Spiritual Gifts

What Remains, What Ceased, and What Religion Counterfeits

Series 1-10

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VerseQuest Ministries




VerseQuest
MINISTRIES

Spiritual Gifts

What Remains, What Ceased, and What Religion Counterfeits

A VerseQuest Ministries Bible Study Series

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The ultimate authority for every doctrine presented is the written word of God.

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." — 2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV)

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Spiritual Gifts

What Remains, What Ceased, and What Religion Counterfeits

Series Introduction

There is probably no subject in modern Christianity where more people claim to possess something from God while demonstrating less interest in discovering what God actually said about it than the subject of spiritual gifts. Walk into certain religious gatherings today, and you will find enough self-appointed apostles to populate the book of Acts twice over, enough prophets to keep heaven supposedly issuing announcements around the clock, and enough miracle workers to make you wonder why the hospitals have not closed their doors. Yet ask these same religious enthusiasts to explain the difference between the signs of an apostle and the gifts distributed to members of Christ's body, between the baptism of the Holy Ghost and the filling of the Spirit, or between supernatural revelation and ordinary biblical understanding, and suddenly the extraordinary confidence begins experiencing some rather ordinary difficulties. The problem is not that God has failed to explain spiritual gifts. The problem is that men have become so fascinated with possessing them that they have neglected to read the instructions governing them. **The Holy Ghost did not distribute spiritual gifts to provide Christianity with a traveling circus, a collection of religious celebrities, or another opportunity for ambitious men to make themselves important. He gave them according to divine purpose, and that purpose must be established from the Scriptures rather than manufactured from human experience.**

The apostle Paul opened his discussion in 1 Corinthians 12:1 with a statement that should have settled the necessity of serious Bible study: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant." Notice whom he was addressing. These were saved people in a New Testament congregation, not heathen philosophers attempting to explain supernatural phenomena without divine revelation. The Corinthians had experienced genuine spiritual manifestations, yet they were still remarkably ignorant concerning their purpose and proper operation. Their congregation was troubled by divisions, envy, carnality, spiritual pride, and disorder. First Corinthians 3:3 identifies them as carnal because envying, strife, and divisions existed among them. Evidently, possessing extraordinary gifts did not automatically produce extraordinary holiness. A man might speak with tongues and still behave like an overgrown child. Another might possess knowledge and become proud of knowing it. Others might compete for recognition while forgetting that every gift originated with the same Spirit. **The Corinthians had spiritual equipment that modern religion would spend a fortune trying to reproduce, yet Paul still had to explain how saved people were supposed to behave.** That ought to tell us

something about the difference between possessing a gift and walking in obedience to the God who supplied it.

Before examining what ceased and what remains, the first responsibility is to identify the Giver. First Corinthians 12:4–6 declares, "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." Verse 7 then establishes the governing purpose: "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." There it is. The gifts were given for spiritual benefit, not personal decoration. Verse 11 further declares that the Spirit distributed them "to every man severally as he will." Not according to religious advertising, not according to human ambition, and certainly not according to the results of some questionnaire designed to persuade everybody that his natural preferences constitute supernatural authority. The Holy Ghost distributes according to His will. Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4 establish corresponding principles concerning grace, ministry, stewardship, and the edification of believers. **A spiritual gift is not a trophy awarded for religious enthusiasm. It is a responsibility entrusted by God, and the man who receives it has no business claiming ownership of the power or glory that belongs to the Giver.** That principle governs everything that follows.

One of the greatest sources of confusion is the failure to distinguish spiritual gifts from other biblical subjects. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is not identical to the possession of a particular supernatural gift. Ephesians 1:13 establishes that the believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise after hearing and believing the gospel. Romans 8:9 declares that anyone without the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. First Corinthians 12:13 identifies the Spirit's work of placing believers into the one body of Christ. These are foundational truths concerning salvation and the believer's position in Christ, not a requirement to demonstrate an extraordinary manifestation before being recognized as genuinely saved. Neither should the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23 be confused with the supernatural gifts described during the apostolic period. Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance concern spiritual character. Natural abilities likewise are not automatically spiritual gifts, and possessing a talent does not qualify a man for a church office. **A fellow may have the voice of a trumpet, the confidence of a politician, and the organizational ability of a military commander without possessing the qualifications to pastor fifteen Christians gathered in a living room.** The Bible distinguishes these matters, and biblical teaching must preserve those distinctions.

The distinction becomes especially important when examining the extraordinary signs associated with the apostles. Paul declared in 2 Corinthians 12:12, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." Hebrews 2:3–4 connects signs, wonders, divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost with God's confirmation of the original proclamation of salvation. Mark 16:20 declares that the Lord worked with His messengers, "confirming the word with signs following." These manifestations were not entertainment designed to attract spectators who happened to enjoy unusual religious experiences. They authenticated the divine testimony accompanying the establishment of the New Testament church. Ephesians 2:20 identifies the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself as the chief corner stone. A foundation is laid for a building to stand upon; it is not supposed to be poured repeatedly because every generation produces another man who enjoys calling himself an apostle. **The genuine apostles were commissioned by the risen Christ, not appointed by a committee of admirers or promoted through a religious organization. A modern preacher who borrows their title does not thereby inherit their authority any more than a man wearing a crown becomes the rightful king of a country.** The foundation was established by God, and the church must build upon it.

Then there is the extraordinary confusion surrounding tongues. Acts 2 does not describe a congregation producing unintelligible religious sounds while everybody pretends something remarkable must have occurred. It describes men speaking recognizable languages through supernatural enablement. The witnesses asked, "And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" (Acts 2:8). They understood the languages being spoken and recognized the wonderful works of God being proclaimed. Paul later explained in 1 Corinthians 14:22 that tongues were for a sign to unbelievers, drawing upon Isaiah 28 and the prophetic significance of foreign speech. He also demanded interpretation, intelligibility, and orderly conduct. First Corinthians 12:30 asks the question that has demolished more religious theories than some people care to admit: "do all speak with tongues?" The answer is no. Yet certain religious systems have made tongues the required evidence of salvation, the baptism of the Holy Ghost, or superior spirituality. **It takes a special kind of doctrinal determination to read an apostle asking whether everybody speaks with tongues and conclude that everybody must.** Scripture must govern the experience, not the other way around. If Paul required genuine tongues to operate according to biblical regulations, nobody today possesses authority to disregard those regulations while claiming the same Holy Ghost.

Healing and miracles require the same careful distinction. The God who healed the lame man through Peter in Acts 3 remains the Almighty God who can answer prayer, preserve life, restore health, and intervene according to His sovereign will. But God's continuing

power does not establish that every religious performer advertising a healing ministry possesses the apostolic gift of healing. Peter commanded the crippled man to rise, and the man immediately walked. The apostles performed genuine public signs, and God wrought special miracles through Paul in Acts 19. Yet the same apostle later pleaded three times concerning his thorn in the flesh and received the answer, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Epaphroditus nearly died, Timothy experienced recurring infirmities, and Paul left Trophimus at Miletum sick. These passages are not embarrassing interruptions in the biblical record. They establish that God remained sovereign over healing. James 5 provides instruction concerning prayer for the sick, and Christians should never stop praying because fraudulent ministers have disgraced the subject. **The Lord does not require a television contract, an expensive auditorium, a donation envelope, or a preacher's permission to heal anybody. The man who turns suffering into a commercial opportunity may know how to operate a profitable religious business, but he has not demonstrated the apostolic gift of healing.** God's grace cannot be purchased, and His power is not merchandise.

The revelatory gifts raise another essential question: What happens when the foundational apostolic testimony has been delivered? First Corinthians 13:8 declares that prophecies shall fail, tongues shall cease, and knowledge shall vanish away. Ephesians 3:5 identifies revelation concerning the mystery given to the apostles and prophets by the Spirit, while Jude 3 speaks of "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Second Timothy 3:16–17 establishes the divine inspiration and sufficiency of Scripture for furnishing the man of God unto all good works. These passages provide the foundation for understanding why the church does not require another generation of foundational prophets delivering additional doctrine. The expression "that which is perfect" in 1 Corinthians 13:10 must be examined within Paul's complete discussion, including the future fullness of knowledge described in verse 12; sound doctrine is not strengthened by pretending that every interpretive question disappears when somebody repeats a convenient slogan. Nevertheless, the authority of the apostolic revelation remains established. **There is a world of difference between a preacher discovering what God has written and claiming that God has just whispered something nobody else knows. One involves understanding revelation; the other involves claiming to receive it.** When private declarations contradict the Scriptures, the problem is not that God has revised His position. The problem is that somebody has mistaken his own thoughts for divine authority.

Yet this examination would be seriously incomplete if it concentrated entirely upon extraordinary manifestations while neglecting the practical gifts that continue strengthening the body of Christ. Romans 12 identifies ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, and showing mercy. First Corinthians 12 includes helps and governments,

while 1 Peter 4:10 commands believers to minister their gifts to one another "as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." There is nothing spiritually inferior about faithful service performed outside the public spotlight. The widow who prepares clothing for struggling families, the brother who assists an elderly believer, the Christian who supports genuine gospel ministry, and the teacher who patiently explains Scripture may accomplish more lasting good than a celebrated performer whose ministry exists primarily to attract attention. Acts 9 remembers Dorcas for her good works and almsdeeds, not for possessing an impressive religious title. Acts 6 demonstrates that caring for neglected widows required responsible administration and spiritually qualified servants. **Some Christians are so determined to discover a gift that will make everybody notice them that they overlook a dozen opportunities to serve the Lord sitting directly in front of them.** The body of Christ needs faithful hands as surely as it needs faithful voices.

Teaching, preaching, exhortation, and pastoral instruction also remain indispensable. Ephesians 4:11–16 explains that Christ supplied ministers for the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of His body. The purpose is to establish believers in truth so they are no longer carried about by every wind of doctrine. Second Timothy 2:15 commands diligent study and rightly dividing the word of truth. Second Timothy 4:2 commands, "Preach the word." Titus 1:9 requires a qualified spiritual leader to hold fast the faithful word so that he can exhort and convince those who oppose sound doctrine. None of these passages authorizes replacing biblical exposition with motivational speeches, theatrical performances, or newly manufactured revelation. A man entrusted with teaching must know what the Scriptures say, understand their proper context, and distinguish Israel from the Church, law from grace, and earthly promises from heavenly blessings wherever those distinctions are required. **The preacher's responsibility is not to invent a message that makes him appear intelligent. It is to explain the message God has given so that the congregation becomes spiritually intelligent.** If the audience leaves knowing more about the speaker than the Scriptures, something has gone seriously wrong with the assignment.

Spiritual leadership must likewise be distinguished from religious dictatorship. Romans 12:8 commands the man who rules to do so with diligence, while 1 Corinthians 12:28 identifies governments among the provisions for the church. First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 establish qualifications for bishops and deacons, requiring character, doctrinal fidelity, sober conduct, and responsible oversight. First Peter 5:3 expressly forbids elders from becoming lords over God's heritage, commanding them instead to serve as examples to the flock. Acts 20:28–32 contains Paul's solemn warning that grievous wolves would arise and that some would come from among the leaders themselves, speaking perverse things to draw disciples after them. These warnings are necessary because religious authority can

become an instrument of oppression when personal ambition replaces biblical accountability. Believers should respect faithful pastors, cooperate with legitimate church order, and reject needless rebellion. But no pastor possesses authority to replace Scripture with his opinions or treat disagreement with himself as automatic rebellion against God. **A shepherd who must continually remind the sheep that he is the most important creature in the pasture has probably forgotten that he is supposed to be watching for wolves rather than auditioning to become one.** The Lord Jesus Christ remains the chief Shepherd, and every human leader serves beneath Him.

The danger of counterfeit spirituality extends beyond misused gifts into the very foundation of religious assurance. First John 4:1 commands believers to try the spirits because many false prophets have gone out into the world. Matthew 7:21–23 records men claiming prophecy, deliverance from devils, and wonderful works while remaining unknown to Christ. Second Corinthians 11:13–15 warns of false apostles and Satan's ability to transform himself into an angel of light. Second Thessalonians 2 reveals that future Satanic deception will involve power, signs, and lying wonders. The appearance of supernatural activity therefore cannot become the final authority for determining spiritual truth. Nor can feelings occupy that position. The facts of the gospel are established by Scripture: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. Faith rests upon God's testimony concerning His Son. Feelings may accompany genuine faith, but they cannot create or authenticate salvation. First John 5:13 grounds the believer's knowledge of eternal life in what God has written. **A man may feel wonderfully religious while remaining lost, and a saved man may experience the darkest circumstances of his earthly life while remaining eternally secure in Jesus Christ.** Assurance rests upon the Saviour and His promise, not upon the intensity of a religious experience.

Finally, all ten studies must return to the corrective Paul placed between the discussion of gifts and their regulation: "Charity never faileth" (1 Corinthians 13:8). The apostle declares that extraordinary tongues, knowledge, prophecy, mountain-moving faith, and enormous personal sacrifices accomplish nothing of proper spiritual value without charity. Biblical charity is not sentimental tolerance that excuses sin, protects false teachers, or demands that Christians surrender discernment. First Corinthians 13:6 declares that charity "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." It suffers long, behaves properly, refuses envy, and does not seek its own advancement at the expense of others. Genuine charity remains inseparable from truth. Romans 12 requires sincere love, hatred of evil, brotherly kindness, faithful service, hospitality, and patience. Galatians 5 identifies love among the fruit of the Spirit, while Ephesians 4 commands believers to speak the truth in love. **The man who boasts about his extraordinary gifts but cannot tell the truth, endure correction, help a suffering brother, or rejoice when somebody else receives**

recognition has confused spiritual importance with spiritual maturity. The Holy Ghost did not give gifts so that charity could become optional.

That is the purpose of this series. Not to manufacture controversy where Scripture supplies clarity, not to deny the supernatural power of God, and certainly not to replace biblical Christianity with a lifeless religious system that has forgotten the work of the Holy Ghost. The purpose is to examine the actual words God preserved in the King James Bible, establish the proper historical and dispensational setting of the gifts, distinguish what served the apostolic foundation from what remains necessary for the church, and expose counterfeit claims that elevate human experience above divine revelation. Every manifestation must be judged according to Scripture. Every preacher must remain accountable to Scripture. Every church must understand that gifts were supplied to edify Christ's body rather than glorify religious personalities. The Lord Jesus Christ remains the Head, the Holy Ghost remains the divine Giver, and the written word remains the final authority. **The question is not how many impressive gifts a man can claim, how much noise a congregation can produce, or how extraordinary a religious performance can become. The question is whether God's people will believe what God has said and use what He has given for the purposes He established. The signs have their place in biblical history, the gifts have their proper functions, and the counterfeits must be exposed. But above them all stands the Saviour who purchased the church with His own blood. When the performers have finished performing, the prophets have finished announcing, and the religious celebrities have collected their applause, the word of God will still be true, the finished work of Jesus Christ will still be sufficient, and charity will still be the more excellent way.**

1 of 10 — Spiritual Gifts — The Giver, the Gifts, and the Purpose Religion Forgot

Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 12:1–31

Introduction

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant" (1 Corinthians 12:1). There is the opening statement of a chapter that has been abused, twisted, commercialized, sensationalized, and dragged through more religious confusion than almost any other subject in the New Testament. Paul did not begin by congratulating the Corinthians for their extraordinary spiritual experiences. He began by addressing their ignorance. That ought to disturb a few modern religious experts who believe that the louder a congregation becomes, the more spiritual it must be. Corinth possessed spiritual gifts,

yet the congregation was plagued with divisions, carnality, pride, disorder, and doctrinal confusion. Evidently, possessing a gift did not automatically make a man spiritually mature. The Corinthians had supernatural manifestations operating among them, but they still needed an apostle to explain what those manifestations meant, why God had given them, and how they were supposed to function. A man can possess something God has given him and still be ignorant concerning its proper use. That is not merely a possibility. The Corinthian correspondence proves it.

The first mistake modern Christianity makes is asking what spiritual gift a person possesses before asking why the Lord distributed spiritual gifts in the first place. The average religious organization has transformed the subject into a complicated arrangement of personality inventories, leadership assessments, ministry classifications, and impressive titles. Somebody takes a questionnaire, discovers that he enjoys talking, and suddenly considers himself a prophet. Another discovers that he likes organizing people and begins entertaining thoughts of apostolic authority. A third possesses a commanding voice, an enthusiastic personality, and enough confidence to fill a football stadium, so naturally somebody concludes that the Holy Ghost must have given him an extraordinary gift. It apparently never occurs to these people that Balaam's ass spoke under supernatural influence without becoming qualified to pastor a congregation (Numbers 22:28–30). The biblical question is not whether a person possesses an impressive ability. The question is whether God has supplied something for the benefit of His people and whether that individual is using it according to Scripture. Spiritual gifts are not decorations for religious personalities. They are provisions for the body of Christ.

Four primary passages establish the foundation for understanding the subject: 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. Each contributes something essential, but they should not be thrown into one enormous religious mixing bowl and treated as interchangeable lists without considering their contexts. First Corinthians emphasizes spiritual manifestations, their distribution, their diversity, and their proper relationship to the body. Romans emphasizes the sober exercise of gifts according to grace and the responsibilities accompanying them. Ephesians emphasizes Christ's provision for the church, the work of the ministry, and the development of doctrinal maturity. First Peter emphasizes stewardship, service, and the glory of God. Together these passages provide a substantial explanation of spiritual gifts, but they do not authorize the assumption that every gift operated in precisely the same manner throughout every stage of New Testament history. The distinctions matter because the Holy Ghost never authorized anybody to tear down the walls of biblical context merely because he wanted a larger room in which to display his religious merchandise. The Scriptures must determine both the purpose and the operation of the gifts.

1. The Same Spirit, the Same Lord, and the Same God

Paul begins his explanation by reminding the Corinthians of their former spiritual condition: "Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led" (1 Corinthians 12:2). The statement identifies their Gentile background and establishes an important contrast between pagan religious experiences and the operation of the Holy Ghost. These Corinthians had once been involved with idols that could not speak, reveal truth, save sinners, or communicate the will of the living God. Yet they had been carried away by such things. A man can be intensely religious and completely deceived. He can become emotionally overwhelmed by a ceremony, convinced that something supernatural has occurred, and remain as ignorant of the truth as the idol sitting on the shelf. Paul therefore directs attention to the confession concerning Jesus Christ in verse 3. The Spirit of God glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ; He does not lead men into blasphemy against Him. The real test of spirituality begins with truth concerning Christ, not the intensity of a religious experience.

Then comes the essential declaration: "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" (1 Corinthians 12:4–6). Notice the careful wording. Gifts, administrations, and operations are distinguished, while the divine source remains one. The Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are not competing to establish rival ministries within the church. Neither does the diversity of their work mean that every gift must operate in precisely the same fashion. The passage demonstrates variety under divine authority, not confusion under human ambition. Some believers may serve publicly, others privately; some may teach, others help; some functions were associated with the foundational apostolic period, while others continue wherever faithful Christians serve the Lord. The unity lies in the Giver and His purpose, not in the mistaken assumption that everybody must perform the same activity. God has never needed religious uniformity to produce spiritual unity.

The statement also exposes the folly of making gifts into badges of spiritual superiority. If the Spirit supplies the gift, the Lord determines the administration, and God accomplishes the operation, precisely which part gives the recipient permission to boast? A man who receives a gift has no more reason to strut around the church than a delivery driver has to claim ownership of the warehouse because he carried one package. Paul settled the matter elsewhere when he asked, "And what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). Whatever God supplies remains a reason for gratitude and accountability, never a license for self-exaltation. The more visible a believer's service becomes, the greater the temptation to confuse divine usefulness with personal importance. The

Corinthians needed to understand that the source of spiritual gifts was divine, their distribution was purposeful, and their operation was supposed to bring glory to God. The vessel has no business demanding applause for the contents it did not manufacture.

2. The Spirit Distributes Gifts According to His Will

"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (1 Corinthians 12:7). That final expression deserves to be nailed over the entrance of every church building in the country. The manifestation is given "to profit withal." It is not given to establish a religious aristocracy, promote an entertainer, generate financial excitement, or persuade ordinary Christians that they must depend upon some unusually gifted personality to approach God. It is given for spiritual benefit. The word "manifestation" directs attention to what the Spirit makes evident through His work, while the stated purpose establishes the standard by which that work is to be understood. The Corinthians had made individual gifts occasions for pride and disorder when those same gifts were supposed to contribute to the common good. A manifestation that merely makes the recipient appear remarkable while everybody else remains confused has missed the stated purpose of the passage. God did not distribute spiritual gifts so that one member could become famous at the expense of the entire body.

Verses 8–10 identify several gifts: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, divers kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. These distinctions must be respected rather than dissolved into modern religious terminology. The supernatural communication of knowledge is not necessarily identical to a believer learning Scripture through diligent study. The particular gift of faith listed here should not automatically be confused with the saving faith through which a sinner receives Christ. The gifts of healing and the working of miracles must be examined in connection with their actual manifestations in the apostolic record. Prophecy, tongues, and interpretation likewise possess particular biblical contexts and functions that cannot be established by attaching their names to whatever activity a modern congregation happens to enjoy. The list demonstrates genuine variety, but the existence of a gift in Corinth does not, by itself, establish its uninterrupted operation throughout every subsequent century. The Bible must define the gift before religious experience is permitted to claim it.

Paul then removes human ambition from the driver's seat: "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Corinthians 12:11). Notice that the Spirit divides the gifts according to His will. The verse does not say according to the recipient's demands, the pastor's preferences, the congregation's popularity contest, or the results of a spiritual aptitude examination. The distribution is

sovereign. A believer may desire to serve God, improve his understanding, labor faithfully, and make himself available for useful ministry, but he cannot command the Holy Ghost to supply an extraordinary manifestation. Neither should a Christian assume that another believer is spiritually defective because he does not possess a particular gift. The Corinthians were already infected with the notion that certain manifestations established superior standing. Paul answers by placing the authority for distribution entirely in the hands of the Spirit. The Holy Ghost is not operating a religious department store where ambitious customers select whichever supernatural ability best suits their personal image. He distributes according to divine wisdom, and the church is responsible for recognizing His purpose.

3. One Body, Many Members, and No Room for Spiritual Aristocrats

"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" (1 Corinthians 12:12). Paul now explains spiritual gifts through the familiar illustration of the human body. A body possesses many different members, each with its own function, yet all belong to one living organism. The illustration is remarkably effective because nobody needs specialized theological training to understand that an eye cannot perform the work of a foot, and a hand cannot replace the heart. The body operates through coordinated diversity. The same principle governs the spiritual body of Christ. Verse 13 identifies the means of incorporation: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free." This is the Spirit's work of placing believers into Christ's body, not a description of a minister immersing somebody in water. The passage also maintains an important distinction between Jew and Gentile in their historical identities while establishing their common membership in Christ. Spiritual gifts operate within that body, not as substitutes for membership in it.

Paul then attacks the inferiority complex that sometimes develops among Christians who consider their service unimportant. "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" (1 Corinthians 12:15). The question exposes the absurdity of measuring membership according to similarity of function. A foot does not cease belonging to the body because it cannot perform the work of a hand. Likewise, a believer does not become an inferior Christian because he cannot preach, teach publicly, organize a ministry, or perform some highly visible responsibility. God has placed the members according to His wisdom. Verse 18 declares, "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him." That statement destroys the entire philosophy of spiritual competition. The believer who despises his own responsibility because somebody else possesses a more visible function is questioning the

arrangement God established. A foot that spends its life trying to become an eye will accomplish very little walking and considerably less seeing.

