

In like manner, although it is always possible for the gift of miracles to be given to a laymember—and we will never try to limit God in how He inspires—the Bible shows that gift primarily given to apostles, prophets, and ministers ordained to confirm God's Word with power.

If God ever chooses to give laymembers the gifts of prophecy, healings, and miracles, one thing is for sure: Those gifts will never be set up in competition with the ministry. This would violate the very principle of unity Paul is trying to convey!

But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. . . . but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body (1 Corinthians 12:18–20, 24–25).

God is not going to give authority to the ministry to teach, guide, and protect the sheep, and then give a special gift to a laymember in competition, who "sets up shop" in the church—outside of ministerial authority—and exercises his craft unilaterally. What nonsense! We have had individuals in our midst in times past, who because they were not eligible to be ministers, sought to have some other "gifts" they could exercise to give them prominence in the church. Some have presumed to have prophetic abilities. Others have claimed to be able to heal.

Besides the fact their fruits never proved they had such gifts at all, there was one other characteristic that absolutely ruled them out. They never sought to use their "gifts" under the direction of ministerial oversight. No, they always asserted their authority was separate and distinct from the ministry, and insisted the pastors *bend their wills* to the new "prophet" or "healer." How absurd. Where was the manifestation of the unity of God's Spirit in that? Where was the evidence of these special gifts working in harmony for the edification of the Body of Christ? There was none. Conversely, to those who had eyes to see, there was every evidence of Satan attacking these members and playing upon their lust for attention and personal recognition.

No, when those spiritual gifts are given legitimately by God to members, they will be exercised within the structure of authority of that Body, and the fruits of unity and cooperation will be evident.

Are These Gifts What Really Matter?

We have witnessed many in times past who have allowed lust for spiritual gifts to destroy them. This was the reason Paul was inspired to write about these gifts and provide guidance to the church to understand them in context. Carnality was a real problem in the first-century church, even as it has been in the last-day church. Human beings are always challenged to really crucify the self and give up the pursuit of self-promotion. Paul addresses this very weakness at the end of 1 Corinthians 12:

Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:29–31).

What was this more excellent way, which was separate and distinct from any of these special gifts of the Spirit? None other than the topic in 1 Corinthians 13—the love chapter! Paul confirms that none of those gifts have value unless they are used in the context of real love—sacrifice of selfish pursuits for the benefit of others. The picture is complete.

How Are These Gifts Manifested Today?

We know that God utilized every one of these eleven gifts in the first-century Church. The word of knowledge and wisdom were manifested through the apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Great faith was exercised by many who put their lives at risk to obey God's commandments, as documented in the book of Acts. Incredible healings and miracles were performed. Prophets and prophetesses were still extant in that era of time, who delivered special messages from God. Peter was given the ability to discern spirits (Acts 5:3). Selected ones were given the ability to master languages, and to translate languages, even manifested miraculously when people heard the same sermon in their own native tongues (Acts 2:6–8). The church was organized in local and regional areas, which involved the gift of governments, and helps were manifested as brethren poured themselves out in compassionate sacrifice to assist those in need.

What about today? Are all of these eleven gifts extant in God's Church? We certainly received the word of knowledge and wisdom through the ministry of Mr. Herbert Armstrong and those men whom he ordained to help him do that work in this age. God revealed doctrine to us in exactly the same way He established the first-century Church—by divine revelation through a chosen servant.

Great acts of faith have also been manifested by the people of God over the last seventy years, although such faith has been much harder to find in the last thirty years, since serious

apostasy—departure from Truth—set in. Unfortunately, even many who embrace the faith once delivered in doctrinal tenets, have had trouble putting their complete confidence in God in times of personal threat, but there are still a few who have manifested the fruits of real faith and conviction.

Great healings have also taken place in God's Church in this age, although the diminishing of overall faith seems also to have impacted the number of divine healings over the last several decades. Healing and faith go hand in hand (Acts 14:9).

We certainly have had members who have shown the ability to discern spirits, based upon outward fruits. Regardless of how appealing a personality or message might be, God gave us the means to try those spirits and tell from which source they derive (Deuteronomy 13:1–5; 18:21–22). This does not require the miracle of reading hearts and minds, but it is still a gift of the Spirit which comes from God's help and inspiration.