The opposite problem is equally dangerous. "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee" (1 Corinthians 12:21). Here Paul rebukes the supposedly superior member who imagines that his prominence eliminates his dependence upon others. The preacher who believes the church cannot function without his personality, the teacher who considers everybody else spiritually ignorant, and the leader who treats ordinary believers as disposable assistants have missed the illustration entirely. Paul specifically emphasizes that members appearing weaker are necessary and that God has arranged the body so there should be no schism among its members. Verse 26 adds, "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." The biblical response to another believer's usefulness is gratitude, not jealousy; to his suffering, compassion, not indifference. Genuine spiritual gifts should strengthen mutual responsibility. When the hand begins mocking the foot and the eye starts demanding a throne, the problem is not insufficient gifting. The problem is that the body has developed a serious case of Corinthian pride.

4. Romans Twelve: Grace, Sober Judgment, and Gifts Without Grandstanding

Romans 12 begins with the believer's reasonable service and the command not to be conformed to this world. Before Paul discusses individual gifts, he addresses the transformation of the mind and the presentation of the body to God. That order is significant. The Christian life is not supposed to revolve around discovering some extraordinary ability while neglecting ordinary obedience. Verse 3 delivers the necessary warning: "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." Paul places humility at the entrance to the discussion. The believer must not exaggerate his spiritual importance, invent abilities that God has not supplied, or confuse personal ambition with divine appointment. Neither should he refuse legitimate service because it fails to attract public recognition. Sober judgment recognizes both responsibility and limitation. A man who needs a magnificent title before he will perform an ordinary duty has already demonstrated that his chief concern is not the duty.

Paul continues, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us" (Romans 12:6). The word "grace" is essential because the gifts are not rewards for human merit. The passage identifies prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, and showing mercy, attaching practical responsibilities to their exercise. The man who ministers is to attend to his ministering. The teacher is to devote himself to teaching. The

exhorter must perform his responsibility faithfully. The giver is instructed to give with simplicity; the ruler, with diligence; and the one showing mercy, with cheerfulness. These are not invitations to create impressive religious titles. They are instructions governing service. Notice especially that giving and mercy appear alongside activities frequently regarded as more prominent. A faithful Christian quietly helping a struggling family may be exercising a responsibility of substantial spiritual value without ever appearing behind a pulpit. The passage also prevents the common mistake of assuming that every spiritual function must be miraculous or spectacular. The Lord is perfectly capable of accomplishing important work through somebody who never once announces that something extraordinary has happened.

Romans 12:4–5 reminds believers that all members do not have the same office and that they are "every one members one of another." The expression demonstrates mutual responsibility rather than independent spiritual kingdoms. Furthermore, the duties immediately following the discussion include genuine love, abhorrence of evil, patience in tribulation, hospitality, and concern for fellow believers. These commands show the conduct expected of a church functioning properly under grace. A man may claim unusual spiritual knowledge while despising his brethren, but Romans 12 gives him no permission to separate his supposed gift from ordinary Christian character. Similarly, an individual cannot use the claim of extraordinary ability to excuse laziness, dishonesty, arrogance, or neglect of his household. The gift must operate within the moral responsibilities established by Scripture. A preacher who can explain the mysteries of heaven but cannot tell the truth on earth has confused the appearance of knowledge with obedience to God. Genuine usefulness requires more than declaring an ability; it requires exercising whatever God has entrusted in a manner consistent with His word.

5. Ephesians Four: Christ Gives Gifts to Build His Church, Not Human Empires

"But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Ephesians 4:7). The passage directs attention to the ascended Lord Jesus Christ and His provision for the church. The context begins with the believer's calling, the unity of the Spirit, and the declaration of one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. That unity establishes the framework within which Christ distributes gifts and ministries. Verses 8–10 speak of His victorious ascension and His giving of gifts unto men. The gifts are therefore associated with the triumph and authority of the risen Lord, not with the organizational ingenuity of religious institutions. Ephesians 4:11 identifies apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These are not merely five impressive titles available to anybody with sufficient confidence to print them on a business card. They represent persons and ministries supplied by Christ for the accomplishment of His

purposes. Their historical and continuing functions must be distinguished through the rest of Scripture rather than assumed to be identical.

Ephesians 2:20 declares that the household of God is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." That statement becomes indispensable when examining the relationship between foundational ministries and the continuing work of the church. A foundation is essential, but its purpose is not to be laid repeatedly as though the building never progressed beyond the first construction stage. The apostles occupied a distinctive position in connection with the revelation and establishment of the New Testament church. The signs associated with their ministry will require separate examination, particularly in connection with 2 Corinthians 12:12 and Hebrews 2:3–4. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers must likewise be understood according to their actual biblical responsibilities rather than their modern popularity. The existence of particular foundational ministries does not mean God has abandoned His church, nor does the continuation of ordinary ministry require the perpetual appearance of new foundational apostles. A man who announces that he is laying the foundation of Christianity again should first explain what happened to the foundation the Lord already supplied.

The purpose of Christ's provision appears plainly in Ephesians 4:12: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." That is the governing objective. The saints are to be equipped, the ministry performed, and the body edified. Verse 14 then warns against remaining spiritual children, "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." Sound teaching is therefore not an optional decoration added to an exciting religious service; it is central to the church's stability. Verse 16 further emphasizes the contribution of every part toward the body's growth and edification in love. A ministry that produces permanent dependency upon one charismatic personality while leaving believers unable to distinguish sound doctrine from false teaching has inverted Christ's purpose. The pastor is supposed to feed the sheep, not train them to worship the shepherd. The teacher is supposed to explain the Scriptures, not persuade everybody that understanding the Bible requires his exclusive permission. The greatest evidence of faithful spiritual leadership is not the size of the leader's reputation but the scriptural strength of the Christians receiving his instruction.

6. First Peter Four: Stewards of Grace, Not Owners of God's Property

"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10). The word "stewards" establishes a principle that reaches directly into the heart of spiritual service. A steward manages what belongs to another. He possesses responsibility without absolute ownership. Whatever

God entrusts to a believer must therefore be handled faithfully, honestly, and for its intended purpose. Peter does not tell Christians to advertise their gifts, compare their importance, or compete for recognition. He commands them to minister one to another. The immediate context includes fervent charity, hospitality, prayer, and practical Christian conduct. The original recipients of Peter's epistle were scattered believers facing trials, and the instruction addresses faithfulness in that setting, not the construction of a religious celebrity industry. Their gifts were to serve fellow believers under difficult circumstances. A steward who spends the master's resources building a monument to himself should not be surprised when the master asks what happened to the assignment.

Peter continues, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth" (1 Peter 4:11). Speaking and ministering receive particular attention, and each carries an unmistakable responsibility. The Christian who speaks must remain governed by God's revelation. The one who ministers must recognize the divine source of whatever ability enables his service. Neither is authorized to invent doctrine, manipulate the congregation, or claim independent spiritual authority. Notice also that the verse identifies the ultimate purpose: "that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ." That statement leaves very little room for the modern custom of treating ministry as personal advertising. Faithful instruction should magnify God's word, and practical service should direct gratitude toward the Lord who supplies the ability. Religious workers may become well known as a consequence of faithful labor, but personal recognition must never become the reason for the labor. If the servant receives all the glory while the Master becomes an occasional footnote, somebody has stolen the attention that rightfully belongs to Jesus Christ.

These passages also require Christians to distinguish spiritual gifts from several related but separate subjects. Every saved person possesses the indwelling Holy Spirit according to Romans 8:9, and Ephesians 1:13 identifies believers as sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise. The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23 concerns Christian character, including love, joy, peace, longsuffering, and temperance. Natural talents are abilities an individual may possess apart from spiritual regeneration; an accomplished musician, administrator, or public speaker is not necessarily a spiritually gifted Christian. Spiritual gifts concern divine provision for service within the body of Christ. Church offices involve recognized responsibilities and qualifications, such as those established for bishops and deacons in 1 Timothy 3. These categories are related in practical Christian service, but they are not interchangeable. A gifted speaker may lack the qualifications to pastor. A faithful pastor may possess little natural eloquence. An unbeliever may possess remarkable talent without possessing the indwelling Holy Ghost. God does not confuse natural ability with spiritual authority merely because a man can hold an audience's attention.

7. The Purpose of Every Gift and the Danger of Counterfeit Spirituality

The closing portion of 1 Corinthians 12 brings the entire discussion back to divine arrangement and proper priorities. Paul declares, "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). This list deserves careful attention because it includes both extraordinary manifestations and functions associated with teaching, assistance, and administration. The order also prevents the Corinthians from assuming that their favorite spectacular gift necessarily occupied the highest position of importance. Paul follows with a series of questions: "Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?" (verse 29). Verse 30 continues with questions concerning healing, tongues, and interpretation. The expected answer is plainly negative. All believers do not possess identical gifts. Consequently, any religious system declaring that every genuine Christian must exhibit one particular manifestation has already collided with the apostle's questions. When Paul asks whether everybody speaks with tongues, the man who insists everybody must has not discovered deeper revelation. He has simply contradicted the question.

The distinctions between temporary apostolic signs, foundational revelation, and continuing Christian service require careful examination through the progress of New Testament revelation. The book of Acts records a transitional period in which God dealt with Israel, the nations, the apostles, and the developing church in circumstances that must not be indiscriminately transferred into every modern congregation. First Corinthians describes gifts actually operating in Corinth while also addressing their misuse. Ephesians emphasizes the apostolic foundation and the maturing body. The later pastoral instructions repeatedly emphasize sound doctrine, faithful teaching, qualified leadership, godly conduct, and the preservation of apostolic truth. These observations establish the framework for examining what ceased and what remains, but they must be followed by close study of the passages governing each gift. The Christian who believes God can still answer prayer, heal the sick, and intervene providentially is not thereby obligated to accept every preacher claiming permanent apostolic miracle-working power. God's ability to perform a miracle is one question; a man's claim to possess a standing commission to manufacture miracles is another. Confusing the two produces a convenient business opportunity for religious frauds.

Finally, the measure of a gift's proper exercise must remain the word of God and the edification of His people. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and His work cannot be authenticated merely by unusual sensations, impressive testimonies, public excitement, or a congregation's willingness to believe whatever happens on the platform. Paul later

declares, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40), while his great discussion of charity in chapter 13 rebukes spiritual exhibitionism without genuine love. A congregation can possess polished music, impressive crowds, dramatic performances, and a collection of extraordinary claims while remaining spiritually malnourished because nobody is faithfully teaching Scripture. Conversely, a modest congregation where the Bible is preached, believers are instructed, suffering saints are supported, and Christ receives the glory may demonstrate remarkable spiritual usefulness without a single spectacular performance. A church does not become spiritually powerful by displaying everything its members claim to possess. It becomes spiritually useful when its members faithfully employ what God has actually supplied. The purpose of the gift must always govern the claims of the recipient.

Conclusion

The doctrine of spiritual gifts begins with God, proceeds according to His sovereign will, and terminates in the benefit of His people and the glory of Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 12 establishes the divine source, distribution, diversity, and purpose of the gifts. Romans 12 insists upon humility, sober judgment, and faithful service. Ephesians 4 demonstrates that Christ supplies ministries for the edification and doctrinal maturity of His body. First Peter 4 identifies believers as stewards accountable for the proper use of God's manifold grace. These passages should leave no uncertainty concerning the governing principle: spiritual gifts are provisions for service, not certificates of personal greatness. Nobody earns salvation by possessing a gift, maintains eternal security through exercising a gift, or acquires superior standing before God because his responsibility happens to attract public attention. Salvation remains by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and the spiritual body exists because of His finished work. The cross saves the sinner; the Spirit places him into Christ's body; and the gifts are given to serve that body. Reverse that order, and religion will gladly sell you whatever confusion follows.

The church must therefore abandon the habit of evaluating spirituality by spectacle. A believer who faithfully teaches Scripture, encourages the discouraged, assists struggling brethren, gives generously without demanding recognition, or performs necessary work that nobody else notices may be accomplishing exactly what God has entrusted to him. Such service should not be despised because it lacks public excitement. At the same time, genuine Christian service must never become an excuse for accepting false doctrine, unqualified leadership, fraudulent miracles, or supposed revelations that compete with Scripture. The indwelling Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, natural ability, spiritual gifts, and recognized church offices must remain distinguishable if the biblical teaching is to be understood. The miraculous gifts associated with the apostolic period require careful

attention to their historical purpose, while the continuing responsibilities of believers must be honored without manufacturing supernatural claims. God never instructed the church to choose between sound doctrine and faithful service. He expects the service to proceed according to the doctrine.

The final question is not whether a man can impress an audience with the spiritual importance he assigns himself. It is whether his life and ministry contribute to the edification of the body of Christ according to the Scriptures. Paul declared, "But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31). That statement leads directly into the great chapter on charity, where even the most extraordinary manifestations are shown to be worthless without the proper spiritual character and purpose. The Corinthians needed correction because they had become fascinated with the manifestations while neglecting the maturity those manifestations were supposed to serve. The modern church needs precisely the same warning whenever spiritual gifts become commodities, performances, titles, or instruments of personal advancement. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the body, not the most impressive personality standing in front of it. The Holy Spirit distributes according to His will, not according to the demands of ambitious men. And every believer is responsible for serving faithfully with whatever God has provided. A gift that makes the recipient famous while leaving the church confused may have come from somewhere, but the God who commanded His people to be established in truth is not honored by the confusion. God's gifts were never intended to make much of the servant while making little of the Saviour.

2 of 10 — Spiritual Gifts — The Signs of an Apostle and the Foundation That Cannot Be Laid Twice

Key Passages: 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3–4; Ephesians 2:19–22; Acts 2:43; 5:12–16; Mark 16:17–20

Introduction

"Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds" (2 Corinthians 12:12). There is a statement that ought to settle a considerable amount of modern religious foolishness before the offering plates ever leave the back of the auditorium. Paul did not call these manifestations the ordinary signs of every Christian, the permanent equipment of every preacher, or the guaranteed experiences of every congregation. He identified them as "the signs of an apostle." Those words were written for a reason, and the reason was not to provide twenty-first-century

religious entertainers with an impressive collection of supernatural claims. Paul was defending the authenticity of his apostolic ministry against those who challenged his authority, questioned his credentials, and attempted to establish themselves as superior spiritual leaders. The miracles were not independent attractions. They were divine credentials associated with a particular commission. When God supplies credentials for an office, a man has no business photocopying the credentials and declaring that he has inherited the office. The distinction between divine appointment and human presumption stands at the very heart of this controversy.

The confusion begins when people remove supernatural signs from their historical setting, separate them from the men through whom God performed them, and announce that whatever happened during the establishment of the New Testament church must remain the normal expectation of every subsequent congregation. Acts becomes a religious merchandise catalogue, with modern performers selecting whichever demonstration happens to attract the largest audience. One fellow wants Peter's shadow. Another wants Paul's handkerchiefs. Another demands tongues, healing, visions, prophetic revelations, and miraculous authority, preferably with a convenient donation system attached. Yet these same people frequently overlook the imprisonment, persecution, suffering, poverty, and martyrdom that accompanied the apostolic calling. Evidently, the supernatural credentials are highly desirable, while the accompanying afflictions have somehow disappeared from the advertisement. The Bible does not present apostolic signs as spiritual toys distributed for religious amusement. They accompanied a unique period in God's dealings with Israel and the nations, testified to the authority of His messengers, and confirmed the proclamation of revealed truth. A miracle performed to establish divine testimony is not an invitation for every ambitious preacher to establish a traveling miracle business.

The foundation of the New Testament church provides the governing explanation. Paul declares that believers are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20). Notice that the apostles and prophets are associated with the foundation, while Jesus Christ Himself occupies the position of chief corner stone. A foundation supports what is subsequently built upon it. It is not an endlessly repeated construction project in which every generation tears up the concrete and announces that the original builders forgot something. Once the foundation has been established, the building continues upon that foundation rather than replacing it with another. This does not mean God has lost His power, ceased answering prayer, or become incapable of performing miracles. It means that His continued ability to intervene supernaturally must be distinguished from a permanent apostolic office carrying the original signs of its divine commission. The Lord who established the church has not

surrendered His authority to modern claimants. God can still perform a miracle without appointing another apostle, just as a king can exercise his authority without issuing a new royal charter to every man who admires the throne.

1. An Apostle Was Commissioned by Christ, Not Manufactured by Religion

The first question is not whether a modern preacher can perform something unusual. The first question is whether he possesses the biblical qualifications and commission of an apostle. In Acts 1:21–22, when the disciples considered a replacement for Judas Iscariot, Peter specified that the man must have accompanied the original disciples during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, beginning with John's baptism and continuing until the ascension. He must become "a witness with us of his resurrection." This was no ordinary appointment to an administrative position in a local congregation. The replacement would join the company of men who bore direct historical testimony concerning the resurrected Lord. Matthias was numbered with the eleven apostles in Acts 1:26. Whatever questions men may raise concerning individual details of that appointment, the passage unmistakably establishes the character of the office being filled. The original apostolic company was connected directly with the person, ministry, resurrection, and commission of Jesus Christ. A man who has never witnessed the risen Christ does not acquire the qualifications of the Twelve by purchasing a larger pulpit and printing the word "Apostle" above his name.

Paul's apostleship provides no loophole for modern pretenders. Galatians 1:1 begins, "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)." Paul deliberately excludes human appointment as the source of his apostleship. His commission came from the risen Lord Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 9:1, he asks, "Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" The connection between his apostleship and his encounter with the resurrected Christ is unmistakable. First Corinthians 15:8 adds, "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Paul's apostolic ministry was extraordinary, but it was not self-appointed. He received revelation and commission from Christ Himself, and his writings supplied foundational doctrine for the church. The exception proves the necessity of divine authorization rather than eliminating it. Paul did not attend a religious leadership conference, receive an impressive certificate, and discover afterward that heaven had apparently promoted him. Christ called him, and Christ supplied the authority.

The Scriptures also distinguish the unique apostolic office from the broader work of believers sent to accomplish particular ministries. Churches send messengers, congregations commission workers, and evangelists carry the gospel into new regions, but such activities do not automatically confer the foundational authority of the Twelve or Paul.

In 2 Corinthians 8:23, Paul speaks of men who are "the messengers of the churches," yet he does not therefore give them the authority associated with his own apostolic commission. Philippians 2:25 similarly identifies Epaphroditus as the Philippians' "messenger." The simple act of being sent does not establish an equal standing with those personally commissioned by the risen Christ. This distinction becomes especially important because Paul warns of "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:13). There were impostors even while genuine apostles were alive to expose them. The church should hardly become less discerning after the original foundation has been established. A religious title is not a divine appointment, and a man who appoints himself to an office Christ never gave him is not displaying extraordinary faith. He is displaying extraordinary confidence in himself.

2. The Signs Were Divine Credentials, Not Religious Entertainment

Return to 2 Corinthians 12:12 and examine the wording carefully. Paul says, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." The immediate context concerns his defense against competing religious authorities who had attempted to diminish his ministry. In verse 11, he declares that he was "in nothing" behind the chiefest apostles, though he was nothing. His defense rests upon what the Lord accomplished through him, not upon an elaborate account of his personal greatness. Notice also the phrase "in all patience." The apostolic ministry was not merely a procession of spectacular miracles; it involved endurance under sustained opposition. Paul had already described beatings, imprisonment, shipwreck, danger, hunger, and persecution in 2 Corinthians 11:23–28. Those difficulties formed part of the actual apostolic record. The modern fellow who wants Paul's signs but not Paul's scars has selected a remarkably comfortable edition of apostleship. Genuine apostolic authority cannot be reconstructed by borrowing its spectacular elements while discarding its commission, suffering, and foundational responsibility.

Hebrews 2:3–4 provides an equally decisive explanation concerning the confirming function of these manifestations: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" Observe the sequence. The Lord proclaimed the message; those who heard Him confirmed it; God bore witness through supernatural manifestations. The signs accompanied the testimony and authenticated the messengers. They were not presented as independent religious activities operating for their own sake. Furthermore, the words "according to his own will" exclude the assumption that miraculous power operated according to human command whenever

somebody desired a demonstration. God determined the manifestations accompanying His testimony. The passage does not say that divine power could never operate afterward. It identifies a particular historical work of confirmation associated with the original proclamation. The signs were heaven's testimony to the message, not a substitute for the message itself.

This distinction also explains why extraordinary manifestations cannot become the final test of doctrinal truth. The Bible repeatedly warns that impressive supernatural claims may accompany deception. Deuteronomy 13:1–3 warned Israel against following a dreamer or prophet who produced a sign and then attempted to lead the nation after other gods. The doctrinal standard governed the interpretation of the experience. Matthew 7:22–23 records men who will appeal to prophecy, casting out devils, and wonderful works, only to discover that the Lord never knew them. Second Thessalonians 2:9 warns concerning Satanic activity "with all power and signs and lying wonders." A claimed miracle cannot establish the truth of a doctrine that contradicts God's written word. The genuine apostles were authenticated in connection with the revelation and proclamation of divine truth; modern claimants cannot reverse the process and demand that unusual experiences authenticate whatever doctrine they happen to teach. The devil does not have to convince everybody that miracles are impossible. He only has to convince enough people that anything unusual must have come from God. Scripture never granted supernatural spectacle the authority to overrule revealed truth.

3. Pentecost, Israel, and the Apostolic Signs in the Book of Acts

Acts 2:43 states, "And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles." The setting is Pentecost, immediately following Peter's proclamation to the Jewish multitude gathered at Jerusalem. Peter addresses "Ye men of Israel" in Acts 2:22 and identifies Jesus of Nazareth as "a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you." The words are important because the signs performed during Christ's earthly ministry had already provided divine testimony concerning His identity before Israel. Peter now proclaims the crucifixion and resurrection of that same Jesus Christ. The signs accompanying the apostles demonstrate that the God who authenticated His Son is also bearing witness to the men proclaiming His resurrection. First Corinthians 1:22 states, "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." That distinction helps explain the conspicuous place of miraculous testimony in the early Jewish setting of Acts. God was not putting on a religious carnival at Jerusalem. He was confronting Israel with the testimony of the risen Messiah.

Acts 5 provides an even more remarkable account. Verse 12 declares, "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people." The following

verses describe sick people being brought into the streets, with some hoping that Peter's shadow might overshadow them as he passed. Verse 16 records that multitudes brought sick people and those vexed with unclean spirits from surrounding cities, "and they were healed every one." These were extraordinary public manifestations associated with the apostolic ministry. Peter did not advertise appointments, sell a healing substance, or demand an offering before permitting the afflicted to approach. The narrative describes unmistakable supernatural intervention that contributed to the public witness of the apostles. Acts 3 had already recorded the healing of a man lame from birth, who immediately walked and leaped while praising God. Peter refused personal credit, directing the astonished crowd to Jesus Christ (Acts 3:12–16). The genuine apostle performed the miracle and pointed away from himself; the modern religious showman advertises himself and hopes the miracle will eventually appear. That reversal ought to make anybody suspicious.

The miraculous activity in Acts was not restricted exclusively to the hands of the Twelve. Stephen performed great wonders and miracles among the people according to Acts 6:8, and Philip's ministry in Acts 8 included miracles and deliverance from unclean spirits. Paul later performed extraordinary miracles among Gentiles as his apostolic commission carried the gospel outward. These details prevent the careless assertion that no person outside the original Twelve ever performed a supernatural sign. The issue is not that God was physically unable to work through anybody else. The issue is that miraculous manifestations accompanied the foundational spread and confirmation of the gospel through divinely appointed witnesses. Acts records a developing historical situation, including Israel's confrontation with the risen Christ, the conversion of Samaritans, the reception of Gentiles, and the establishment of churches throughout the Roman world. Events occurring during that transition must be interpreted according to their actual purpose. The book of Acts is inspired history, not a box of disconnected religious tricks waiting for somebody to reproduce them whenever attendance begins to decline. Doctrine must govern the application of the narrative, not the appetite for spectacle.

4. Mark Sixteen: The Signs Followed the Word, Not a Modern Religious Circus

Mark 16:17–18 declares, "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." These verses must be approached with the same respect for context that governs every other passage of Scripture. Verse 14 identifies the immediate gathering addressed by the resurrected Lord as the eleven, and verse 15 contains the commission to preach the gospel to every creature. The promised signs accompany the proclamation of

that message. They are not presented as an independent religious attraction. Furthermore, the list includes more than the manifestations commonly promoted by modern miracle ministries. It includes serpents and immunity from deadly poison. A preacher who insists upon claiming every apostolic promise while carefully avoiding those particulars has already revealed that his application is selective. It is a curious kind of literalism that demands tongues and healings every Sunday but suddenly discovers the importance of historical context when the conversation turns to serpents and poison.

The decisive explanation appears in Mark 16:20: "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen." The verse describes the disciples going forth and the Lord confirming the preached word through accompanying signs. There is the stated purpose, plainly supplied by the Holy Ghost. The signs confirmed the word. They did not replace preaching, establish an independent method of salvation, or provide a permanent license for religious experimentation. The book of Acts supplies historical examples corresponding to the commission. Tongues appear at significant points in the gospel's expansion, the apostles heal the sick, unclean spirits are cast out, and Paul survives the venomous creature that fastens upon his hand in Acts 28:3–6. That incident is particularly instructive because Paul did not assemble a crowd, bring out a collection of snakes, and stage a demonstration of invincibility. A viper unexpectedly fastened upon him while he gathered sticks, and God preserved him. There is a considerable difference between trusting God when danger arrives and deliberately manufacturing danger so that an audience can admire your supposed spirituality.

The claim that Mark 16 requires every saved person in every generation to demonstrate the entire collection of supernatural signs also collides with Paul's later teaching concerning the diversity of gifts. First Corinthians 12:29–30 asks, "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?" The expected answer is no. The Spirit distributes gifts according to His own will, and the manifestations were never presented as identical equipment guaranteed to every believer. Mark 16 records the Lord's commission and promised confirming signs; 1 Corinthians explains how diverse manifestations operated within the church. Neither passage authorizes the doctrine that every Christian must speak in tongues, handle serpents, heal the sick, or produce supernatural manifestations to prove salvation. Neither does the absence of a particular sign invalidate the believer's position in Christ. A sinner is saved by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, not by passing a supernatural performance examination. The gospel rests upon Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, not upon whether an individual can reproduce an event from Acts.

5. The Apostles and Prophets Laid a Foundation That Cannot Be Laid Twice

Ephesians 2:19–22 supplies the doctrinal foundation for understanding why the apostolic office was unique. Paul tells Gentile believers that they are "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God." The context concerns the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the one body of Christ, not the destruction of God's national promises to Israel. Gentiles who were once strangers from the covenants of promise have been brought nigh through the blood of Christ, and believing Jews and Gentiles now possess access by one Spirit unto the Father. Verse 20 identifies the building's foundation: "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." The apostles and prophets are foundational to the church's establishment and revelation, while Christ remains its indispensable foundation and chief corner stone. The church is not a vacant construction lot waiting for another generation of self-appointed apostles to arrive with shovels. The foundation has already been laid.

Ephesians 3:5–6 further explains the revelatory work associated with these foundational men. Paul describes the mystery "which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." The content concerns Gentiles becoming fellowheirs, belonging to the same body, and partaking of God's promise in Christ by the gospel. This revelation explains the church's position under grace without confusing the body of Christ with Israel's national prophetic promises. The apostles and New Testament prophets were associated with the disclosure of truth previously hidden in God. Their function was foundational because the church needed divine revelation concerning its nature, position, and doctrine. First Corinthians 3:11 declares, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." There is no contradiction. Christ is the ultimate foundation, while the apostles and prophets supplied the divinely authorized foundational testimony concerning Him. You cannot improve the foundation by appointing another architect who claims to have received revised instructions from heaven.

Ephesians 4:11–16 identifies apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers in connection with the church's edification and maturity. The continuing necessity of edification does not require every foundational office to remain in operation throughout the entire Church Age. Evangelists still proclaim the gospel, pastors still feed congregations, and teachers still explain Scripture, but their authority is derived from the written revelation already provided, not from a commission to produce additional foundational doctrine. Second Timothy 3:16–17 declares that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, "That the man

of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." The church possesses the inspired Scriptures through which its doctrine is established and its ministry governed. A preacher's responsibility is to proclaim that word faithfully, not supplement it with newly invented apostolic credentials. A completed foundation requires faithful builders, not another man announcing that the original blueprints have mysteriously expired.

6. Paul's Later Ministry Exposes the Myth of Automatic Miracle-Working Power

Acts 19:11–12 records that "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul," so that handkerchiefs and aprons brought from his body were associated with the healing of diseases and the departure of evil spirits. Notice who performed the miracles. The text attributes the supernatural work to God, not to some independent magical property possessed by ordinary cloth. These were expressly called "special miracles," and they occurred in connection with Paul's apostolic ministry at Ephesus. Yet modern religion has repeatedly transformed this extraordinary historical account into an excuse for selling supposedly anointed handkerchiefs and other objects promising supernatural benefits. The transformation is astonishing. God performed special miracles through an apostle, and somebody concludes that the proper modern application is to operate a mail-order business. Acts 19 does not instruct Christians to manufacture relics, assign prices to spiritual power, or create a permanent system of miraculous objects. When an extraordinary work of God becomes an ordinary merchandise scheme, the distance between apostolic Christianity and modern religious commerce becomes painfully obvious.

The later record of Paul's ministry also challenges the doctrine that apostolic healing operated as an automatic power available whenever its possessor chose to exercise it. Paul experienced a thorn in the flesh and received the Lord's answer, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Epaphroditus became sick nigh unto death, and Paul attributed his recovery to God's mercy rather than treating healing as a mechanical certainty (Philippians 2:25–27). Timothy experienced recurring stomach difficulties, and Paul advised him concerning his physical condition in 1 Timothy 5:23. Most strikingly, 2 Timothy 4:20 declares, "Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick." These passages do not demonstrate that God had become incapable of healing. They demonstrate that healing was never an independent ability operating at human discretion. If possessing apostolic authority meant that every sick acquaintance could be healed on command, somebody should explain why Paul's companions continued having medical problems while the supposed modern successors promise results to strangers on television.

As the New Testament revelation advances, increasing attention falls upon sound doctrine, faithful preaching, qualified leadership, endurance, and the preservation of apostolic truth. Paul instructs Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2). He does not instruct him to establish credibility by reproducing every miracle recorded in Acts. First Corinthians 15:3–4 identifies the gospel Paul received and delivered: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. That gospel remains powerful because of the finished work of Jesus Christ, not because every preacher possesses miraculous credentials. The written apostolic testimony continues declaring the truth after the foundational generation has passed. A preacher armed with the word of God does not need to borrow an apostle's shadow to make the gospel effective. The power belongs to God, and the authority belongs to His revealed truth.

7. God Still Performs Miracles, but No Man Owns the Power

Rejecting modern claims to apostolic office does not require denying the supernatural power of God. The Lord remains able to heal sickness, preserve life, answer prayer, provide deliverance, and intervene according to His sovereign will. James 5:14–16 specifically directs the sick to call for the elders of the church and provides instruction concerning prayer. Christians have no biblical reason to abandon prayer for physical healing merely because fraudulent ministers have abused the subject. The error lies in transforming the sovereign work of God into a guaranteed possession of particular men. Paul prayed concerning his thorn, and the Lord answered him, although the answer was sufficient grace rather than removal of the affliction. God may heal through extraordinary intervention, ordinary providence, medical care, or circumstances that human understanding cannot fully explain. None of these possibilities requires a new apostolic office. The Almighty has not retired because the original apostles have departed. But neither has He transferred ownership of His power to every man advertising himself as a miracle specialist.

Christians must also recognize that supernatural claims require biblical examination rather than automatic acceptance. First John 4:1 commands, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." The command is not to believe every testimony that produces excitement, but to test what is being claimed. Second Corinthians 11:13–15 warns concerning false apostles and Satan's ability to transform himself into an angel of light. Matthew 7:22–23 demonstrates that claims involving remarkable religious works cannot replace a genuine relationship with Christ. A preacher who contradicts Scripture does not become trustworthy because somebody reports an unusual experience during his meeting. Neither does a large congregation establish divine authorization. The church must examine

doctrine, authority, character, and conduct according to the written word. A counterfeit twenty-dollar bill does not become genuine because somebody spends it enthusiastically, and a false apostle does not become genuine because his congregation applauds loudly enough. Truth must authenticate experience, never the reverse.

The proper response is not to spend the Christian life chasing miraculous performances but to serve faithfully under the authority God has actually established. The believer has the indwelling Holy Spirit, access to the Father through Jesus Christ, the completed work of redemption, and the inspired Scriptures for instruction. The local church has responsibilities involving evangelism, teaching, fellowship, prayer, charity, discipline, and mutual edification. These responsibilities are not second-rate substitutes for apostolic signs; they are genuine obligations established by Scripture. Ephesians 4:14 warns against believers remaining children, "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." A congregation perpetually searching for the next sensational manifestation while neglecting biblical teaching is doing precisely what sound ministry was intended to prevent. The church needs doctrinal stability, spiritual maturity, and faithful service more than another religious performance. When a congregation knows more about its preacher's alleged miracles than the apostle Paul's actual doctrine, it has mistaken the fireworks for the lighthouse.

Conclusion

The signs of an apostle had a definite biblical purpose, and that purpose cannot be understood apart from the unique commission of the apostolic witnesses. Paul identified their signs in 2 Corinthians 12:12. Hebrews 2:3–4 connected signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost with God's confirmation of the original proclamation. Acts recorded their operation as the gospel advanced from Jerusalem into the wider world. Mark 16:20 explained that the Lord worked with His messengers, "confirming the word with signs following." Ephesians 2:20 then located the apostles and prophets within the foundation of the church, with Jesus Christ Himself as the chief corner stone. These passages form a coherent doctrinal explanation rather than a collection of supernatural promises available for indiscriminate modern reproduction. The signs served the divinely authorized testimony through which the church was established. God did not perform miracles to create a permanent religious entertainment industry. He performed them to authenticate His messengers and confirm His revealed truth. Once that purpose is recognized, the modern claims to unrestricted apostolic authority lose their supposed biblical foundation.

There is no contradiction between believing that God can still perform miracles and rejecting a man's claim to possess the permanent authority of an original apostle. The former acknowledges God's sovereignty; the latter demands biblical evidence for an

extraordinary office. Christians should pray for the sick, trust the Lord through suffering, recognize His providential care, and rejoice when He answers prayer. They should also reject the commercialization of healing, the manipulation of afflicted people, and the teaching that failure to receive a particular miracle proves insufficient faith. A sick believer is not automatically disobedient, and a healthy religious performer is not automatically spiritual. Paul's thorn, Timothy's ailments, Epaphroditus's illness, and Trophimus's condition should permanently silence the notion that physical suffering necessarily demonstrates defective Christianity. The Lord told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee." That answer came from heaven, even though it did not remove the difficulty. God's refusal to perform the miracle a man demands does not establish that God has failed. It may establish that the man has mistaken his demand for God's will.

The final issue is the authority of Jesus Christ and the sufficiency of the apostolic testimony He provided. The original apostles were not religious celebrities who happened to possess unusual abilities. They were divinely commissioned witnesses whose foundational ministry helped establish the church and deliver the truth by which subsequent generations must be governed. Their authority was not a personal inheritance passed to ambitious successors who desired impressive titles and supernatural reputations. It remains preserved in the inspired Scriptures, which the church is commanded to believe, study, preach, and obey. The believer does not need another Peter, another Paul, or another newly appointed apostle promising additional revelation. He needs the Christ those apostles proclaimed, the gospel they delivered, and the doctrine they established under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. The church's responsibility is to build upon that foundation, not repeatedly pretend to establish it. A foundation is laid to support a building, not to be poured again every Sunday morning. The Lord Jesus Christ has already established the foundation of His church, and the man who claims to be its newest replacement is not continuing the apostles' work. He is challenging the authority of the very foundation upon which he ought to be standing.

3 of 10 — Spiritual Gifts — Prophecy, Knowledge, and Revelation: When God Finished Speaking Through the Apostolic Witness

Key Passages: 1 Corinthians 12:8–10; 13:8–12; 14:1–6; Ephesians 3:1–6; 2 Peter 1:19–21; Jude 3

Introduction

"Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away" (1 Corinthians 13:8). There is a statement that ought to disturb the modern religious industry considerably more than it does. The apostle Paul identifies supernatural manifestations operating within the Corinthian church and announces that some of them will not continue indefinitely. Apparently, nobody informed the modern prophet who claims to receive fresh communications from heaven between his breakfast and his afternoon television appearance. The Corinthians possessed genuine gifts associated with divine revelation, but Paul never suggested that possessing those gifts placed their recipients above biblical correction. Quite the opposite. He spent three chapters correcting their ignorance, regulating their conduct, and establishing the superiority of charity over spectacular manifestations. A man can make extraordinary claims about hearing from heaven, but those claims become worthless the moment he refuses to listen to what heaven has already said. The question is not whether God possesses the ability to reveal truth. The question is whether He has appointed modern men to continue delivering foundational revelation after the apostolic witness has been established.

The distinction is essential because there is a world of difference between receiving supernatural revelation and understanding revelation God has already given. A Christian who studies Scripture, recognizes a biblical truth, understands a difficult passage, or receives wisdom through applying God's word has not necessarily received the same supernatural gift operating through a New Testament prophet. Likewise, the ability to recognize false doctrine does not automatically establish possession of the particular gift called "discerning of spirits" in 1 Corinthians 12:10. Religious confusion begins when separate biblical subjects are gathered beneath one impressive title and the resulting collection is presented as evidence of extraordinary authority. A man discovers a useful scriptural principle and calls it a revelation. He makes a reasonable prediction and announces himself as a prophet. He experiences a strong impression and attributes it directly to the Holy Ghost. Before long, his personal thoughts have acquired the status of divine commandments. The distance between "I believe this is right" and "Thus saith the LORD" is enormous, and the fellow who crosses it without divine authorization has wandered into exceedingly dangerous territory.

The proper examination must begin with the circumstances in which revelatory gifts operated, continue through Paul's explicit teaching concerning their temporary character, and conclude with the sufficiency of the written Scriptures. First Corinthians 12 identifies the gifts, chapter 13 places them beneath charity and announces their eventual cessation, and chapter 14 regulates their exercise within the assembled congregation. Ephesians 3 explains the revelation of the mystery concerning the body of Christ, while Ephesians 2

identifies the apostles and prophets with the church's foundation. Second Peter directs attention to the certainty of God's prophetic word, and Jude speaks of "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). These passages provide a substantial foundation for understanding why the church must not confuse the apostolic transmission of divine truth with the continuing ministry of preaching and teaching that truth. The Holy Ghost has not abandoned believers because the foundational revelation has been delivered. The same God who supplied the revelation also supplied the responsibility to believe it, preserve it, rightly divide it, and obey it.

1. The Word of Wisdom, the Word of Knowledge, and the Spirit Who Distributed Them

Paul begins his enumeration of gifts by declaring, "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:8). Notice that he says "the word of wisdom" and "the word of knowledge." He does not simply say that some Christians are wiser than others or that certain men have read more books. The context concerns supernatural manifestations supplied by the Spirit according to His will, not ordinary differences in intellectual ability. Wisdom and knowledge are distinct expressions in the passage, and neither should be carelessly identified with every modern claim bearing a similar name. In the formative period of the New Testament church, divine revelation and Spirit-given understanding served important purposes before the complete apostolic testimony had been delivered. However, the verse does not provide an exhaustive definition of each gift's operation, and inventing detailed procedures where Scripture supplies none is hardly an improvement upon biblical accuracy. When the Bible identifies a gift without describing every possible operation, the preacher's responsibility is to explain what is written, not fill the remaining space with imagination and call the invention doctrine.

The distinction between wisdom and knowledge becomes clearer when the wider Scriptures are considered. First Corinthians 2:12–13 explains that the apostles received the Spirit of God so that they might know the things freely given by God and communicate them in words taught by the Holy Ghost. Paul was not claiming that the doctrines of Christ's crucifixion, the spiritual body, and the mysteries revealed to him were conclusions reached through exceptional human intelligence. They were matters of divine revelation. Yet Scripture also commands ordinary believers to grow in knowledge. Colossians 1:9 records Paul's prayer that believers might be filled with the knowledge of God's will "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Second Timothy 2:15 commands the workman to study and rightly divide the word of truth. The existence of a supernatural gift of knowledge during the foundational period does not eliminate the continuing responsibility to acquire scriptural knowledge through diligent attention to God's word. A preacher who refuses to study

because he expects the Holy Ghost to download his sermon has confused divine inspiration with sanctified laziness. God supplied revelation; He also commanded men to handle that revelation faithfully.

First Corinthians 12:10 additionally identifies "discerning of spirits," another gift requiring careful distinction from ordinary spiritual judgment. During the period when supernatural manifestations and revelatory claims operated within congregations, discerning the source of a manifestation carried particular importance. Yet the continuing command to examine doctrine does not depend upon a Christian claiming this extraordinary gift. First John 4:1 instructs believers, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." Hebrews 5:14 describes mature believers whose senses are exercised to discern both good and evil. Those responsibilities remain. A Christian does not need to claim a private vision to identify a false teacher who contradicts Scripture. He needs to know what Scripture says. When a man teaches salvation by works, denies the gospel, or contradicts the written word, you do not need a supernatural detective to discover the problem. You need an open Bible and enough backbone to believe it. The distinction protects genuine biblical discernment without manufacturing new supernatural credentials.

2. Prophecy in Corinth Was Revelation, Not Merely an Impressive Sermon

"Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy" (1 Corinthians 14:1). Paul is addressing a congregation in which supernatural gifts were genuinely operating, and he places prophecy above uninterpreted tongues because prophecy communicated understandable instruction to the assembled believers. Verse 3 declares, "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." This statement identifies the beneficial result of prophecy, but it does not automatically turn every modern sermon containing edification, exhortation, and comfort into a supernatural revelation. A preacher can edify through Scripture without receiving an additional message from heaven. Paul's instructions concern the actual manifestation of prophecy in Corinth, where the church was still living during the foundational apostolic period. The distinction matters because modern claimants frequently redefine prophecy as ordinary preaching when defending its continuation, then quietly restore the supernatural definition when advertising their supposed revelations. A man cannot retreat into the definition of teaching whenever his claims are examined and emerge wearing the robes of a prophet whenever the collection plate appears. Biblical terms must retain their proper contextual meaning.

The book of Acts provides examples demonstrating that New Testament prophecy involved more than religious eloquence. Acts 11:27–28 records prophets arriving from Jerusalem to

Antioch, with Agabus signifying by the Spirit that a great dearth would occur throughout the world. Acts 21:10–11 records Agabus taking Paul's girdle and declaring what the Holy Ghost said concerning the apostle's coming imprisonment. Acts 13:1 identifies prophets and teachers serving in the church at Antioch, while Acts 15:32 describes Judas and Silas, "being prophets also," exhorting and confirming the brethren. These accounts establish that prophecy could include predictive revelation and direct divine communication, while also accomplishing the edification of believers. It was not merely a poetic name for public speaking. Furthermore, the existence of New Testament prophets must be understood in connection with the historical disclosure and establishment of the church's doctrine. A prophet in Scripture was not simply a fellow with a powerful voice, an emotional vocabulary, and an unusual ability to predict that somebody in the audience was experiencing difficulties. Genuine prophecy involved divine communication, and divine communication carried divine authority.

Paul also placed strict regulations upon prophetic activity. First Corinthians 14:29 declares, "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge." Verse 32 adds, "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." The instructions destroy the notion that a person claiming spiritual inspiration becomes uncontrollable, unaccountable, or exempt from examination. Verse 33 identifies God as the author of peace rather than confusion, and verse 40 requires all things to be done decently and in order. Paul even tells the Corinthians that those claiming prophetic or spiritual standing must acknowledge his written instructions as "the commandments of the Lord" (verse 37). Consider the significance: men exercising supernatural gifts were required to submit to apostolic Scripture. The manifestation did not outrank the written commandment. If genuine prophets in Corinth were required to submit to Paul's instructions, what possible exemption has been granted to a modern prophet who refuses correction because he claims the Holy Ghost told him something different? The man who elevates his experience above Scripture has reversed the authority established by the apostle himself.

3. The Mystery Revealed and the Foundation Established

Ephesians 3:3–5 introduces a subject that cannot be understood by treating every dispensation as though God revealed everything to everybody at the same time. Paul declares, "How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery," and then explains that this mystery "in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." The language is unmistakably revelatory. Paul was not merely developing a personal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy or discovering something that had always been plainly understood. God disclosed truth concerning His present work that had previously remained hidden. Verse 6

identifies the substance: "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." The body of Christ, consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles united in one spiritual organism, was the subject of this particular revelation. A mystery revealed by God is not a doctrine manufactured by an intelligent preacher. It is truth disclosed by the One who possessed it before men ever knew it existed.

This revelation must not be confused with the notion that Israel has permanently forfeited her national promises or that the church has simply become Israel under a different name. Romans 11 maintains God's future dealings with Israel, while Ephesians 2 establishes the present spiritual unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. Paul's ministry as the apostle of the Gentiles involved revealing and explaining truths particularly associated with the dispensation of grace. In Colossians 1:25–27, he speaks of the dispensation given to him and the mystery hidden from ages and generations but now made manifest to the saints. This was foundational truth necessary for understanding the church's identity, position, and calling. The apostles and prophets therefore occupied a significant place in the communication of revelation during the church's establishment. Their ministry did not merely provide religious encouragement. It supplied doctrine by which subsequent generations would understand their standing in Christ. The modern preacher who cannot distinguish Israel's earthly covenants from the heavenly calling of the body of Christ has little business announcing that heaven has entrusted him with additional revelations. He ought to learn the revelation already written before claiming authority to deliver another.