The church has been blessed with those skilled in languages and interpretation of languages to facilitate the spreading of the gospel around the world, and preserving communications across national boundaries among international congregations of this faithful remnant. We are most grateful to God for the blessing of those gifts which He has preserved for us even today.

We have also witnessed many instances of the gift of helps, as members with that special ability to assist and comfort those in need have served tirelessly the Body of Christ. Likewise, we have enjoyed the fruits of God's blessings in administrations to provide the organization needed to accomplish His will to feed and support the sheep. There is no doubt the church in those earliest decades (1930s–1960s) had the real blessing of administrations during the time that body was growing at an average rate of thirty percent annually. But wise leadership was one of those gifts lost when the ministry began to pervert the doctrine, and bad fruits certainly became manifested thereafter in many areas of that organization in the late 1960s and beyond. But all of these gifts were certainly manifested in our times.

Gifts Not Yet Manifested Today

What about miracles and prophecy? Why were they not included in the list of last-day manifestations above?

It is very true we have seen a number of great miracles in our church history over the past seventy years. God intervened so many times to keep that fledgling work of Mr. Armstrong from being destroyed. The fact it grew at such a prodigious rate to become so vast and significant is nothing short of a miracle. Then there are the many blessings God granted individual families

and members who tell of divine interventions to protect them from harm, or to open doors for incredible opportunity. These all certainly come under the heading of miracles. Our very callings are the greatest miracles of all.

But in the context of the kind of miracles manifested in the first-century, like Ananias and Sapphira being struck dead by the word of Peter (Acts 5:5, 10), prison doors being opened by angels (Acts 5:19), Philip being translated before the eyes of the eunuch (Acts 8:39), the bite of a deadly viper having no ill effect upon Paul (Acts 28:5), and dead people being resurrected back to life (Acts 20:9–12), we have not seen such miracles to date in the work God has done in this age.

Likewise, Mr. Herbert Armstrong confirmed that God has not chosen to raise up any prophets in our time—individuals with the commission to reveal details about coming events. Yes, we have had prophets in terms of inspired servants who have "prophesied" the Truth for our hearing. But no individual in this age has ever demonstrated the gift to reveal names, dates, places, and events to transpire in the future. All who have presumed such gifts have been shown foolish by the failure of their prophecies—bonafide proof they were *not* sent by God.

What do we say then? Is the fact we have seen no great miracles or newly confirmed prophecies in our time—as manifested in the first century—evidence we are not the legitimate Church of God? Not at all. Many have made such a conclusion, however. They assume all of these gifts *must* be present in every age, and at every time, or it is not the work of God. So they conjure up miracles and prophecies to try and provide confirmation for the religious works they embrace. But all of that has only proven to be an empty charade.

No, brethren, the gifts we *have* been given by God are substantial proof that He performed a great work through the ministry of Herbert Armstrong in this age. The priceless nature of that revealed Truth—especially as it has changed our lives for the better—is the best proof of the legitimacy of that work. No other religion pulls together the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation and shows without contradiction how God is working to offer salvation to mankind. Obedience to those laws as we were taught brings absolute blessings to those who keep them in faith. And all that we have seen transpire in that church over seventy years is a direct fulfillment of those prophecies God gave for the end time.

The fact is, according to God's own purpose, He has not chosen to use great miracles and works of prophets in our age thus far. That does not trouble us. We know both of those tools will become very prominent in His dealings with man before long. When God sets His hand to recover spiritual Israel (the apostate peoples) out of her filth, and when He begins to perform that warning work to the nations in preparation for the Second Coming of Christ, those alive will see the great manifestations of power that were extant in the first-century work of God. In relation to man's tenure on this earth, that time is not far removed.

In the meantime, how blessed are we to understand the real meaning and purpose of the gifts of God's Holy Spirit. How priceless is the opportunity to be part of the firstfruits of God's work, and to have received that spiritual begettal through baptism. Having been made a beloved member of the Body of Christ, we each have an opportunity to fulfill the role God has given us. Every member of that Body is critical. There are no disposable parts. As we contemplate the meaning of Pentecost and God's work with and through His Church, the role of those gifts of the Spirit become ever more significant.

Yours with love and affection in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jon W. Brisby