Ephesians 2:20 establishes the corresponding structural truth: believers are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." The apostles and prophets were associated with the foundation because their divinely authorized witness provided the initial revelation upon which the church would be established. Hebrews 2:3–4 likewise describes salvation first spoken by the Lord and confirmed by those who heard Him, with God bearing witness through signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost. The supernatural manifestations accompanied the delivery and confirmation of divine truth. Once the apostolic foundation was established, the church's ongoing responsibility was to build upon it, not continually appoint new foundational authorities. This is a doctrinal conclusion drawn from the nature of the apostolic ministry and the revealed foundation, rather than from an imaginary verse announcing the precise calendar date on which every extraordinary gift disappeared. A foundation is not improved by continually digging it up, and revelation is not honored by continually claiming that the original message needs another installment. The church needs faithful builders who obey the established foundation, not religious contractors advertising new blueprints.

4. When That Which Is Perfect Is Come: What First Corinthians Thirteen Actually Says

First Corinthians 13:8–10 must be examined without either denying Paul's announcement of cessation or pretending that the passage answers questions it does not explicitly address. Paul declares, "Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." Verse 9 explains, "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part." The knowledge under discussion belongs to the context of supernatural gifts and partial revelation, not the complete extinction of all knowledge among Christians. Verse 10 then states, "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." The contrast concerns partial and complete knowledge. Paul establishes that the partial manifestations will not continue forever, and that their temporary character distinguishes them from the abiding excellence of charity. The gifts were never the final destination. They were provisions operating while God's purposes were advancing toward their appointed fulfillment. The apostle announces their limitations before modern religion ever begins claiming their permanence.

The phrase "that which is perfect" has generated considerable controversy, and a faithful examination must read Paul's entire argument rather than attach a convenient definition to one expression. The completion of the apostolic revelation provides an important doctrinal reason why foundational revelatory gifts are no longer necessary, but simply declaring that "perfect" means the completed Bible does not establish that interpretation beyond dispute. Paul immediately illustrates the difference between childhood and maturity in verse 11, then speaks of seeing "through a glass, darkly" and afterward "face to face" in verse 12. These expressions reach beyond the mere possession of additional written information and point toward a fullness of knowledge that belongs to the believer's ultimate completion in Christ. The expression "then shall I know even as also I am known" must be allowed its full weight. A man who claims that every element of this passage was completely exhausted when the last New Testament book was written still has to explain why believers continue seeing imperfectly and why the promised fullness of knowledge remains future. The verse must be interpreted, not merely recruited.

The distinction is between the end of foundational revelation and the ultimate perfection toward which Paul directs attention. The church can possess the completed apostolic testimony while still awaiting the fullness of its heavenly hope. First Corinthians 13:12 says, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face." This language naturally directs attention toward the believer's future condition, when present limitations yield to fuller knowledge. First John 3:2 similarly declares that when Christ appears, believers shall be like Him, "for we shall see him as he is." That future hope does not require the

continuation of new apostolic revelation throughout the intervening centuries. The cessation of foundational gifts rests upon the completed foundational ministry, the delivered apostolic doctrine, and the sufficiency of Scripture, not upon forcing every expression in 1 Corinthians 13 into a single disputed timetable. The Christian does not need to pretend that he already knows everything in order to confess that God has already revealed everything necessary for his present faith and obedience. The completion of the written testimony and the future perfection of the believer are distinct truths, and confusing them weakens rather than strengthens the biblical argument.

5. The More Sure Word of Prophecy and the Faith Once Delivered

Second Peter 1:16–21 supplies a remarkable contrast between extraordinary personal experience and the certainty of God's prophetic word. Peter had witnessed the majesty of Jesus Christ upon the holy mount and had heard the voice from the excellent glory. This was not an invented testimony, an inward impression, or an emotional experience produced during a religious meeting. Peter was an eyewitness of Christ's majesty. Nevertheless, he directs attention to the authority of divine prophecy, declaring in verse 19, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place." The significance is tremendous. An apostle who personally witnessed the transfiguration directs believers toward the prophetic word as their dependable light. Modern Christians who demand experiences superior to Scripture have reversed the emphasis. Peter heard the voice from heaven and directed men to God's sure word; the modern enthusiast reads God's sure word and demands another voice from heaven. The contrast is difficult to overlook.

Verses 20–21 continue, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Peter identifies the divine origin of scriptural prophecy. It did not originate in human invention or private initiative; God moved the men through whom His revelation was delivered. This establishes a distinction between the inspired word and the personal thoughts of religious individuals. A preacher may understand Scripture, explain it, defend it, and apply it, but he cannot transform his interpretation into additional inspired Scripture by attaching the words "God told me." Second Timothy 3:16 declares that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and verse 17 explains its sufficiency to furnish the man of God unto all good works. The church possesses a divinely inspired standard against which every teaching must be measured. The Bible does not become more authoritative when somebody adds his personal revelation to it. It becomes the very standard by which that addition must be examined.

Jude 3 provides another indispensable statement: believers are commanded to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Notice the completed character of the delivery and the responsibility to defend what has been received. The church is not instructed to invent fresh articles of faith every generation or wait for a continuing succession of prophets to revise the doctrine entrusted to the saints. The New Testament itself demonstrates the recognition of apostolic writings as Scripture; 2 Peter 3:15–16 refers to Paul's epistles and places them alongside "the other scriptures." Revelation 22:18–19 solemnly warns against adding to or taking away from the words of that particular prophecy, though the immediate warning should not be carelessly detached from its own book and treated as the sole proof of the entire canon's completion. The broader testimony is stronger: Christ commissioned His apostles, the Holy Ghost supplied their revelation, and the church received an authoritative doctrinal deposit to preserve and obey. The faith was delivered to the saints, not placed on permanent backorder until another prophet discovered something the apostles supposedly forgot.

6. God Told Me: When Private Impressions Become Counterfeit Revelation

Few expressions have been abused more thoroughly in modern Christianity than the words "God told me." A person may use the expression innocently when describing conviction arising from Scripture or a providential circumstance, but the moment he claims to possess a fresh, authoritative communication from God, an entirely different issue emerges. Jeremiah 23:16 warns Israel against prophets who "speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD." Verse 21 contains God's indictment: "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied." Although Jeremiah addresses false prophets in Israel's historical setting, the principle concerning counterfeit divine authority remains unmistakable. The claim that God has spoken does not establish that God has spoken. Human conviction, imagination, ambition, and even sincere misunderstanding can masquerade as divine revelation when somebody refuses to distinguish his thoughts from God's words. A man who believes his own opinions is merely mistaken when those opinions are wrong. A man who attributes those opinions directly to God has made his mistake considerably more serious.

The danger becomes especially apparent when supposed revelations are employed to control other people. A preacher announces that God has revealed who must donate, whom somebody should marry, which business decision must be made, or why questioning the ministry constitutes rebellion against heaven. Such claims attempt to transfer the unquestionable authority of Scripture to the private declarations of an individual. Paul supplied a decisive safeguard in Galatians 1:8: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto

you, let him be accursed." Even an alleged angelic message cannot replace the gospel already delivered. The Galatian churches were being confronted with a corruption of the gospel of grace, and Paul refused to recognize any supposed authority capable of changing it. A modern claimant enjoys no greater privilege. The preacher who demands obedience because God supposedly gave him a special message must first submit that message to the Bible. If it contradicts Scripture, heaven has not issued an amendment. Somebody has issued a counterfeit. The believer's obligation is to God's revealed truth, not to the unverified claims of religious personalities.

Scripture supplies principles for testing extraordinary claims without requiring Christians to deny God's continuing providential guidance. First Thessalonians 5:20–21 commands, "Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." These instructions were written during the period when prophetic gifts operated, and even then the Thessalonians were forbidden to abandon examination. Acts 17:11 commends the Bereans for searching the Scriptures daily to determine whether Paul's teaching was so. If an apostle's preaching was examined against Scripture, modern religious claims certainly deserve no exemption. Christians may seek God's wisdom through prayer, recognize His providential direction, and make decisions according to biblical principles without announcing that every strong impression constitutes new revelation. James 1:5 promises wisdom to those who ask God, but wisdom is not permission to manufacture additional commandments. The Christian who says, "I believe the Lord is leading me," should remain humble enough to recognize his own fallibility. The fellow who announces, "God commanded this," has placed himself under the far more serious obligation of proving that God actually spoke. Those are not interchangeable statements.

7. The Holy Ghost Still Teaches Through the Word He Inspired

The cessation of foundational revelation does not imply that the Holy Spirit has ceased working in the lives of believers. Romans 8:9 establishes that the Spirit dwells in those who belong to Christ, while Ephesians 1:13 declares that believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise after hearing and believing the gospel. His continuing ministry includes sanctification, spiritual understanding, conviction through the word, and the production of godly character. First Corinthians 2:12 explains that believers have received the Spirit of God "that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." That statement must be understood within Paul's discussion of divinely revealed truth and the Spirit's work, not converted into permission for every Christian to claim independent inspiration. The Holy Ghost who moved men to deliver Scripture is perfectly capable of enabling believers to understand the Scriptures already delivered. The Spirit does not become inactive because He is not producing another apostle. The same divine power that established the testimony

continues working through that testimony to instruct, correct, and strengthen God's people.

The continuing responsibilities of preachers, teachers, evangelists, and ordinary believers are therefore substantial. Ephesians 4:11–16 explains that Christ supplied ministries for the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body. The objective is doctrinal stability, spiritual maturity, and growth into Christ the Head. Paul warns against believers remaining children carried about by every wind of doctrine. Second Timothy 4:2 commands, "Preach the word," while Titus 1:9 requires a qualified bishop to hold fast the faithful word so that he may exhort and convince gainsayers. These instructions establish a ministry governed by Scripture rather than continual supernatural improvisation. The preacher must study, explain, reprove, rebuke, and exhort. He is not commissioned to improve upon the apostolic revelation. A congregation that requires a fresh prophecy every week because it refuses to study the written word has not demonstrated extraordinary spirituality. It has demonstrated an extraordinary appetite for substitutes. Sound doctrine may not produce the excitement of a supposed heavenly announcement, but it accomplishes the work God actually commanded.

The Christian must also distinguish illumination from inspiration and ordinary discernment from the supernatural revelatory gifts operating in the early church. A believer may read a familiar passage and suddenly recognize its significance, but the realization does not add another inspired verse to the Bible. A pastor may wisely apply Scripture to a difficult situation without possessing the apostolic word of knowledge. An evangelist may understand the needs of an audience without claiming divine access to secret information about every individual present. Likewise, a Christian may recognize the dangerous doctrine of a false teacher through careful comparison with Scripture. Such understanding is not spiritually inferior because it arrives through ordinary study rather than spectacular manifestation. Proverbs 2:6 declares, "For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." The source remains God, and His written words remain the governing authority. A believer does not need fresh revelation to possess fresh understanding of the revelation already given. He needs to open the Bible, believe what it says, and stop expecting God to repeat Himself because he neglected to listen the first time.

Conclusion

The supernatural gifts of prophecy, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, and discerning of spirits occupied significant places within the formative period of the New Testament church. They cannot be understood properly without recognizing the divine revelation being delivered through the apostles and prophets, the historical transition

recorded in Acts, and the establishment of the body of Christ under the dispensation of grace. First Corinthians 12 identifies the diversity of gifts and their distribution by the Holy Spirit. Chapter 14 demonstrates that even genuine manifestations were regulated by apostolic authority and required to serve the edification of the congregation. Chapter 13 announces the temporary nature of partial revelatory gifts while directing attention toward the enduring excellence of charity and the fullness still awaiting believers. Ephesians 2 and 3 explain the foundational character of apostolic revelation, while Second Peter and Jude direct the church toward the certainty and preservation of God's delivered truth. The apostolic foundation was given to establish the church, not to create an endless procession of men claiming that the foundation must be established all over again. A preacher who cannot distinguish revelation from explanation has already confused the messenger's responsibility with the authority of the One who supplied the message.

The completed apostolic testimony gives Christians a dependable doctrinal standard that does not change according to religious fashion, personal experience, or the ambitions of men. That standard must govern every claim to spiritual authority. The Bible is not an incomplete religious manual awaiting supplementary chapters from modern visionaries. Neither is it a collection of ancient writings that require a contemporary prophet to make them authoritative. It is the inspired word of God, profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. This does not eliminate the believer's need for prayer, wisdom, discernment, faithful teaching, or the continuing ministry of the Holy Ghost. It establishes the proper relationship between those responsibilities and divine revelation. Christians are commanded to study the word, not replace it; to preach the word, not improve it; and to test religious claims, not surrender their judgment whenever somebody claims supernatural authority. When a man's private revelation contradicts the public revelation God has already given, the problem is not that heaven has changed its mind. The problem is that somebody has mistaken his own voice for God's. The written word must judge the claim, regardless of how confidently the claim is announced.

The final responsibility is to stand upon the truth already delivered and refuse the temptation to chase every new religious announcement. God's people have no reason to despise wisdom, knowledge, spiritual understanding, or faithful preaching merely because the foundational revelatory gifts served their appointed historical purpose. Those continuing responsibilities are indispensable to Christian growth, doctrinal stability, and the proper operation of the local church. A man who accurately explains Romans, rightly divides the dispensations, defends salvation by grace through faith, exposes false doctrine, and directs sinners to the finished work of Jesus Christ is accomplishing far more lasting good than somebody who fills an auditorium with dramatic predictions that nobody is permitted to examine. The church does not need another source of divine authority

competing with Scripture. It needs men who believe the authority God has already supplied. The Lord Jesus Christ remains the Head of the church, the Holy Ghost remains present with believers, and the written testimony remains sufficient for the work entrusted to God's people. Heaven has not gone silent because the foundational revelation has been completed. Heaven has already spoken with an authority no modern prophet can improve, revise, or replace. The greatest spiritual discovery a Christian can make is not that God has whispered something nobody else knows, but that God has written something everybody ought to believe.

4 of 10 — Spiritual Gifts — Tongues: God's Sign to Unbelievers or Religion's Badge of Superiority?

Key Passages: Acts 2:1–13; 10:44–48; 19:1–7; 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28–30; 14:1–40; Isaiah 28:11–12

Introduction

"Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not" (1 Corinthians 14:22). There stands one of the clearest statements in the New Testament concerning the purpose of tongues, and it has been ignored by enough religious organizations to fill every pew in the country twice over. Paul identifies tongues as a sign, tells us whom the sign concerns, and then spends the surrounding chapter regulating its operation. Modern religion has managed to turn that sign into a badge of superior spirituality, a supposed requirement for receiving the Holy Ghost, a certificate of extraordinary holiness, and, in some circles, a convenient method of convincing ordinary believers that they have not received everything God intends for them. Apparently, the apostle's explanation was insufficiently exciting. When God identifies the purpose of a spiritual gift, the church has no authority to invent another purpose because the original one does not attract enough attention. The issue is not whether tongues were genuine. They were. The issue is whether modern claims correspond to what the Holy Ghost actually recorded.

The Corinthians had a serious problem with spiritual pride, and tongues had become one of the manifestations around which their disorder revolved. Paul did not write 1 Corinthians 12–14 to congratulate them for discovering a superior form of Christian experience. He wrote to correct ignorance, establish the purpose of spiritual gifts, exalt charity above supernatural manifestations, and bring public worship under biblical authority. First Corinthians 12:30 asks, "do all speak with tongues?" The expected answer is no. Yet

religious systems have been constructed upon the insistence that every genuinely Spirit-filled Christian must eventually speak in tongues. Others teach that a believer who has not experienced tongues has somehow failed to receive the fullness of the Holy Ghost. Some even connect the manifestation with the assurance of salvation. That is quite an accomplishment: taking a gift Paul says not everybody possesses and making it the spiritual measuring stick by which everybody is judged. It requires more than a little enthusiasm to contradict an apostle while claiming that the contradiction came from the Holy Ghost.

The biblical investigation must begin at Pentecost, proceed through the transitional events recorded in Acts, examine the Jewish significance of supernatural signs, and then allow Paul's detailed instructions to determine the nature and proper exercise of tongues. Acts 2 identifies the languages being spoken and the people who understood them. Isaiah 28 supplies the prophetic background Paul explicitly invokes. Acts 10 and 19 demonstrate tongues accompanying particular events in the spread of the gospel. First Corinthians 12 establishes that tongues were distributed as one gift among several, while chapter 14 insists upon interpretation, understanding, edification, and order. These passages must be allowed to speak without being buried beneath emotional testimonies or denominational traditions. A congregation can produce enough noise to shake the windows, but volume is not inspiration, confusion is not revelation, and religious excitement does not prove that the Holy Ghost has spoken. The King James Bible must determine what the gift was, why God supplied it, and whether contemporary claims deserve the same name.

1. Pentecost: They Heard Languages, Not Unintelligible Religious Noise

Acts 2:1–4 records the arrival of Pentecost, the sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, the appearance of cloven tongues like as of fire, and the filling of those gathered with the Holy Ghost. Verse 4 declares, "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." That is the biblical account, and the following verses explain what those tongues were. Jerusalem was filled with devout Jews "out of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). When the multitude assembled, the people were confounded because "every man heard them speak in his own language" (verse 6). The supernatural event was not that the speakers lost their ability to communicate intelligibly. The miracle was that men from Galilee spoke languages understood by visitors from distant regions. The Holy Ghost did not descend at Pentecost to make the gospel unintelligible. He enabled its proclamation across barriers that ordinary human ability could not overcome. That is considerably different from a religious performance nobody present can understand.

The witnesses themselves supplied the evidence. Acts 2:8 records their astonished question: "And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" The passage proceeds to identify Parthians, Medes, Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judaea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, parts of Libya, strangers of Rome, Jews, proselytes, Cretes, and Arabians. Verse 11 states, "we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." These were recognizable languages associated with actual peoples and geographical regions. The hearers understood what was being proclaimed. The miracle did not require somebody to invent a definition for each unfamiliar sound or persuade the audience that meaningless syllables constituted a heavenly language. The people identified the speech by the languages they had known since birth. If modern tongue-speaking is identical to Pentecost, the first question should be whether somebody who actually speaks the language can understand what is being said. The Book of Acts makes that question entirely reasonable.

Pentecost must also be understood in its Jewish setting. Peter stands before the multitude and addresses "Ye men of Judaea" in Acts 2:14 and "Ye men of Israel" in verse 22. He identifies Jesus of Nazareth as the One approved of God among them by miracles, wonders, and signs, declares His crucifixion and resurrection, and applies the Scriptures concerning David and the promised Christ. The account records a historical confrontation with Israel concerning the Messiah whom the nation had rejected. Peter quotes Joel 2 concerning the outpouring of the Spirit and the prophetic events associated with the day of the LORD. Not every event described in Joel reached its final fulfillment at Pentecost, and Peter's quotation does not erase Israel's remaining prophetic future. Nevertheless, the miraculous languages furnished an extraordinary sign during the proclamation of the risen Christ. Some mocked and accused the speakers of drunkenness, proving that even a genuine miracle does not force an unbelieving heart to submit to truth. The problem at Pentecost was not that God had failed to make Himself understandable. The problem was that some men preferred accusing the messengers of drunkenness to believing the message.

2. Isaiah Twenty-Eight: The Sign That Carried a Warning to Unbelieving Israel

Paul does not leave the significance of tongues to religious speculation. In 1 Corinthians 14:21, he writes, "In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord." He is drawing upon Isaiah 28:11–12, where the LORD declares, "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people." The historical setting concerns Israel's refusal to hear the word of God. Isaiah rebukes religious leaders corrupted by drunkenness, mocks their inability to receive instruction, and records their rejection of the rest and refreshing

God had offered. Foreign speech would become a testimony against people who had refused understandable divine instruction. The passage has a connection with judgment, unbelief, and the consequences of rejecting God's word. The nation that would not listen when God spoke plainly would encounter the unmistakable evidence of His dealings through lips it did not understand. The sign was not a medal awarded for exceptional spirituality.

First Corinthians 14:22 draws the conclusion: "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe." The association with Isaiah is critical because the sign's purpose cannot be determined merely by examining the feelings of the recipient. In Scripture, signs frequently accompanied God's dealings with Israel. First Corinthians 1:22 states, "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." That verse does not mean God never performed miracles before Gentiles, nor does it make every biblical sign exclusively Jewish in its immediate audience. It establishes a distinction particularly relevant to the ministry of Christ and His apostles. The tongues at Pentecost appeared in Jerusalem among Jews and proselytes gathered from many nations, precisely where the language sign carried extraordinary significance. Religion has taken a manifestation connected with divine testimony and turned it into something resembling a spiritual membership badge. Paul calls it a sign; religious ambition calls it a promotion.

There is another important detail. First Corinthians 14:23 declares that if the whole church gathers and everybody speaks with tongues, unbelievers or unlearned visitors may conclude that the congregation is mad. Verses 24–25 then describe how understandable prophecy can convict an unbeliever and reveal the secrets of his heart, leading him to acknowledge that God is among the believers. This does not contradict verse 22. It demonstrates that a sign associated with unbelief does not automatically produce conversion, particularly when exercised without interpretation and proper order. The historical meaning of the sign and its practical effect inside a disorderly congregation are related but distinguishable matters. Paul is not instructing Corinth to abandon understanding because unintelligible speech supposedly possesses superior spiritual power. He is correcting precisely that confusion. A sign can confront unbelief without curing it, and a room full of people speaking beyond everybody's understanding can convince a visitor of only one thing—that somebody has forgotten the purpose of communication. The apostle demanded intelligibility, not an impressive volume of religious noise.

3. Cornelius and Ephesus: Tongues at Turning Points in the Book of Acts

Acts 10 records a remarkable event in the household of Cornelius, a Gentile centurion who had been seeking God and received instruction to send for Peter. The apostle arrived, proclaimed Jesus Christ, preached His death and resurrection, and declared in verse 43, "that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Verse 44 then announces, "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." The Jewish believers accompanying Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Ghost had been poured out upon Gentiles. How did they recognize what had happened? Verse 46 explains, "For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God." The manifestation provided unmistakable testimony that God had accepted believing Gentiles. It was not evidence that the Gentiles had acquired a higher level of salvation than Peter's companions. God was demonstrating that Gentiles could receive the Holy Ghost without first becoming Jews, not establishing a religious competition over which believers could produce the most impressive supernatural experience.

The order of events destroys another popular confusion. Cornelius and those with him received the Holy Ghost before water baptism. Peter subsequently asked, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" (Acts 10:47). Acts 11:15 records Peter's explanation: "And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning." He specifically connects the event with the earlier outpouring upon the apostles. In Acts 15:8–9, Peter declares that God bore witness to the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Ghost and purified their hearts by faith. The issue concerned Gentile acceptance through faith, not the establishment of tongues as a compulsory experience for every saved person. Neither water baptism nor circumcision produced the reception of the Spirit in Cornelius's household. The Gentiles received the Holy Ghost while Peter preached the gospel, before anybody could get them into a baptistry or require them to observe the law of Moses. The Lord settled the matter before religious traditionalists could complicate it.

Acts 19:1–7 records another distinctive event involving approximately twelve men at Ephesus who had received John's baptism and possessed an incomplete understanding of the revealed work of Christ. Paul explained that John preached the baptism of repentance and directed people to believe on Christ Jesus. These men were subsequently baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and when Paul laid hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them; "and they spake with tongues, and prophesied" (verse 6). The context involves men associated with John's preparatory ministry being brought into the fuller revelation of Christ. It does not describe an ordinary church service in which every already-saved Christian must repeat the experience. Neither does the Book of Acts record tongues accompanying every conversion. The Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 and the Philippian jailer in Acts 16 provide no such account. Three conspicuous occasions in Acts do not authorize

manufacturing a universal salvation requirement, especially when the same inspired history records genuine conversions without mentioning tongues at all. Historical transitions must not be mistaken for standing commandments.

4. Do All Speak With Tongues? Paul's Question Settles Spiritual Superiority

First Corinthians 12:10 identifies "divers kinds of tongues" and "the interpretation of tongues" among the manifestations distributed by the Holy Spirit. Verse 11 immediately explains that one and the selfsame Spirit works these gifts, "dividing to every man severally as he will." The distribution belongs to the Spirit, not to religious ambition, denominational requirements, or the insistence of an enthusiastic preacher. Paul then compares the church to a human body in which members perform different functions. God places those members according to His wisdom rather than making every member identical. Verse 28 specifically lists diversities of tongues among several gifts and ministries, after apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healings, helps, and governments. There is no biblical basis for treating tongues as the universal measure of spiritual maturity. The Holy Ghost deliberately distributed different gifts, and modern religion has spent generations trying to convince Christians that the Spirit should have given everybody the same one. That is not submission to divine wisdom. It is an argument with the Giver.

Paul reinforces the distinction through a series of questions in verses 29–30: "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?" Each question anticipates a negative answer. Not everybody held the same office, performed miracles, possessed gifts of healing, spoke with tongues, or interpreted tongues. The conclusion is not complicated. A manifestation that Paul explicitly says was not possessed by every member cannot be necessary evidence that every member has received salvation or the Holy Ghost. If tongues were the required proof of Spirit baptism, Paul would have undermined his own doctrine by acknowledging that not all Christians spoke with them. Yet some congregations continue treating tongue-speaking as though it were the indispensable mark of a genuine Christian. If the apostle asks, "do all speak with tongues?" and your denomination answers, "They had better," somebody has departed from the Scriptures—and it is not the apostle. Biblical authority does not increase with the size of the congregation contradicting it.

First Corinthians 12:13 supplies the distinction that settles the believer's position in 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." The Spirit places believers into the one body of Christ. Ephesians 1:13 explains that after hearing the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, and believing in Christ, believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Romans 8:9 declares, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ,

he is none of his." These passages establish the Spirit's relationship to every genuine believer without requiring a supernatural language manifestation. Salvation rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, received by faith, not upon an additional religious performance. The indwelling Spirit, the baptism of the Spirit into Christ's body, the filling of the Spirit, and particular supernatural gifts must not be thrown together as though they were identical. The blood of Christ secures salvation; the Spirit seals the believer; and the absence of tongues cannot overturn what God has established through His Son.

5. Unknown Tongues, Interpretation, and the Difference Between Noise and Edification

First Corinthians 14:2 introduces a passage frequently recruited to defend modern claims of unintelligible spiritual speech: "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries." The immediate context concerns the communication and interpretation of tongues within the Corinthian congregation. The word "unknown" identifies a tongue not understood by those present; the verse does not independently establish that the utterance consists of meaningless sounds or an otherwise unidentifiable heavenly language. At Pentecost, the tongues were recognizable languages. At Corinth, the need for interpretation demonstrated that speech could be genuine yet unintelligible to the immediate assembly. God understands what men do not, but that fact does not automatically make every incomprehensible utterance divine. An audience's inability to understand a speaker is not proof that the speaker has become extraordinarily spiritual. Sometimes it simply means nobody in the room understands the language—and sometimes it means the speaker has said nothing intelligible at all. Scripture, not excitement, must distinguish the claims.

Paul's argument repeatedly returns to understanding. First Corinthians 14:6 asks what profit his visit would provide if he spoke with tongues without communicating revelation, knowledge, prophesying, or doctrine. Verses 7–8 compare unintelligible communication to musical instruments producing indistinct sounds and a trumpet failing to give a certain signal. A soldier cannot prepare for battle when the trumpet produces meaningless noise. Verse 9 applies the comparison: "So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air." The purpose of speech is communication, and public worship requires intelligibility. Verse 11 adds that when speakers do not understand one another, they become barbarians to each other. Paul was not opposed to supernatural gifts. He was opposed to their misuse. A preacher who cannot communicate a message his congregation understands has not improved the sermon by making it mysterious. He has merely increased the difficulty of

discovering whether anything worthwhile was said. The Holy Ghost does not need confusion to demonstrate His power.

Verses 13–19 address prayer, singing, and understanding. Paul instructs the one speaking in an unknown tongue to pray that he may interpret. He then explains, "For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful" (verse 14). His conclusion is not that understanding should be abandoned, but that he will pray and sing with the spirit and with the understanding also. Verse 16 asks how an unlearned person can say Amen when he does not understand the thanksgiving being offered. Paul acknowledges that the person speaking may give thanks well, but the other is not edified. The decisive comparison comes in verse 19: "Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." Five understandable words that teach truth are worth more in the assembly than ten thousand words nobody can interpret. That is not an anti-spiritual argument. It is the Holy Ghost's own explanation of what matters when Christians gather.

6. Two or Three, One at a Time, and Somebody Must Interpret

Paul's specific regulations in 1 Corinthians 14:26–28 expose how far many modern manifestations have departed from the biblical pattern. Verse 26 establishes the governing requirement: "Let all things be done unto edifying." Verse 27 then commands, "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret." The instructions are unmistakable. No more than two or three are to speak, they must speak in turn, and interpretation is required. This is not a suggestion for congregations that happen to prefer orderly services. It is apostolic instruction governing the exercise of the gift. Verse 28 adds, "But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God." If nobody can interpret, the biblical command is silence, not greater volume. A congregation in which dozens speak simultaneously without interpretation is not exceeding the apostolic standard through extraordinary spirituality. It is violating the very instructions that regulated genuine tongues.

The same chapter regulates prophecy and the conduct of those claiming spiritual inspiration. Verse 29 directs that two or three prophets speak and that others judge. Verse 32 declares, "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." A genuine spiritual manifestation did not place its recipient beyond self-control, scriptural examination, or congregational order. Paul was not impressed by the argument that somebody became so overwhelmed by spiritual influence that obedience to the apostolic instructions was impossible. Verse 33 settles the matter: "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." Verses 34–35 also contain instructions concerning women keeping silence in the churches, forming part of Paul's

broader regulation of the public assembly. These verses cannot be erased merely because modern practice finds them inconvenient. The Holy Ghost who supplied the gifts also supplied the rules, and He did not suddenly forget those rules when somebody installed louder speakers and brighter lights. Divine inspiration cannot be used to justify disobedience to divine instruction.

Paul concludes by asserting the authority of what he has written. First Corinthians 14:37 states, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." This is a devastating test for religious pretenders. The very person claiming unusual spirituality must demonstrate it by submitting to the apostle's instructions. Verse 39 then declares, "Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues." During the period when genuine tongues operated, Paul did not authorize the Corinthians to prohibit their legitimate exercise. But that historical command cannot be detached from the same chapter's requirements and used to justify modern activities that ignore them. Verse 40 supplies the final standard: "Let all things be done decently and in order." A man cannot claim verse 39 as his authorization while throwing verses 27, 28, 33, 37, and 40 into the wastebasket. The instructions stand together. Anyone claiming the biblical gift must face the biblical regulations governing its exercise.

7. The Counterfeit Badge of Spirituality and the Sign That Served Its Purpose

Modern claims concerning tongues must be evaluated by Scripture rather than by the sincerity, excitement, or confidence of those making them. First Corinthians 13:1 mentions "the tongues of men and of angels," but Paul's statement belongs to an argument demonstrating that even the most extraordinary speech would be worthless without charity. The verse does not supply a detailed description of a private heavenly prayer language that every Christian should expect to receive. Neither does the existence of unintelligible speech prove supernatural inspiration. A genuine foreign language can be unknown to the immediate audience, but random syllables do not become a divinely supplied language merely because they are spoken during worship. The distinction must be established through evidence rather than assumption. If someone claims to possess the gift demonstrated at Pentecost, it is reasonable to ask whether his speech possesses the characteristics of the languages described at Pentecost. Religious sincerity deserves fair treatment, but it does not possess the authority to redefine Scripture. A sincere mistake remains a mistake, and an impressive demonstration remains unproven until its claims are examined.

The biblical case for the cessation of the foundational sign gifts rests upon their historical purpose and relationship to the apostolic ministry. Mark 16:20 identifies the Lord's work of

"confirming the word with signs following." Hebrews 2:3–4 describes God bearing witness to the original proclamation through signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost. Second Corinthians 12:12 identifies the signs of an apostle, while Ephesians 2:20 places the apostles and prophets within the foundation of the church. First Corinthians 13:8 expressly declares that tongues shall cease. These passages provide substantial grounds for distinguishing the temporary sign ministry associated with the apostolic foundation from the continuing responsibilities of Christians under grace. Scripture does not provide a convenient calendar entry announcing the final earthly occurrence of every sign gift, and it should not be represented as doing so. Nevertheless, a sign provided to confirm the original apostolic testimony does not require an endless succession of new apostles to keep that testimony authoritative. The completed foundation and the delivered Scriptures supply the church with its governing doctrinal authority.

The continuing work of the Holy Ghost must not be confused with the supposed necessity of reproducing every manifestation recorded during the apostolic period. The Spirit still indwells believers, seals them unto the day of redemption, enables faithful service, produces spiritual fruit, and works through the word He inspired. Galatians 5:22–23 identifies the fruit of the Spirit, while Ephesians 5:18 commands believers to be filled with the Spirit. Those responsibilities concern genuine Christian living, not the possession of a particular supernatural language. A saved person may possess great biblical understanding and faithful Christian character without ever having spoken in tongues. Conversely, somebody may loudly claim extraordinary manifestations while demonstrating little knowledge of Scripture and less obedience to its commandments. The Corinthians themselves prove that unusual gifts do not automatically produce maturity. The Holy Ghost was not given to furnish Christians with a badge of superiority. He was given to glorify Jesus Christ and accomplish God's work in His people. A congregation that measures spirituality by spectacular speech while neglecting sound doctrine has mistaken the wrapping paper for the gift.

Conclusion

The biblical gift of tongues was genuine, supernatural, purposeful, and carefully regulated. Acts 2 establishes the unmistakable reality of identifiable languages spoken through divine enablement. Acts 10 records tongues accompanying God's demonstration that believing Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost. Acts 19 describes a distinctive event involving men previously associated with John's baptism. Isaiah 28 supplies the prophetic background of foreign speech as a sign connected with unbelief and divine dealings with Israel. First Corinthians 12 establishes that tongues were one gift among several and were not possessed by every Christian. First Corinthians 14 identifies their sign character,

emphasizes intelligibility and interpretation, and commands orderly conduct within the assembly. These passages do not support the doctrine that every believer must speak in tongues, that tongues prove superior spirituality, or that unintelligible religious excitement automatically constitutes divine revelation. The purpose of the biblical gift was established by God, and no congregation has been authorized to replace that purpose with a religious tradition of its own making. The question is not how loudly somebody can defend an experience, but whether the experience corresponds to Scripture.

The gospel of salvation does not include speaking in tongues as a requirement for receiving eternal life. First Corinthians 15:1–4 identifies the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the gospel Paul preached. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares salvation by grace through faith, apart from works. Ephesians 1:13 identifies the sealing of believers with the Holy Spirit after they hear and believe the gospel of salvation. First Corinthians 12:13 explains that the Spirit baptizes believers into the one body of Christ, while the same chapter explicitly denies that all possess the gift of tongues. The conclusion is unavoidable: a Christian may belong to Jesus Christ, possess the indwelling Holy Ghost, and remain eternally secure without ever experiencing a supernatural language manifestation. No preacher has authority to make an optional and historically significant gift into a mandatory condition for something God grants through faith in Christ. The blood of Jesus Christ saves the sinner, not his ability to produce an extraordinary sound. The Holy Ghost seals the believer, not the religious organization that claims exclusive possession of His manifestations. Salvation must never be held hostage to an experience Paul himself declared was not universal.

The final responsibility of the church is to honor the purpose of spiritual gifts while rejecting the counterfeit authority that religious ambition has attached to them. Genuine spiritual service is governed by truth, charity, understanding, and obedience to Scripture. The believer does not need to imitate Pentecost, manufacture a supernatural experience, or submit to a religious leader who insists that unusual speech establishes superior standing with God. He needs to believe the gospel, study the Scriptures, walk in the Spirit, serve the brethren, and remain grounded in sound doctrine. The supernatural signs accompanying the apostolic witness served their historical purpose, and the written testimony of those apostles continues declaring the truth today. God remains sovereign, powerful, and perfectly able to accomplish His will without depending upon modern performers who advertise themselves as possessors of extraordinary gifts. Paul's instruction remains decisive: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40). The church does not need another outbreak of religious noise to prove that the Holy Ghost is present. It needs Christians who believe what the Holy Ghost has already written. A thousand voices making sounds nobody understands cannot improve upon five words that faithfully teach

the truth. And when religion begins measuring spirituality by the noise a man makes rather than the Scriptures he obeys, it has forgotten both the purpose of the gift and the authority of the Giver.

5 of 10 — Spiritual Gifts — Healing, Miracles, and the Men Who Claim God's Power Is for Sale

Key Passages: Acts 3:1–16; 5:12–16; 19:11–12; 1 Corinthians 12:9–10, 28–30; 2 Corinthians 12:7–10; Philippians 2:25–27; 2 Timothy 4:20; James 5:14–16

Introduction

"Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). There stands one of the most remarkable miracles recorded in the book of Acts, and it presents a rather embarrassing problem for the modern religious industry that has discovered how to attach a price tag to almost everything associated with healing. Peter possessed no silver or gold to offer the crippled man, but he possessed apostolic authority from the risen Lord Jesus Christ. The man was not required to make a financial contribution, purchase a prayer cloth, demonstrate extraordinary enthusiasm, or prove that he had accumulated enough faith to qualify for divine assistance. Peter commanded him to rise in the name of Jesus Christ, and the man immediately received strength. There was no collection afterward, no expensive follow-up program, and no attempt to turn the miracle into a profitable traveling exhibition. The apostle who had no money healed the crippled man, while some modern healers seem unable to perform their ministry until everybody else has surrendered theirs. That difference deserves considerably more attention than it receives.

Does God still heal the sick? Absolutely. The God who created the human body has not become incapable of repairing it, preserving it, or delivering it from affliction. Jeremiah 32:27 asks, "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?" The answer is obvious. But acknowledging God's unlimited power is not the same thing as accepting every preacher who claims to possess a permanent supernatural ability to heal other people. The former is a statement concerning the Almighty; the latter is a claim concerning the preacher, and that claim requires biblical examination. First Corinthians 12 identifies gifts of healing and the working of miracles among the manifestations distributed by the Holy Ghost, while 2 Corinthians 12:12 identifies signs, wonders, and mighty deeds with the authentication of apostolic ministry. Those passages must be understood together. God's power belongs to God. It does not become the personal property of a

religious personality merely because he has learned to describe himself as anointed. A genuine miracle glorifies the Lord; a counterfeit ministry uses the Lord's name to glorify its operator.

The proper examination must distinguish the extraordinary healing ministry recorded during the apostolic period from God's continuing ability to answer prayer according to His will. Acts records undeniable supernatural healings, deliverances, and even the restoration of the dead to life. Paul later describes his own unanswered request for the removal of an affliction, while other faithful servants experienced illnesses that were not immediately eliminated by apostolic command. James instructs believers concerning prayer for the sick, demonstrating that the rejection of fraudulent healing claims must never become an excuse for unbelief or neglect of suffering brethren. The Scriptures also expose the commercialization of spiritual power and warn against men who make merchandise of God's people. These truths must remain distinguishable. A man can believe every miracle recorded in the King James Bible without believing every miracle advertised on television. Faith accepts what God has said. Presumption demands that God perform according to somebody's religious sales presentation.

1. The Lame Man at the Beautiful Gate: What a Genuine Apostolic Healing Looked Like

Acts 3:1–3 places Peter and John at the temple during the hour of prayer, where a man lame from his mother's womb was being carried daily to the gate called Beautiful. The man's condition was longstanding, publicly recognizable, and sufficiently serious that he depended upon others to transport him. He was not experiencing a vague discomfort that might disappear under ordinary circumstances, nor was he presented as somebody whose condition depended upon the enthusiasm of the audience. He had never possessed the ordinary ability to walk. When he saw Peter and John approaching, he asked for alms because money was what he expected to receive. Peter instead directed his attention toward something entirely different. Acts 3:6 records the command to rise and walk in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. The man came expecting a contribution to help him endure his condition, and the Lord supplied a miracle that removed the condition itself. The account is remarkably specific concerning both the original disability and its immediate reversal.

Verse 7 declares that Peter took the man by the right hand and lifted him up, "and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength." Verse 8 continues, "And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God." Notice the immediate physical result. The man did not receive instructions to return next month for another appointment or explain that he was healed spiritually while his body awaited confirmation. His feet and ankle bones received strength,

he stood, he walked, and the people recognized him. Acts 3:10 reports that the witnesses were filled with wonder and amazement. Acts 4:22 adds that the man was above forty years old. This was an unmistakable public miracle involving an individual whose condition had been known for years. A genuine miracle does not become more convincing because somebody turns down the lights, increases the music, or places security guards between the audience and the evidence. The biblical account establishes the reality of the healing without requiring theatrical assistance.

Peter's explanation is even more important than the event itself. When the crowd gathered in amazement, he asked, "Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" (Acts 3:12). There is the apostolic correction to personal glory. Peter rejected the suggestion that the miracle originated in his own power or superior holiness. He directed the Jewish audience to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and proclaimed the glorification of Jesus Christ, whom they had delivered up and denied. Verse 16 attributes the man's restoration to the name of Christ and the faith associated with Him. The healing served the proclamation of the risen Messiah before Israel. Peter performed the miracle and then refused the credit. The modern religious celebrity takes the credit and expects everybody to believe that a miracle must have occurred. The apostolic sign pointed away from the servant and directly toward the Saviour.

2. The Signs of the Apostles: Public Miracles With a Divine Purpose

Acts 5:12 declares, "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people." The immediate setting concerns the developing testimony of the apostles at Jerusalem, following the judgment involving Ananias and Sapphira. Verse 15 describes sick people being brought into the streets and laid upon beds and couches so that Peter's shadow might overshadow some of them. Verse 16 records multitudes arriving from surrounding cities, bringing sick people and those vexed with unclean spirits, "and they were healed every one." These were extraordinary manifestations associated with the apostolic witnesses during the early establishment of the church. The healing ministry was not described as an ordinary possession guaranteed to every future pastor. It was associated with men commissioned to bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When the Bible calls something a sign of apostolic authority, the reader should hesitate before transferring it to everybody who happens to own a microphone. The historical setting is part of the doctrine, not an inconvenient detail to be discarded.

The same apostolic record includes miracles involving the dead. Acts 9:36–42 describes Dorcas, also called Tabitha, who became sick and died at Joppa. Peter entered the chamber, put the mourners outside, knelt down, prayed, and commanded, "Tabitha, arise."

She opened her eyes, sat up, and was presented alive to the believers. The event became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Acts 20:9–12 describes Eutychus falling from a third-story window and being taken up dead, followed by Paul's intervention and the young man's restoration, bringing great comfort to the congregation. These accounts demonstrate the extraordinary character of apostolic miracles and their connection with divine testimony. Yet they also raise an uncomfortable question for those advertising identical miracle-working authority today. If the original apostolic power is supposedly available on demand, why do the modern advertisements concentrate so heavily upon conditions that cannot be readily verified and so rarely upon the public restoration of someone whose death is beyond dispute? Scripture provides the standard against which extraordinary claims must be examined.

Hebrews 2:3–4 explains the confirming purpose of signs and wonders: God bore witness to the original proclamation through miraculous manifestations and gifts of the Holy Ghost according to His own will. Second Corinthians 12:12 specifically identifies "the signs of an apostle." Mark 16:20 states that the Lord worked with His messengers, "confirming the word with signs following." These passages must be considered together. The signs authenticated divinely appointed witnesses and confirmed the message concerning Jesus Christ. Their purpose cannot be separated from the foundational apostolic ministry. Matthew 10:5–8 provides an earlier example of the Lord sending the Twelve specifically to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, commanding them to heal the sick, cleanse lepers, raise the dead, and cast out devils. That commission had its own historical and dispensational setting; it cannot simply be transferred to every modern congregation. God's credentials for His appointed messengers were not blank checks handed to every future religious entrepreneur. The Lord still possesses all power, but the authority granted to particular servants must be understood according to the commission they actually received.

3. Paul's Handkerchiefs and the Merchandise of Religious Counterfeits

Acts 19:11–12 records an extraordinary occurrence during Paul's ministry at Ephesus: "And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul." Verse 12 explains that handkerchiefs and aprons brought from Paul's body were associated with diseases departing and evil spirits going out of those afflicted. Notice the careful wording: God wrought the miracles. Paul was the instrument, not the independent manufacturer of supernatural power. The miracles were also called "special," indicating their extraordinary nature. Nothing in the passage commands churches to begin manufacturing sacred handkerchiefs, selling supposedly anointed objects, or establishing mail-order programs that promise healing in exchange for financial contributions. Yet this historical event has repeatedly become an

excuse for religious merchandising. Somebody reads that God performed special miracles through Paul and concludes that the obvious modern application is to establish a retail department. That is not biblical interpretation. That is commercial imagination wearing a religious collar. The distinction between God's sovereign action and human imitation must remain intact.

The surrounding passage provides an especially appropriate warning. Acts 19:13–16 describes certain Jewish exorcists attempting to use the name of Jesus as though it were a supernatural formula they could operate independently of genuine divine authority. They said, "We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth." The evil spirit answered, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" The possessed man then overcame them, leaving them fleeing wounded and naked. The account exposes the danger of treating the name of Jesus as a magical instrument available for human manipulation. The resulting fear among the people contributed to the magnification of the Lord Jesus, and those involved in curious arts brought their books together and burned them publicly. The seven sons of Sceva discovered that borrowing an apostle's vocabulary does not supply an apostle's authority. The same warning applies to anybody who imagines that repeating biblical expressions, touching objects, or performing religious ceremonies automatically places divine power under human control.

Acts 8 provides another decisive account involving Simon, a former sorcerer who offered money in an attempt to obtain the power associated with the apostles' ministry. Peter's response was severe: "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money" (Acts 8:20). Simon's error was not merely that he offered an insufficient amount. He attempted to purchase what only God could give. Peter commanded him to repent of his wickedness rather than offering him a discounted ministry package. This event exposes the fundamental corruption behind selling supposed supernatural authority. God's gifts are not commodities, and His power is not a commercial franchise. Ministers may receive legitimate support for faithful labor, but divine healing cannot be sold as a product or distributed according to a donor's financial status. When a preacher begins attaching prices to the power of God, he has moved considerably closer to Simon the sorcerer than to Simon Peter. The apostolic record condemns the purchase of spiritual power rather than providing an example for its commercial distribution.

4. Gifts of Healing Were Distributed by the Spirit, Not Possessed by Everybody

First Corinthians 12:9 identifies "the gifts of healing by the same Spirit," while verse 10 includes "the working of miracles." These are listed among several manifestations operating during the apostolic period, alongside prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and interpretation. The distinctions demonstrate that the Spirit supplied different

manifestations for different purposes. Paul does not describe healing as an ability every Christian automatically possesses upon receiving salvation. Neither does he instruct believers to develop miracle-working authority through sufficient enthusiasm, financial sacrifice, or spiritual exercises. Verse 11 settles the question of distribution: "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." God's will governs the distribution, not human ambition. A spiritual gift is not something a preacher can manufacture through determination, and divine power does not become available for public demonstrations merely because somebody has announced a healing service. The Corinthians needed to understand that the manifestations belonged to the Spirit, not to the personalities through whom He operated.

Paul reinforces that distinction through his comparison of the church to the human body. First Corinthians 12:28 identifies apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healings, helps, governments, and diversities of tongues. Verses 29–30 then ask whether everybody possesses these same ministries and manifestations: "Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing?" The obvious answer is no. The Holy Ghost did not distribute every gift to every member. Therefore, the modern teaching that every believer should possess the ability to heal others through supernatural command has no foundation in Paul's explanation. Neither can a Christian's inability to produce a miracle establish that he lacks genuine salvation, sufficient faith, or the indwelling Holy Spirit. Ephesians 1:13 identifies believers as sealed with the Holy Spirit after hearing and believing the gospel. That sealing is not dependent upon supernatural demonstrations. The believer's position in Christ rests upon the finished work of the Saviour, not upon his ability to reproduce an apostle's miracles. Confusing spiritual gifts with salvation turns divine grace into a religious performance examination.

The gifts of healing must also be distinguished from God's continuing sovereign intervention in response to prayer. During the apostolic period, particular men were enabled to perform extraordinary signs confirming their divine commission. That historical fact does not establish a perpetual office of miracle-working ministers with authority to heal every person they encounter. The same God who performed miracles through Peter and Paul remains capable of healing apart from any individual claiming that gift. Nor should the absence of a publicly recognized miracle-worker cause Christians to stop praying for suffering brethren. The error lies in confusing God's continuing power with man's supposed possession of that power. Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 establish continuing responsibilities involving ministry, teaching, exhortation, and the edification of believers without requiring every Christian to possess the same manifestation. A man who faithfully prays for a sick brother has obeyed a biblical responsibility. A man who announces that the sick brother must recover because he personally possesses apostolic authority has made a claim the

Scriptures require him to prove. One is dependent upon God; the other risks presuming to command Him.

5. Paul's Thorn, Epaphroditus, Timothy, and the Sick Man Left Behind

Second Corinthians 12:7–10 presents a serious difficulty for the doctrine that every faithful Christian is guaranteed physical deliverance through sufficient faith. Paul describes receiving "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me," and explains that it served to prevent his exaltation through the abundance of revelations. The passage does not explicitly identify the thorn as a particular physical disease, and claiming certainty about its precise medical nature would exceed what Scripture reveals. Nevertheless, Paul describes a continuing affliction that he earnestly desired to have removed. Verse 8 declares, "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." Three times the apostle appealed to the Lord. This was not a careless prayer offered by a spiritually indifferent believer. It was the request of the very apostle through whom God had performed extraordinary miracles. If anybody should have qualified under the modern theory that sufficiently spiritual Christians can command every affliction to depart, Paul would have been an excellent candidate. Yet the Lord did not answer him according to that theory.

The divine answer appears in verse 9: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul did not respond by rebuking himself for possessing inadequate faith or searching for another apostle whose supernatural credentials might produce better results. He accepted the Lord's answer and learned to glory in his infirmities so that the power of Christ might rest upon him. Verse 10 concludes, "for when I am weak, then am I strong." That statement overturns the assumption that God's power must always be demonstrated through the immediate removal of suffering. Sometimes divine power is displayed through preservation, endurance, and sufficient grace during affliction. The apostle was not abandoned because his requested deliverance was withheld. Christ was glorified through the provision of grace rather than the elimination of the difficulty. The God who can remove a burden can also sustain His servant beneath it. A preacher who recognizes only the first possibility has overlooked a considerable portion of the Christian life. The answer from heaven was sufficient even though it was not the answer Paul originally requested.

Other passages reinforce the distinction. Philippians 2:25–27 records that Epaphroditus became sick nigh unto death, and Paul attributes his recovery to the mercy of God. First Timothy 5:23 contains Paul's practical instruction to Timothy concerning his stomach and frequent infirmities. Most strikingly, 2 Timothy 4:20 states, "Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick." The apostle who performed special miracles at Ephesus left a fellow laborer sick at

Miletum. These passages should permanently discourage the notion that miraculous healing operated as an automatic power whenever Paul desired it. God had not lost His ability to heal, and Paul's apostolic commission had not become fraudulent. Rather, physical healing remained subject to divine purpose. The modern preacher who promises guaranteed recovery to every sufficiently believing Christian ought to explain why Paul did not simply heal Timothy, prevent Epaphroditus from nearly dying, and send Trophimus home in perfect health. The inspired record is not obligated to conform to somebody's modern healing formula.

6. James Five: Prayer for the Sick Is Biblical, but Healing Is Not for Sale

James 5:14 asks, "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." Here is a passage that must not be discarded merely because counterfeit healing ministries have disgraced the subject. James addresses "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" in the opening verse of his epistle, and that historical setting deserves recognition. Nevertheless, the instruction concerning elders, prayer, confession, and care for the sick provides substantial teaching concerning the responsibilities of believers. The sick person is directed to seek prayer, and the elders are instructed to pray in the name of the Lord. The passage does not mention purchasing healing, hiring a miracle specialist, or rewarding the elders according to the supposed financial value of their prayers. The sick man calls for the elders because he needs prayer, not because the church has discovered another opportunity to collect admission fees. Biblical ministry approaches suffering with compassion and dependence upon God, not commercial calculation.

Verse 15 continues, "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." This is a genuine promise concerning the Lord's work, and its positive wording should not be watered down until prayer becomes an empty ceremony. Nevertheless, the passage must be interpreted alongside the rest of Scripture rather than isolated from the experiences of Paul and his companions. Notice particularly that the Lord raises the sick person. The authority and power remain His. The prayer of faith is not a mechanical instrument by which human beings compel God to perform contrary to His will. First John 5:14 establishes the governing confidence of prayer: "if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us." James himself warns against presumptuous planning in James 4:13–15 and commands believers to acknowledge, "If the Lord will." Faith does not become stronger by pretending that God has surrendered His sovereignty to the person doing the praying. Genuine faith trusts God's promises in their proper setting while submitting to His revealed will.

James 5:16 adds, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." The instruction recognizes the relationship between spiritual conduct, fellowship, confession, and prayer, but it does not establish that every sickness results from some particular unconfessed sin. John 9:1–3 specifically records the Lord rejecting the disciples' assumption that a man's blindness necessarily resulted from his own sin or that of his parents. Neither does seeking medical assistance demonstrate a lack of faith. Luke is called "the beloved physician" in Colossians 4:14, and Paul supplied practical counsel for Timothy's physical infirmities. Prayer and appropriate medical treatment are not opposing religions competing for God's attention. The Christian may pray earnestly, seek competent care, and acknowledge the Lord as the ultimate source of life. A bottle of medicine does not frighten the Almighty, and a physician does not become God's enemy because he knows something about the human body. The believer should neither despise prayer nor refuse ordinary care under the mistaken notion that suffering proves superior spirituality.

7. Healing for Sale, Faith on Trial, and the Gospel They Have Forgotten

Second Peter 2:3 warns that false teachers, "through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you." The expression is remarkably appropriate whenever religious workers exploit physical suffering for financial gain. Sick people are often frightened, desperate, and willing to surrender substantial resources if somebody promises relief. A religious profiteer understands that desperation can produce donations where ordinary preaching might not. The resulting system may involve supposed healing objects, special offerings, financial seeds, guaranteed breakthroughs, or claims that God's willingness to heal depends upon the size of a contribution. Such practices should be examined in light of Peter's warning to Simon in Acts 8:20 and Paul's condemnation of those who suppose "that gain is godliness" (1 Timothy 6:5). A suffering person is not a financial opportunity waiting for a preacher with an expensive suit and an impressive vocabulary. The ministry of Jesus Christ is not a marketplace where supernatural favors are sold to the highest bidder.

Another particularly cruel error involves blaming sick people when promised healings fail to occur. The afflicted are told that their faith was insufficient, their confession was negative, or some secret sin prevented the miracle. The preacher's claim remains beyond examination while the entire burden of failure is transferred to the suffering individual. That teaching cannot be reconciled with Paul's thorn, Epaphroditus's illness, Timothy's infirmities, or Trophimus being left sick. Nor does it agree with the account of the man at the Beautiful gate, who originally expected money rather than a supernatural healing. Genuine biblical faith certainly matters, but faith is not an independent force operating

above the will of God. Hebrews 11 records believers who experienced extraordinary deliverance and others who endured torture, imprisonment, suffering, and death while remaining faithful. If suffering proves insufficient faith, somebody had better explain why the Holy Ghost included so many suffering saints among those who obtained a good report through faith. The Bible honors faithful endurance rather than treating every affliction as an embarrassment to be concealed.

Finally, the doctrine of healing must remain connected with the gospel and the believer's future redemption. Isaiah 53:5 declares, "with his stripes we are healed," and 1 Peter 2:24 applies that language directly to Christ bearing our sins so that believers, "being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness." The immediate emphasis concerns the redemptive work of the suffering Saviour, not a guaranteed present exemption from every physical disease. Christ's redemption ultimately includes the believer's body, but Romans 8:23 identifies the redemption of the body as something still awaited. First Corinthians 15:42–54 explains the future resurrection and transformation into incorruption and immortality. Until that appointed fulfillment, Christians continue inhabiting mortal bodies subject to weakness and death. Calvary purchased a complete redemption, but the believer has not yet received every future benefit of that redemption in its final manifested form. The man promising that no faithful Christian should ever become sick has confused the present experience of the Church Age with the future completion of the believer's glorification.

Conclusion

The miracles recorded in Scripture are not religious legends, theatrical illustrations, or exaggerated accounts requiring modern reinterpretation. Peter genuinely healed the lame man at the Beautiful gate. The apostles performed extraordinary signs and wonders in Jerusalem. Dorcas was restored to life, and God wrought special miracles through Paul at Ephesus. These accounts demonstrate the supernatural power of God and the unique authority accompanying the foundational apostolic ministry. But they do not authorize the conclusion that every preacher who advertises miraculous healing possesses identical authority. First Corinthians 12 establishes that miraculous gifts were distributed according to the Spirit's will, while the later record of Paul's ministry demonstrates that physical deliverance was never a power operating independently of divine purpose. God's miracles are genuine because God performed them, not because a modern religious organization has discovered a profitable method of imitating their appearance. The believer must distinguish the historical signs confirming apostolic testimony from the continuing sovereignty of the Lord who supplied those signs.

The Christian should never permit fraudulent healing ministries to destroy his confidence in prayer. James 5 directs attention toward seeking the Lord in sickness, and the Scriptures

provide abundant testimony of divine mercy toward suffering people. God may heal through extraordinary intervention, providential circumstances, appropriate medical treatment, or means beyond human understanding. He may also permit an affliction to continue while supplying sufficient grace. The believer's responsibility is to trust Him without pretending to possess authority over His decisions. Neither the absence of a miracle nor the presence of suffering automatically proves spiritual failure. The Lord's answer to Paul remains a necessary correction to every religious system that measures divine favor exclusively by health and prosperity: "My grace is sufficient for thee." Faith that trusts God only when the sickness disappears has not yet learned the lesson Paul received when the thorn remained. The Saviour is worthy of trust both when He delivers His servant from affliction and when He sustains that servant through it.

The final verdict must return to the glory of Jesus Christ and the authority of His written word. The church has no authority to sell God's power, manufacture healing guarantees, exploit desperate families, or accuse faithful Christians of unbelief merely because their physical suffering continues. The gospel promises forgiveness of sins and eternal life through Jesus Christ, not a present body permanently exempt from sickness, aging, and death. The believer awaits the resurrection, when mortality will put on immortality and corruption will put on incorruption. Until then, Christians should pray for the sick, minister to the suffering, give generously without purchasing promises, and refuse every attempt to transform divine mercy into religious merchandise. The Lord Jesus Christ remains perfectly capable of performing miracles, but He has never authorized ambitious men to turn His power into their personal property. The Lord does not need a television contract, a donation envelope, a miracle-working celebrity, or a preacher's permission to heal anybody. When a man turns suffering into a sales opportunity, he has revealed something about his ministry, but it is not the apostolic gift of healing. God's power is not for sale, His grace is not merchandise, and the blood of Jesus Christ was never shed to provide dishonest religion with another product to advertise.

6 of 10 — Spiritual Gifts — The Gifts Nobody Applauds: Ministry, Helps, Giving, and Showing Mercy

Key Passages: Romans 12:6–13; 1 Corinthians 12:25–28; 1 Peter 4:10–11; Acts 6:1–7; Galatians 6:2–10

Introduction

"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us" (Romans 12:6). There is a statement that ought to put an end to much of the foolishness surrounding spiritual gifts before the first religious celebrity ever approaches the microphone. The apostle Paul did not say that every Christian must possess an extraordinary manifestation, perform a miracle, speak in tongues, or occupy some impressive position before becoming useful to God. He declared that believers possess differing gifts according to grace, and then proceeded to discuss ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, and showing mercy. Evidently, the Holy Ghost considers activities important that the modern religious entertainment industry has little interest in advertising. Some of the most valuable work in the body of Christ is accomplished by people whose names never appear on a church bulletin, whose faces never appear on a platform, and whose hands are too busy serving to applaud themselves. God has never confused publicity with usefulness, and neither should His people.

There is something profoundly revealing about a religious culture that can produce an endless supply of supposed prophets, apostles, miracle workers, and spiritual superstars while struggling to find somebody willing to visit a lonely widow, repair a broken step, prepare a meal for a sick family, or assist a struggling believer. Everybody seems interested in possessing a gift that makes him important, but considerably fewer appear interested in exercising one that makes somebody else's burden lighter. The modern church can spend an entire conference discussing extraordinary manifestations while overlooking the ordinary Christian who quietly keeps the congregation functioning. Yet 1 Corinthians 12:22 declares, "Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary." Notice that word: necessary. Not ornamental, optional, or merely convenient. Necessary. The church may admire the man holding the microphone, but somebody still has to hold the building together while he is talking. The Lord understands that distinction even when the congregation forgets it.

The subject requires a careful examination of practical spiritual service without confusing biblical gifts with natural personality, financial prosperity, religious employment, or human merit. Romans 12 identifies particular responsibilities accompanying gifts distributed according to grace. First Corinthians 12 explains the mutual dependence of the members of Christ's body. First Peter 4 identifies believers as stewards of God's manifold grace, while Acts 6 demonstrates the importance of organized practical ministry. Galatians 6 commands Christians to bear one another's burdens and do good according to biblical opportunity and responsibility. These passages address the Church Age without requiring the continuation of every extraordinary apostolic sign. They also establish that service must be governed by sound doctrine rather than sentimental enthusiasm. A generous person is not automatically spiritual, and a busy church worker is not necessarily obedient

to Scripture. Nevertheless, faithful practical service remains an indispensable expression of Christian responsibility. God did not give gifts to make men impressive. He gave gifts to make His people useful.

1. Gifts According to Grace, Not Religious Importance

Romans 12 begins with a command that establishes the proper foundation for every Christian responsibility: "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). Before Paul identifies individual gifts, he commands believers to yield themselves to God. Verse 2 requires transformation through the renewing of the mind, and verse 3 warns every believer "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly." The order is deliberate. A man who has not learned to submit himself to God is in no condition to boast about the importance of his supposed spiritual abilities. The discussion begins with surrender, renewed thinking, and humility rather than supernatural excitement. The fellow who spends six months trying to discover an impressive spiritual gift while refusing to perform an obvious biblical duty has managed to make spiritual discovery an excuse for disobedience. God does not require a special revelation to make a Christian faithful in responsibilities already plainly commanded.

Romans 12:4–5 explains, "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." Paul establishes diversity within unity, then identifies gifts differing according to grace. The believer who possesses a particular ability for service has not acquired greater personal worth than somebody whose responsibilities are less visible. The grace that supplies the gift also excludes boasting concerning its possession. First Corinthians 4:7 asks, "And what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Whatever a Christian has received from God carries responsibility, not permission for self-exaltation. Natural abilities may contribute to useful service, but spiritual gifts cannot simply be identified by personality tests or human preferences. A naturally generous unbeliever can give substantial sums without possessing the indwelling Holy Spirit. A saved believer may faithfully serve without attracting public attention. The question is not how impressive the servant appears but whether God is being honored through the service performed.

Romans 12:7 declares, "Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering." There is the kind of instruction that receives relatively little applause because it contains no promise of personal celebrity. The believer called to minister is instructed to attend to the ministry. The emphasis falls upon faithful performance, not the constant announcement of extraordinary qualifications. Ministry involves service rendered to others, and its responsibilities must be understood within the broader teaching of Scripture. Not every person engaged in ministry

holds an ordained office, and not every useful Christian activity requires an official appointment. The believer who assists a struggling family, prepares necessary materials, visits someone unable to attend church, or quietly meets a legitimate need may be serving Christ through work that attracts no public recognition. Such service does not become spiritually inferior because it is practical. A man who needs a title before he will carry a box has probably misunderstood the difference between serving the Lord and expecting the Lord's people to serve him. Biblical ministry begins with faithfulness, not professional recognition.

2. Helps and the Members the Body Cannot Afford to Lose

First Corinthians 12:21 declares, "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." Paul's illustration exposes the absurdity of spiritual superiority. The visible or prominent member has no authority to dismiss another member as unnecessary merely because their functions differ. Verse 22 specifically identifies members that appear weaker as necessary, and verses 23–24 explain that God has arranged the body with particular concern for those requiring honor. The purpose appears in verse 25: "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another." Spiritual gifts were never intended to produce a religious caste system separating supposedly important Christians from everybody else. The human body would be in serious trouble if the eyes spent their time congratulating themselves while the feet refused to walk and the hands went on strike. The spiritual body is no different.

First Corinthians 12:28 specifically identifies "helps" among the gifts and ministries God placed in the church. That word does not describe a second-class category of believers whose only purpose is to make influential people comfortable. It identifies assistance as a legitimate contribution to the functioning of Christ's body. Consider how much necessary work occurs beyond the public teaching ministry: caring for elderly believers, assisting families during illness, distributing needed supplies, maintaining places of assembly, providing transportation, helping with practical arrangements, and supporting those laboring in the word. These activities require honesty, diligence, compassion, and perseverance. They may not involve extraordinary supernatural manifestations, but they can strengthen the congregation in ways that public speaking cannot accomplish alone. A preacher may deliver a magnificent sermon on Christian charity, but the believer who takes a meal to the hungry family has put the sermon on two feet and walked it to their front door. The church needs both sound instruction and faithful application.

Nevertheless, the importance of helps must never become an excuse for exploiting willing Christians. Some religious organizations have discovered that calling labor a spiritual

privilege provides a convenient way to demand endless work without accountability, gratitude, or proper concern for the worker. Scripture does not authorize leaders to use spiritual gifts as instruments of manipulation. First Corinthians 12:25 requires mutual care among members, not unilateral service flowing toward whichever personality controls the organization. Galatians 6:6 recognizes the responsibility to communicate good things to those teaching the word, while 1 Timothy 5:18 establishes that "The labourer is worthy of his reward." Those principles prevent a congregation from treating genuine labor as disposable. Faithful Christians should willingly serve, but leaders must not confuse generosity with permission to exploit. The servant who carries the burden is not a piece of church equipment to be used until he breaks and then replaced with somebody younger. A biblical ministry values the worker as a member of Christ's body rather than merely appreciating the work he produces.

3. Giving With Simplicity: Grace Is Not a Financial Auction

Romans 12:8 declares, "he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity." The instruction places giving among the practical expressions of grace operating within the church. Financial generosity is a legitimate form of Christian service, but the biblical motive differs sharply from the commercial arrangements promoted by prosperity religion. Giving is not a method of purchasing divine favor, securing salvation, or acquiring a superior position among believers. Second Corinthians 9:7 establishes the governing principle: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." That statement leaves no room for the preacher who manufactures guilt, demands a particular payment, or promises supernatural privileges in exchange for financial contributions. A cheerful giver offers willingly unto the Lord; a frightened donor pays because somebody convinced him that heaven operates a collection agency. The two activities may involve money changing hands, but their spiritual character is entirely different.

Second Corinthians 8:12 adds, "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." Paul was addressing a collection for needy saints, and he expressly rejected the notion that believers should be evaluated according to resources they did not possess. Verses 13–14 explain that the objective was not to ease others while burdening the contributors, but to provide relief according to existing circumstances. The example of the Macedonian churches demonstrates generosity amid affliction and poverty, yet Paul presents their participation as an expression of grace, not a compulsory payment demanded under threat. The widow who contributed two mites in Mark 12:41–44 likewise reminds readers that God evaluates giving differently from people impressed by large amounts, though her historical setting under

Israel's temple system must not be confused with a standing Church Age financial regulation. God does not need a wealthy man's bank account to recognize generosity, and He does not mistake a poor believer's small contribution for a small heart.

The New Testament also distinguishes Christian giving under grace from Israel's legal obligations concerning tithes and offerings. Malachi 3:8–10 addressed Israel regarding obligations associated with the law and the storehouse, not Gentile believers enjoying salvation through the finished work of Jesus Christ. Churches may teach responsible, regular generosity, but they have no authority to transform Israel's covenant obligations into threats that saved Christians will lose divine acceptance unless they meet a financial quota. Second Corinthians 9:6 establishes the principle of sowing and reaping, but verse 8 directs attention toward having sufficiency for good works, not guaranteed personal riches. First Timothy 6:5 condemns men "supposing that gain is godliness." The preacher who presents giving as an investment guaranteed to make the donor wealthy has confused the treasury of the church with a speculative financial market. Biblical giving supports genuine ministry, relieves legitimate needs, honors the Lord, and rejects the manipulation of those who possess less than the preacher demanding their money.

4. Showing Mercy and Hospitality Without Compromising Biblical Truth

Romans 12:8 concludes its identification of particular responsibilities with the command, "he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness." Mercy is not merely a pleasant feeling toward unfortunate people. It involves responding to suffering with genuine concern and appropriate assistance. The command to exercise mercy cheerfully exposes the difference between serving because one recognizes a legitimate responsibility and serving while openly resenting the person receiving help. First Peter 4:9 adds, "Use hospitality one to another without grudging." Hospitality may require opening one's home, providing a meal, assisting a traveler, or supplying practical comfort to someone experiencing hardship. Hebrews 13:2 likewise commands believers not to forget hospitality. These instructions are not invitations to display wealth or demonstrate social superiority. They concern the treatment of people who need help. A table with ordinary food offered in genuine Christian kindness may accomplish more good than a magnificent religious banquet where everybody is concerned with finding the most important seat. Mercy must reach beyond religious conversation into the actual circumstances of human need.

The Scriptures provide remarkable examples of practical mercy. Acts 9:36 identifies Dorcas, also called Tabitha, as a woman "full of good works and almsdeeds which she did." When she died, the widows stood beside Peter, showing the coats and garments she had made while living among them. Her ministry was not built around public preaching or extraordinary claims. She used her hands and resources to care for people. James 1:27

identifies visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction as part of pure religion before God, along with keeping oneself unspotted from the world. First Timothy 5:3 commands, "Honour widows that are widows indeed," while the surrounding verses distinguish the responsibility of family members from that of the congregation. The Bible therefore combines genuine compassion with orderly responsibility. Dorcas did not need a microphone to prove that her ministry mattered. The garments she made were still preaching about her charity after she had died. The Lord notices practical faithfulness even when no audience gathers to applaud it.

Biblical mercy, however, must never become an excuse for tolerating sin, enabling deliberate irresponsibility, or refusing necessary correction. Jude 22–23 distinguishes showing compassion from rescuing others with fear while hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Galatians 6:1 commands spiritual believers to restore someone overtaken in a fault "in the spirit of meekness," but restoration involves confronting the fault rather than pretending it does not exist. First Corinthians 5 demonstrates that a congregation must not use an outward appearance of tolerance to excuse open wickedness. Mercy and truth are not enemies. A believer can assist a struggling person while refusing to support destructive behavior, dishonest schemes, or false doctrine. Christian charity is not a license to finance somebody's rebellion against God, and biblical compassion does not require leaving a man in the ditch because correcting him might hurt his pride. Genuine mercy seeks the person's good according to Scripture, not merely the temporary comfort of avoiding an uncomfortable conversation.

5. Acts Six: When Neglected Widows Became a Matter of Church Responsibility

Acts 6:1 records a serious problem within the growing Jerusalem congregation: "there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." The distinction concerned Greek-speaking Jews and Hebrew-speaking Jews within the early believing community, not a controversy between the church and unbelieving Gentiles. The congregation was increasing, but some widows were being overlooked in the distribution of assistance. Notice that the problem was practical, not merely theoretical. People who needed support were not receiving it properly. The apostles did not respond by declaring that material concerns were beneath the dignity of spiritual people. Neither did they pretend that neglect automatically demonstrated insufficient faith on the part of the widows. They recognized a genuine administrative problem requiring correction. A church may possess sound doctrine and still have a serious problem if the people responsible for distributing help cannot distinguish a needy widow from an empty chair. Spiritual responsibility includes the proper handling of practical matters.

Acts 6:2 records the apostles' explanation: "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables." The statement does not mean that serving tables was disgraceful or spiritually worthless. It means that the apostles were responsible for prayer and the ministry of the word, and those responsibilities should not be neglected because the daily distribution required better organization. The congregation was instructed to select seven men "of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" (verse 3), whom the apostles could appoint over the business. The qualifications were spiritual and moral, even though the immediate responsibility involved material assistance. Acts 6 does not explicitly give these seven the formal title of deacon, although their service provides important instruction concerning practical ministry and the later qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3. When the church needed men to oversee the distribution of food, the apostles did not merely ask who could count the baskets. They wanted men whose character could be trusted with the responsibility. Administration without integrity can corrupt even a charitable ministry.

The results demonstrate the importance of proper organization. Acts 6:4 records the apostles' determination to continue in prayer and the ministry of the word, while verse 7 states, "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly." The passage does not suggest that serving tables produced spiritual growth independently of preaching. It demonstrates that resolving practical disorder allowed necessary responsibilities to proceed without needless conflict. Both the ministry of the word and the care of neglected widows mattered. Furthermore, Stephen and Philip subsequently appear in significant public ministries, demonstrating that faithful practical service did not restrict these men to a permanent category of inferior Christian usefulness. The church needed sound preaching, honest administration, and proper concern for those requiring assistance. A congregation that protects its pulpit while neglecting its widows has not understood Acts 6, and a congregation that abandons biblical teaching to operate a social organization has missed the passage just as badly. The Lord's work requires both doctrinal faithfulness and practical responsibility.

6. Bearing One Another's Burdens Without Carrying Another Man's Rebellion

Galatians 6:2 commands, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." The instruction appears immediately after Paul's direction concerning the restoration of a believer overtaken in a fault. Verse 1 requires spiritually minded Christians to restore such a person with meekness while considering their own susceptibility to temptation. The context therefore involves more than providing money or physical assistance. Believers must help one another under spiritual, moral, and practical burdens according to the circumstances involved. A struggling Christian may need correction, encouragement,

prayer, financial assistance, companionship, or help carrying responsibilities that have become overwhelming. The body of Christ was never intended to function as a collection of isolated individuals who occasionally gather in the same building. A church that can identify every false doctrine in the county but cannot recognize when one of its own members is being crushed beneath a legitimate burden has learned to defend truth without fully obeying it. Biblical discernment and brotherly responsibility belong together.

Galatians 6:5 adds, "For every man shall bear his own burden." At first glance, somebody might imagine a contradiction with verse 2, but the surrounding passage establishes the distinction between mutual assistance and personal accountability. Christians must help one another, yet each individual remains responsible for his own conduct before God. Verse 4 requires every man to prove his own work rather than establish his worth through comparisons with others. The obligation to bear another person's burden does not transfer all personal responsibility to the helper. Second Thessalonians 3:10 declares, "that if any would not work, neither should he eat." The wording concerns a refusal to work, not inability through sickness, disability, age, or circumstances beyond one's control. Consequently, the church should assist those genuinely unable to meet legitimate needs while refusing to make deliberate idleness into a permanent entitlement. Christian generosity is supposed to relieve real burdens, not construct a comfortable hammock for a man determined to avoid his responsibilities. Compassion requires judgment as well as willingness.

Galatians 6:6–10 further connects practical responsibility with spiritual consequences. Verse 6 instructs the one taught in the word to communicate unto the teacher "in all good things." Verse 7 warns, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." The following verse contrasts sowing to the flesh with sowing to the Spirit, establishing a principle much broader than financial contributions. Verse 9 commands perseverance in well doing, while verse 10 declares, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." This is not a promise that every donation will produce a miraculous financial return. It is a command to persist in righteous conduct and practical goodness. The preacher who turns sowing and reaping into a formula for making donors wealthy has taken a passage about Christian responsibility and converted it into a financial advertisement. The actual instruction is to do good faithfully, even when immediate recognition or repayment never arrives.

7. Faithful Stewards, Hidden Labor, and the Judgment Seat of Christ

First Peter 4:10 establishes the governing principle for every form of spiritual service: "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good

stewards of the manifold grace of God." A steward manages what belongs to another and must eventually give account of his stewardship. The gifts, opportunities, abilities, resources, and responsibilities entrusted to believers are not possessions granted for independent personal glory. They are to be employed according to the Master's instructions. Verse 11 distinguishes speaking and ministering, directing the speaker to speak as the oracles of God and the servant to minister "as of the ability which God giveth." The purpose is unmistakable: "that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ." Neither spectacular manifestations nor ordinary service should become instruments of self-advertisement. The Christian who advertises every good deed has apparently mistaken stewardship for a public relations campaign. The Lord entrusted him with an assignment, not an advertising contract. Faithful service may become visible, but personal recognition must never become its governing purpose.

The final evaluation of Christian service belongs to Jesus Christ. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." First Corinthians 3:12–15 explains that the believer's work will be tested, with some work enduring and other work suffering loss. The passage concerns the evaluation of service, not the loss of salvation purchased by the finished work of Jesus Christ. A saved believer remains secure in Christ, but his labor remains accountable to Christ. First Corinthians 4:5 further declares that the Lord will bring hidden things to light and reveal the counsels of the hearts. That should provide considerable encouragement to Christians whose service receives little earthly acknowledgment. Heaven does not require a publicity department to keep accurate records. The Lord knows what was done, why it was done, and whether the servant sought His glory or his own. The final accounting will not be conducted according to religious popularity.

Ephesians 4:16 describes the body of Christ as joined together and compacted by what every joint supplies, "according to the effectual working in the measure of every part," making increase unto the edifying of itself in love. Every part contributes according to its proper measure and function. That does not mean every natural ability must receive an elaborate spiritual title or that every church activity is automatically a supernatural gift. It means the Lord has established mutual responsibility within His body, and genuine ministry requires the participation of members whose work may differ considerably. The preacher must preach faithfully, the teacher must teach accurately, the giver must give willingly, the merciful must serve cheerfully, and those who assist must perform their responsibilities with diligence. The entire body suffers when members despise their assignments or abandon their duties through jealousy. The church does not need every hand to become a mouth, every foot to demand a pulpit, or every servant to become a

celebrity. It needs every member faithfully doing what God has actually given him to do. The greatest usefulness may be accomplished far beyond the reach of public applause.

Conclusion

The spiritual gifts associated with ministry, helps, giving, mercy, and practical service deserve the same serious biblical attention given to the extraordinary manifestations recorded during the apostolic period. Romans 12 identifies differing gifts according to grace and commands their faithful exercise. First Corinthians 12 establishes that members appearing less prominent are nevertheless necessary to the body. First Peter 4 requires believers to exercise their responsibilities as stewards of God's manifold grace. Acts 6 demonstrates the importance of caring for neglected believers through honest and orderly administration, while Galatians 6 commands mutual assistance, personal accountability, and perseverance in doing good. None of these passages presents practical service as an inferior form of Christianity. The church may remember the preacher who delivered the sermon, but the Lord also remembers the believer who quietly obeyed it when nobody was watching. A ministry does not become insignificant because its accomplishments cannot be counted through attendance records, financial reports, or public recognition.

Neither should these responsibilities be abused by religious leaders who exploit faithful Christians, manipulate financial contributions, or turn acts of mercy into instruments of control. Giving under grace must remain willing and free from manufactured guilt. Helps must never become an excuse to treat church members as unpaid equipment. Mercy must operate alongside biblical truth rather than supporting deliberate irresponsibility or open rebellion. Hospitality must be practiced without grudging, and practical care must be extended according to genuine needs and legitimate opportunities. The Lord has not commanded believers to purchase His favor through financial contributions or prove their spirituality by exhausting themselves in service to demanding personalities. Salvation remains by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, entirely apart from the works performed afterward. Yet the same grace that saves also teaches believers to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Titus 2:11–12). Good works cannot purchase salvation, but a saved man ought to have better things to do with his life than congratulate himself for having received it. Grace excludes boasting without excusing disobedience.

The final measure of spiritual usefulness is not whether a Christian possesses a gift that attracts attention, but whether he faithfully serves the Lord according to the Scriptures. The elderly believer who prays faithfully, the widow who encourages younger Christians, the family that quietly provides food, the worker who helps maintain the congregation, the teacher who explains Scripture, and the brother who assists someone through serious hardship all have opportunities to honor Jesus Christ. Their service may never become a

public spectacle, but it is not concealed from the Lord who examines every work. The apostle Paul did not teach that the entire body must compete for the most visible position. He taught that the members should have the same care one for another. The gifts were given for the benefit of the body, not the advancement of religious personalities. The man carrying groceries to a struggling widow may be doing more for the cause of Christ than the fellow who needs three microphones to announce that he has a spiritual gift. The servant may be forgotten by the crowd, overlooked by the institution, and absent from every photograph, but he has not escaped the notice of Jesus Christ. Heaven does not measure faithfulness by the loudness of the applause. It measures the servant by the faithfulness of his service to the Master.

7 of 10 — Spiritual Gifts — Preaching, Teaching, and Exhortation: Speaking God's Word Without Inventing New Revelation

Key Passages: Romans 12:6–8; Ephesians 4:11–16; 1 Corinthians 12:28–31; 2 Timothy 2:2, 15; 3:16–17; 4:1–5; Titus 1:9

Introduction

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2). There is the divine assignment given to the man who stands before a congregation claiming to speak on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice what Paul did not say. He did not command Timothy to entertain the audience, manufacture emotional experiences, impress the congregation with his personality, or invent fresh revelations because the written Scriptures had supposedly become insufficient. He commanded him to preach the word. That word was already given, already authoritative, and already sufficient to establish the doctrine and conduct of God's people. Yet modern religion has developed an extraordinary fascination with everything surrounding preaching except the preaching itself. The lights must be perfect, the music must be impressive, the personality must be magnetic, and the audience must leave feeling that something remarkable has happened. Whether anybody actually learned what God said appears to be a secondary consideration. A preacher is not called to manufacture a message that makes God sound interesting. He is called to deliver the message God has already given, whether the congregation finds it interesting or not. The pulpit is not a stage for displaying human brilliance. It is a place of accountability before the God whose words are being proclaimed.

Romans 12:7–8 identifies teaching and exhortation among the gifts and responsibilities operating within the body of Christ: "he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation." Those instructions are remarkably uncomplicated. The teacher is supposed to teach, and the exhorter is supposed to exhort. Neither receives permission to replace biblical truth with entertainment, private speculation, or religious theatrics. The same passage warns believers against thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think, establishing humility before the discussion of individual gifts. A man may possess an exceptional ability to explain Scripture, communicate biblical principles, or exhort believers toward obedience, but that ability does not make him inspired, infallible, or exempt from correction. Neither does the ability to attract a large audience demonstrate that God has appointed him to a particular church office. A gifted speaker can fill an auditorium while leaving everybody spiritually empty, just as a talented cook can decorate the dining room while forgetting to put food on the table. The appearance of excellence must never replace the substance of divine truth.

The New Testament distinguishes foundational revelation from the continuing responsibilities of evangelists, pastors, teachers, and faithful believers who communicate the Scriptures. Ephesians 4 explains why Christ supplied these ministries and identifies the maturity they were intended to produce. Second Timothy commands diligent study, the faithful transmission of doctrine, and the public proclamation of God's word. Titus requires spiritual leaders to hold fast sound doctrine and correct those who contradict it. These passages establish a ministry that depends upon revealed truth rather than personal invention. The apostles were commissioned to deliver foundational doctrine; subsequent generations are responsible for preserving, preaching, explaining, defending, and applying that doctrine. The distinction is indispensable. A preacher who explains what God has written is fulfilling a biblical responsibility. A preacher who claims authority to improve upon what God has written is attempting to occupy a position God never gave him. The church needs men who can open the Scriptures, establish the context, rightly divide the truth, confront error, and feed believers with something more substantial than religious excitement.

1. Christ Gave Ministers to Build His Body, Not Personal Kingdoms

Ephesians 4:7 declares, "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." The passage begins with Christ as the source of the gift, not the individual possessing the responsibility. Verse 11 continues, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." The repeated expression "he gave" establishes divine provision. Christ supplied ministries for the benefit of His church, and the individuals entrusted with those responsibilities must

never forget who supplied them. The passage does not teach that every believer occupies every ministry or that all the offices listed possess identical duration and authority. Neither does it authorize ambitious men to manufacture titles because they desire greater public importance. The apostle, the prophet, the evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher must be examined according to their biblical functions. A man who needs an impressive title to convince everybody that he belongs in the ministry ought to consider whether he has mistaken a calling to serve for an opportunity to advertise himself. Christ gives ministers to His church; He does not give His church to ministers as personal property.

The purpose appears immediately in Ephesians 4:12: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." There are three expressions worth examining carefully. The saints are to be perfected, meaning brought toward maturity and proper spiritual development. The work of the ministry must be performed, not merely discussed in religious language. The body must be edified, strengthened through truth and faithful service. Nothing in the verse suggests that Christ supplied these ministries to create spiritual celebrities or establish permanent dependency upon influential personalities. The preacher's work should equip believers to understand Scripture, recognize error, serve faithfully, and grow in Christ. A congregation that knows every opinion of its pastor but cannot explain the gospel has been trained to follow a personality rather than established in doctrine. The purpose of a shepherd is to feed sheep, not convince the sheep that they must remain helpless so the shepherd can continue feeling important. Genuine ministry builds mature Christians rather than helpless admirers.

Ephesians 4:13–16 carries the argument toward doctrinal stability and growth. Paul declares that believers should no longer remain children, "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." The warning establishes that false teachers are not harmless entertainers offering alternative spiritual experiences. Some deliberately deceive through craftiness and manipulation. Christ supplied faithful ministers so His people would become established in truth and capable of resisting such deception. Verse 15 commands "speaking the truth in love," while verse 16 describes the entire body contributing to its growth under Christ the Head. Biblical love does not eliminate truth, and doctrinal accuracy does not excuse cruelty. Both are necessary. The church does not need a preacher who can make error sound pleasant. It needs one who can make truth understandable and refuse to apologize because somebody dislikes hearing it. When faithful teaching produces discernment, maturity, and service, the ministry is accomplishing the purpose for which Christ supplied it.

2. The Apostolic Foundation and the Difference Between Revelation and Exposition

Ephesians 2:20 declares that believers are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." That statement establishes the distinctive foundational relationship of the apostles and prophets to the New Testament church. Ephesians 3:5 explains that the mystery concerning the body of Christ was revealed unto God's holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. Their responsibility involved receiving and communicating divine revelation associated with the establishment of the church. Paul did not merely possess an unusually interesting interpretation of religious tradition. He received truth directly from the risen Jesus Christ. Galatians 1:11–12 explains that the gospel he preached was not received from man but "by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Such authority was foundational, not a permanent privilege transferred to every subsequent preacher. A foundation is laid so that a building may stand upon it, not so that another man can arrive every generation announcing that the original construction was incomplete. The church's continuing ministry must remain subject to the foundational testimony already delivered.

The distinction between revelation and exposition is therefore essential. Revelation concerns truth made known by God; exposition concerns explaining the truth God has revealed. A faithful teacher may discover the meaning of a difficult passage through comparison, study, prayer, and attention to context, but his understanding does not become another inspired chapter of Scripture. A preacher may demonstrate that Romans 4:5 teaches justification apart from works, explain the mystery of the body of Christ in Ephesians 3, or establish the believer's sealing in Ephesians 1:13 without claiming that heaven has supplied him with new doctrine. Second Peter 1:21 identifies the source of biblical prophecy: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Inspiration belongs to God's revelation, not to the personal confidence of the individual expounding it. A man who explains the Scriptures is a servant of the word. A man who places his private opinions on the same level as Scripture is attempting to become its landlord. The church must reject that confusion.

This distinction also exposes modern claims that every preacher possessing unusual eloquence, insight, or spiritual influence must be exercising the original office of prophet or apostle. First Corinthians 12:28 identifies apostles and prophets among the ministries God placed in the church, but the context of that foundational period cannot be ignored. The New Testament apostles delivered authoritative doctrine, and the prophets participated in the revelatory ministry associated with the church's establishment. The present responsibility of evangelists, pastors, teachers, and other faithful believers is to minister according to the revelation already delivered. Jude 3 commands believers to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." That does not leave room

for a procession of newly appointed authorities supplying revised doctrines whenever religious fashion changes. The preacher who cannot establish his doctrine from the written Bible has no right to rescue it with the announcement that God whispered something privately into his ear. The Holy Ghost does not need modern additions to make His earlier revelation authoritative.

3. Study to Shew Thyself Approved: The Workman Must Know His Book

Second Timothy 2:15 contains one of the clearest responsibilities ever placed upon a servant handling Scripture: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Notice that Paul commands study. He does not tell Timothy to depend upon religious excitement, improvise doctrine according to audience reaction, or assume that the Holy Ghost will supply knowledge he has been too lazy to acquire. The Christian workman must labor in the Scriptures and handle them correctly. The approval being sought is God's approval, not the congregation's applause. A preacher may possess natural eloquence, an impressive memory, and a commanding personality while remaining thoroughly confused concerning the Bible's dispensations and doctrinal distinctions. The Holy Ghost inspired the Scriptures, but He did not instruct preachers to avoid studying them as a demonstration of faith. A man who opens his Bible only when he needs a sermon illustration is not faithfully handling the word of truth. He is borrowing its authority to support his own presentation.

The command to rightly divide the word of truth requires recognizing distinctions God Himself established. Israel and the body of Christ are not interchangeable. The law given through Moses must not be confused with the believer's position under grace. The gospel of the kingdom preached during Christ's earthly ministry must be considered in its historical setting rather than indiscriminately substituted for Paul's explanation of salvation after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Acts records a transitional history involving Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and the establishment of New Testament congregations; it must not become a collection of isolated experiences forced upon every Christian. Romans 4:5 declares justification by faith apart from works, while Ephesians 2:8–9 identifies salvation by grace through faith. The future Tribulation, Second Advent, and earthly reign of Christ must likewise be distinguished from the Church Age and the believer's heavenly calling. A preacher who mixes Israel's covenants, the Church's blessings, the law's demands, and the kingdom's promises into one theological stew should not be surprised when his congregation suffers doctrinal indigestion. The Bible is never improved by ignoring its divisions.

Paul also establishes a continuing chain of doctrinal instruction in 2 Timothy 2:2: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful

men, who shall be able to teach others also." Notice the responsibility. Timothy received apostolic teaching and was commanded to entrust that same truth to faithful men capable of teaching others. This was preservation and transmission, not continual invention. The qualification was faithfulness combined with the ability to teach, not the possession of a magnetic personality or an impressive public reputation. The purpose was to multiply sound instruction through responsible servants who would communicate what had already been delivered. This principle remains essential to the training of teachers, evangelists, and pastors. The church does not need every generation to discover a new gospel. It needs every generation to faithfully preach the gospel God already delivered. A teacher who changes the doctrine to make himself appear original has betrayed the very responsibility he was entrusted to preserve.

4. Preach the Word: A Divine Charge Before a Coming Judge

Second Timothy 4:1 begins with a solemn charge: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom." Paul places Timothy's responsibility under the authority of the coming Judge. The preacher is not ultimately accountable to public opinion, religious trends, denominational popularity, or the preferences of the wealthiest contributors. He is accountable to Jesus Christ. Verse 2 follows with the command to preach the word and be ready "in season, out of season." There are times when preaching sound doctrine will be welcomed and times when it will be resisted. Neither circumstance changes the assignment. A preacher who changes his message whenever the congregation becomes uncomfortable has confused his commission with a customer satisfaction survey. The word of God must be proclaimed when people appreciate it and when they would rather hear something else. The responsibility is obedience, not applause.

Paul further commands Timothy to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." These are distinct elements of faithful preaching. Reproof exposes error through the standard of Scripture. Rebuke confronts conduct and teaching that violate God's revealed will. Exhortation urges believers toward faithful obedience while providing necessary encouragement. Longsuffering governs the manner in which these responsibilities are exercised, and doctrine supplies their substance. Preaching must not become a series of angry personal attacks, but neither may it degenerate into pleasant observations designed to avoid every controversial truth. Second Timothy 2:24–25 instructs the servant of the Lord to be gentle, apt to teach, patient, and to correct opponents with meekness. Those commands do not eliminate rebuke; they prevent correction from becoming an exhibition of uncontrolled pride. A preacher can raise his voice without raising his authority, and he can speak calmly without compromising the truth. The authority

belongs to the Scriptures, not to the volume of the man delivering them. Faithful preaching requires conviction governed by biblical character.

The warning in 2 Timothy 4:3–4 explains why this responsibility becomes especially difficult: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." Paul does not merely predict a shortage of competent teachers. He predicts congregations developing an appetite for teachers willing to satisfy their preferences. Verse 4 declares that they will turn away their ears from the truth and be turned unto fables. There is the danger of religious popularity detached from biblical faithfulness. A preacher can gather a crowd by promising prosperity, removing the offense of the cross, avoiding the subject of sin, or offering reassurance without repentance and doctrine. The audience may thoroughly enjoy the performance while starving for truth. An itching ear does not need a shepherd; it wants somebody willing to scratch it. And there will always be a religious professional willing to perform that service for the right price. Paul's remedy remains unchanged: preach the word.

5. Evangelists and Pastors: The Gospel Must Be Preached and the Sheep Must Be Fed

Ephesians 4:11 identifies evangelists among the ministers supplied by the ascended Christ, while 2 Timothy 4:5 commands Timothy, "do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." The command demonstrates that proclaiming the gospel is not a responsibility limited to somebody possessing an impressive title. Timothy was already entrusted with substantial responsibilities concerning doctrine and church order, yet he was still required to do the work of an evangelist. Evangelism concerns the proclamation of the good news through which sinners are directed to Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 15:1–4 identifies the gospel Paul preached, centered upon Christ's death for our sins, burial, and resurrection the third day according to the Scriptures. Romans 1:16 declares that the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." The evangelist's responsibility is to proclaim the Saviour, not make the sinner admire the salesman. A crowded meeting is not necessarily successful evangelism if the audience leaves without understanding what Christ accomplished at Calvary.

The gospel must also be kept free from religious additions that corrupt salvation by grace. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Romans 4:5 identifies the man who believes on Him that justifies the ungodly, apart from works, as the recipient of imputed righteousness. A preacher who replaces faith in Christ with religious ceremonies, personal reform, church membership, financial contributions, or a lifelong performance contract has not improved the gospel. He has confused the finished work of

the Saviour with the unfinished efforts of the sinner. The Church Age evangelist must proclaim the salvation revealed through the apostle Paul's ministry without mixing its terms with passages addressed to Israel under different dispensational circumstances. The gospel is not a religious payment plan in which Jesus makes the down payment and the sinner spends the rest of his life trying to keep the account current. Christ finished the work, and salvation is received through faith in Him.

Pastors and teachers possess the corresponding responsibility of feeding believers with sound doctrine. Acts 20:28 commands the Ephesian elders to feed the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. First Peter 5:2 instructs elders to feed the flock willingly rather than through financial greed or coercion. Timothy is told in 1 Timothy 4:13 to give attendance to reading, exhortation, and doctrine. These responsibilities require more than delivering a fresh collection of motivational stories every Sunday. The pastor must explain Scripture, guard against doctrinal error, provide biblical counsel, and demonstrate faithful conduct. Neither can he establish his own opinions as unquestionable commands. The Scriptures remain the final authority governing his ministry. A shepherd who feeds his sheep nothing but excitement should not complain when the flock cannot recognize sound doctrine from poisonous weeds. The measure of pastoral faithfulness is not whether the congregation admires its leader, but whether the people are being established in the word of God.

6. Exhortation That Comforts, Confronts, and Calls Believers to Obedience

Romans 12:8 commands, "he that exhorteth, on exhortation." Exhortation is not merely the ability to deliver an encouraging speech or leave an audience feeling better about itself. Biblical exhortation urges people to respond appropriately to God's revealed truth. It can strengthen the discouraged, warn the careless, correct the disobedient, and encourage faithful perseverance. First Thessalonians 5:14 declares, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men." Notice the distinctions. The unruly require warning, the discouraged require comfort, and the weak require support. The same approach is not appropriate for every spiritual condition. A preacher who rebukes everybody indiscriminately is not demonstrating unusual boldness, and a preacher who comforts everybody without distinction is not demonstrating unusual love. Both have neglected the judgment required to apply Scripture faithfully. Genuine exhortation recognizes what the Bible says and directs the hearer toward the response God requires.

Hebrews 10:24–25 commands believers to consider one another "to provoke unto love and to good works," refusing to forsake assembling together and instead exhorting one another as the approaching day is seen. Exhortation therefore extends beyond the ordained pastor

or public teacher. Christians possess responsibilities to encourage faithful conduct among the brethren through the word of God. Titus 2 provides practical examples involving aged men, aged women, younger women, and young men, demonstrating how sound doctrine governs conduct in different circumstances. The older women are instructed to teach good things, and younger believers are directed toward sobriety, faithfulness, and appropriate responsibilities. This instruction does not eliminate the order established for public teaching within the congregation, but it demonstrates that useful biblical instruction occurs throughout ordinary Christian relationships. A faithful believer who opens the Scriptures with a struggling brother may accomplish more lasting good than a famous speaker who leaves thousands excited but unable to explain one biblical doctrine. The measure is truth applied faithfully, not audience size.

Exhortation must also retain its connection with sound doctrine. Second Timothy 4:2 joins exhortation with longsuffering and doctrine, preventing encouragement from becoming detached from God's revealed standards. A Christian struggling under legitimate affliction should hear the promises and comforts Scripture actually supplies, not accusations invented to make his circumstances appear spiritually defective. A believer openly practicing sin must receive biblical correction rather than reassurance that obedience is unnecessary. Galatians 6:1 instructs spiritual believers to restore the overtaken brother in meekness, while Romans 15:4 identifies the Scriptures as the source through which believers possess patience, comfort, and hope. The Bible supplies both the warning and the encouragement. The man who calls every rebuke unloving has confused love with permission, while the man who cannot encourage a suffering saint has confused holiness with hardness. Biblical exhortation neither compromises truth nor withholds the consolation God has provided. It brings the appropriate word to the appropriate need.

7. Holding Fast the Faithful Word Against Counterfeit Pulpits

Titus 1:9 establishes an indispensable qualification for spiritual leadership: "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." Notice what qualifies the man for doctrinal correction. He must hold fast the faithful word. His authority does not arise from religious fame, formal credentials, denominational approval, or personal confidence. He must know and maintain the truth he has been taught. The surrounding passage identifies moral and spiritual qualifications for a bishop, including blameless conduct, sobriety, hospitality, and self-control. These requirements expose the foolishness of treating natural speaking ability as sufficient evidence of a pastoral calling. A talented entertainer may hold an audience without possessing the character or doctrinal understanding required of a pastor. A man who can captivate ten thousand people but cannot handle ten verses in their proper

context has demonstrated a gift for attracting attention, not necessarily a gift for teaching Scripture. Biblical qualifications must govern the office.

Paul explains why doctrinal firmness is necessary. Titus 1:10–11 warns concerning "unruly and vain talkers and deceivers" who subvert entire households by teaching things they ought not "for filthy lucre's sake." The warning is remarkably applicable wherever religious teachers manipulate believers through false doctrine for financial advantage. Acts 20:29–30 records Paul's warning that grievous wolves would enter among the Ephesian believers and that men would arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after themselves. The danger would not come exclusively from recognizable enemies standing outside the church. Some would arise from within its own leadership. First Timothy 4:16 therefore commands Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them." A faithful teacher must guard his own conduct and the doctrine entrusted to him. A wolf wearing a preacher's suit is still a wolf, and putting him behind a pulpit does not transform his appetite into pastoral concern. The church must examine doctrine and conduct rather than surrendering discernment to religious appearances.

The ultimate standard remains the inspired Scripture. Second Timothy 3:16–17 declares, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." The passage identifies both the divine origin and practical sufficiency of Scripture. Its profitability includes exactly the responsibilities modern preaching frequently avoids: doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction. A preacher who refuses to teach doctrine has abandoned the very substance through which Scripture equips God's servants. A preacher who substitutes private revelation for biblical exposition has placed his own claims where God's inspired words belong. And a preacher who transforms the pulpit into an entertainment platform has exchanged spiritual nourishment for religious amusement. The congregation does not need a performer who can make a dull sermon exciting while leaving the Bible closed. It needs a workman who can open the Bible and make its truth unmistakable. The Holy Ghost has already supplied the authority. The preacher's responsibility is to believe it, study it, proclaim it, and obey it.

Conclusion

The ministries of preaching, teaching, exhortation, evangelism, and pastoral instruction remain essential to the proper functioning of the body of Christ. They must be distinguished from the foundational revelatory ministries of apostles and prophets without treating faithful biblical teaching as an inferior form of spiritual service. Ephesians 4 establishes that Christ supplied ministers for the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of His body. Romans 12 identifies teaching and exhortation

among the responsibilities associated with grace. Second Timothy commands diligent study, the faithful transmission of apostolic doctrine, and the preaching of God's word. Titus requires spiritual leaders to hold fast sound doctrine and correct those who oppose it. These passages do not present the ministry as an opportunity for religious self-promotion. The preacher is a servant entrusted with a message, not an inventor authorized to improve upon the message. The teacher is responsible for communicating truth, not manufacturing originality. And the exhorter is called to direct believers toward obedience, not entertain them with flattering descriptions of themselves. The authority remains God's written word.

The church must reject the assumption that eloquence proves inspiration, popularity establishes divine approval, or emotional excitement demonstrates spiritual maturity. A congregation can possess impressive facilities, sophisticated presentations, popular personalities, and substantial financial resources while remaining dangerously ignorant of the Scriptures. Conversely, a modest congregation faithfully instructed in the King James Bible may possess doctrinal strength that an elaborate religious institution cannot reproduce through entertainment. The believer needs more than religious enthusiasm. He needs to understand the gospel of grace, his position in Christ, the distinction between Israel and the Church, the proper divisions of Scripture, the responsibilities of Christian conduct, and the future hope secured through Jesus Christ. These truths require faithful teachers who study the Bible and refuse to substitute personal theories for revelation. A preacher who leaves his congregation dependent upon his personality has built a following. A preacher who establishes his congregation in Scripture has strengthened the body of Christ. The difference will become increasingly apparent when false doctrine arrives demanding entrance.

The final charge remains the one Paul delivered to Timothy: "Preach the word." The preacher must proclaim it when welcomed and when rejected. The teacher must explain it accurately rather than display his own intelligence. The evangelist must announce the finished work of Jesus Christ rather than burden sinners with religious conditions God never attached to salvation. The pastor must feed the flock, defend sound doctrine, and refuse to become a spiritual dictator. The exhorter must encourage, warn, and correct according to Scripture, maintaining both conviction and charity. Every believer who communicates biblical truth must remember that the word belongs to God and that the servant will answer for how it was handled. The apostolic revelation does not require improvement, and the gospel does not require theatrical assistance to become powerful. A preacher is not called to manufacture a message that makes God sound interesting; he is called to deliver the message God has already given. If the congregation wants entertainment, the world can supply more than enough of it. But when God's people assemble beneath the authority of His word, they deserve something infinitely more

valuable than another performance. They deserve the Scriptures opened, the truth explained, false doctrine exposed, sinners directed to Christ, and believers strengthened to stand. The man who cannot provide that has no business pretending that his personality is a suitable replacement for the word of God.

8 of 10 — Spiritual Gifts — Governments, Pastors, and Leadership: Gifts for Serving, Not Thrones for Ruling

Key Passages: Romans 12:8; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11–16; 1 Timothy 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Peter 5:1–4; Acts 20:28–32

Introduction

"He that ruleth, with diligence" (Romans 12:8). There is the apostle Paul's instruction concerning spiritual leadership, and it contains considerably more wisdom than the elaborate religious empires men have constructed around themselves. Notice that Paul did not say the man who rules should demand worship, establish unquestionable personal authority, frighten the congregation into submission, or treat the local church as though Jesus Christ had transferred ownership to the fellow standing behind the pulpit. He said the responsibility must be exercised with diligence. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul identifies "governments" among the provisions God placed in the church, demonstrating that proper administration, leadership, and order belong within the functioning of Christ's body. But somewhere between biblical oversight and modern religious celebrity, certain men have developed the remarkable conviction that being called to serve God's people entitles them to rule those people as personal property. A pastor is supposed to feed the sheep, not train them to worship the shepherd. The distinction is not complicated, although it becomes remarkably inconvenient when somebody has built an entire ministry around ignoring it.

The New Testament does not promote religious anarchy. God established order within the local church, provided qualifications for bishops and deacons, commanded elders to oversee the flock, and instructed believers concerning their responsibilities toward faithful spiritual leaders. A congregation without sound teaching, responsible oversight, or proper discipline becomes vulnerable to confusion, division, and false doctrine. Yet biblical authority is never unlimited personal authority. The Lord Jesus Christ remains the Head of the church, and His written word remains the final standard by which every pastor, elder, teacher, and religious organization must be examined. A man's appointment to an office does not make his opinions inspired, his decisions infallible, or his conduct immune from correction. The man who mistakes spiritual oversight for personal ownership has already

forgotten whose blood purchased the congregation. Christ did not shed His blood to provide ambitious preachers with private kingdoms. He purchased a people who belong to Him, and those entrusted with leadership will answer to Him for how they treated that people.

The biblical distinctions must be established carefully. Spiritual gifts are not identical to recognized church offices, and possessing natural leadership ability does not automatically qualify a man for pastoral ministry. Romans 12 identifies ruling as a responsibility exercised according to grace, while 1 Corinthians 12 includes governments among the diverse functions operating within the body. Ephesians 4 explains Christ's provision of ministers for spiritual maturity. First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 establish qualifications that cannot be replaced by popularity, financial success, or religious ambition. Acts 20 records Paul's solemn warning to the Ephesian elders concerning wolves arising both outside and within the congregation, while 1 Peter 5 commands elders to serve without becoming lords over God's heritage. These passages establish a complete rejection of two equally dangerous extremes: authoritarian leadership that substitutes a man for Christ, and rebellious independence that rejects every legitimate form of biblical oversight. A church does not become more spiritual by replacing a pastor with a dictator, and it does not become more biblical by replacing order with confusion. The answer is leadership governed by Scripture.

1. Governments and Ruling: God's Order Without Man's Dictatorship

First Corinthians 12:28 declares, "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." The inclusion of governments deserves careful attention because it demonstrates that order and administration were not merely human inventions added to Christianity after the apostles disappeared. God provided for the proper functioning of His people. Yet the word appears among several gifts and ministries, not as an independent authorization for unrestricted religious control. The passage does not appoint every capable administrator as a bishop, establish a new class of spiritual rulers, or grant a congregation's leadership unlimited authority over the private affairs of its members. It identifies a genuine function within the body. A man may possess considerable ability to organize people and still lack the biblical qualifications to pastor them. Efficiency is valuable, but a well-organized error remains error, and an expertly administered dictatorship does not become a New Testament church merely because its paperwork is immaculate.

Romans 12:6–8 supplies the corresponding emphasis upon grace and responsibility. Paul writes, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us," and proceeds

to identify several functions, including "he that ruleth, with diligence." The immediate context begins with the command not to think more highly of oneself than one ought to think. That ordering destroys the notion that a gift of leadership automatically establishes superior personal importance. Diligence requires careful attention, consistency, responsibility, and faithful labor. It does not mean making arbitrary demands or confusing personal preference with divine commandment. A leader may need to organize ministries, administer resources, resolve practical problems, or coordinate the service of others, but every decision remains accountable to biblical principles. A church leader who can organize fifty volunteers but cannot govern his own temper has mastered administration while neglecting something considerably more important. God's standard concerns both the task and the character of the person performing it.

The diversity of gifts also prevents spiritual leadership from absorbing every responsibility within the congregation. First Corinthians 12 compares believers to members of a body whose functions differ while their importance remains connected to the whole. Verse 21 declares that the eye cannot say unto the hand, "I have no need of thee." The pastor needs faithful teachers, servants, helpers, givers, and members who exercise legitimate responsibilities without demanding constant personal direction. Government within the church is supposed to encourage proper coordination, not reduce the entire congregation to the pastor's personal workforce. Acts 6 demonstrates that the apostles recognized the importance of delegating practical responsibilities to qualified men rather than attempting to control every detail themselves. A leader who must personally approve every movement of every member has not demonstrated exceptional oversight. He has constructed a bottleneck and placed his own name on it. God distributes responsibilities throughout the body because no human leader was appointed to replace the body's Head.

2. Bishops, Elders, and Pastors: Offices Defined by Scripture

First Timothy 3:1 declares, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." Notice that Paul calls it work before he ever discusses the qualifications. The office is not presented as a personal honor to be enjoyed while everybody else performs the labor. Titus 1:5 instructs Titus to ordain elders in every city, and verse 7 proceeds to speak of the bishop as "the steward of God." Acts 20:17 records Paul calling for the elders of the church at Ephesus, while verse 28 commands those same men to take heed to the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers. First Peter 5 similarly addresses elders and commands them to feed the flock. These passages demonstrate the close relationship between elders, bishops, and pastoral oversight. A church office is not a royal title requiring its possessor to maintain a separate court of

admirers. It is a position of stewardship carrying responsibilities before God. The scriptural emphasis falls upon the labor of oversight rather than the magnificence of the title.

The pastoral responsibility is particularly clear in Acts 20:28: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Paul begins by commanding the elders to take heed to themselves. A leader's first responsibility includes the examination of his own doctrine, conduct, and faithfulness. Then comes the responsibility to oversee and feed the flock. Notice also the statement concerning ownership: the church was purchased with God's own blood. The congregation does not belong to the pastor, the founding family, the denominational headquarters, or the largest financial contributor. A preacher may possess the keys to the church building, but he does not possess the title deed to the souls inside it. Christ purchased the church through His redemptive work, and every leader serves as an accountable steward beneath His authority.

The office must also be distinguished from the spiritual gifts associated with teaching, ruling, and administration. A man may demonstrate ability to explain Scripture without meeting every qualification for pastoral office. Another may possess considerable organizational ability while lacking the necessary doctrinal knowledge or personal character. First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 provide objective qualifications that cannot be bypassed by appealing to a personal calling. The qualifications address recognized offices, while the gifts discussed in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 concern functions distributed within the body. Neither subject eliminates the other. First Corinthians 12:28 also mentions apostles and prophets, whose foundational ministries must not be confused with the ordinary continuing oversight of local churches. The man who appoints himself an apostle because the title sounds more impressive than pastor has not necessarily received a greater calling. He may simply have developed a greater appetite for recognition. Biblical authority begins with biblical qualifications, not the grandeur of a religious designation.

3. The Qualifications God Established Before Anybody Took the Pulpit

First Timothy 3:2 begins the qualifications for a bishop: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach." Paul continues by requiring freedom from drunkenness, violence, greed, and contentiousness. The man must be patient, must rule his own house well, and must possess a good report from those outside the congregation. These requirements expose the absurdity of treating preaching talent as sufficient proof of pastoral qualification. A man may possess a powerful voice, excellent memory, substantial education, and the ability to attract thousands while failing the ordinary character requirements that Scripture

establishes. God did not say that a bishop must possess an expensive wardrobe, a commanding stage presence, and enough charisma to fill the parking lot. He said the man must possess the character necessary to oversee His people. The qualifications are not decorative suggestions added to an otherwise unrestricted office.

The requirement concerning a man's household deserves particular consideration. First Timothy 3:4–5 describes one "that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity," and then asks, "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" Notice the final expression: take care. Biblical leadership is not simply the exercise of authority; it includes responsibility for the well-being of those entrusted to one's oversight. The passage establishes a relationship between tested faithfulness in the home and the ability to care for the congregation. It also refuses to separate public ministry from private conduct. A preacher who terrorizes his household while presenting himself as the gentlest shepherd in the county has not demonstrated two different spiritual gifts. He has demonstrated two different faces. Scripture examines the man beyond the pulpit, because the office cannot be separated from the person occupying it.

Titus 1:5–9 reinforces the same requirements and adds particularly important instructions concerning doctrine. The bishop must not be selfwilled or soon angry. He must love good men, be just, holy, temperate, and hold fast the faithful word as he has been taught. First Timothy 3:6 also warns against appointing a novice, "lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." The danger of pride is not incidental. A spiritually immature man suddenly surrounded by admirers may begin confusing public approval with divine authority. Paul therefore requires maturity rather than mere enthusiasm. The qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8–13 likewise emphasize gravity, honesty, doctrinal integrity, and tested faithfulness. If God requires character even from men entrusted with practical church service, the pastor certainly cannot claim exemption because he delivers an impressive sermon. A congregation that ignores biblical qualifications while celebrating human talent has chosen the appearance of ministry over the substance God requires.

4. Feeding the Flock: Leadership Begins With the Word of God

Ephesians 4:11–12 explains why Christ gave evangelists, pastors, and teachers: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." The purpose is not permanent dependence upon a religious personality. It is the development of believers who understand sound doctrine, exercise faithful service, and grow toward spiritual maturity. Verse 14 warns against remaining children carried about by every wind of doctrine through human deception. This places biblical teaching at the

center of pastoral responsibility. A pastor who cannot explain the Scriptures has neglected the very nourishment his flock requires. A pastor who substitutes personal revelations, motivational speeches, and entertaining stories for sound doctrine has replaced spiritual food with religious decoration. A shepherd may polish the feeding trough until it shines like silver, but if he never puts anything nourishing inside it, the sheep will still starve. The ministry must be evaluated by the truth communicated, not the attractiveness of its presentation.

Titus 1:9 requires the bishop to hold fast the faithful word, "that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." Here leadership involves both positive instruction and the correction of opposition to truth. Second Timothy 2:15 commands diligent study and rightly dividing the word of truth, while 2 Timothy 4:2 requires preaching, reproof, rebuke, and exhortation with longsuffering and doctrine. These commands leave no room for a pastor who avoids difficult passages merely because they may disturb influential members. Salvation by grace through faith must be preached without adding works to the finished work of Christ. Israel's national promises must not be confused with the body of Christ, nor should the law and grace be mixed into doctrinal confusion. A pastor who cannot rightly divide the Bible has little business demanding unquestioning loyalty from people who are depending upon him to teach it. Spiritual oversight requires fidelity to revelation, not mastery of religious persuasion.

The pastor's work also includes guarding the congregation against false teaching. Acts 20:29 records Paul's warning: "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." Verse 30 adds that men would arise from among the elders' own company, "speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." The danger was not limited to outsiders. It could arise from within the leadership itself. Paul therefore commended the brethren to God and to the word of His grace, which was able to build them up. He did not commend them to an infallible successor whose every opinion must be obeyed. The wolf is dangerous whether he enters through the church door or walks out of the pastor's office. A collar, a title, and a collection of religious credentials do not change his appetite. Faithful leadership protects believers by establishing them in Scripture, where false doctrine can be recognized and resisted.

5. Neither as Lords: When Pastoral Oversight Becomes Religious Tyranny

First Peter 5:1–3 supplies one of the clearest corrections to authoritarian pastoral leadership in the entire New Testament. Peter addresses the elders and commands them to feed the flock of God, taking oversight willingly rather than by constraint, and not for filthy lucre. Then comes the decisive restriction: "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." Notice that Peter does not deny legitimate

oversight. He commands it. What he forbids is the transformation of oversight into personal lordship. The congregation belongs to God, and the elder is responsible for leading through biblical instruction and faithful example. A pastor who must continually remind everybody that he is in charge may be revealing that his greatest concern is maintaining control rather than faithfully caring for souls. Scripture gives him authority to perform his responsibilities, but it does not appoint him as an unquestionable ruler over every detail of another Christian's life.

The problem becomes especially dangerous when a leader treats disagreement with himself as rebellion against God. Some preachers have developed the convenient habit of placing their personal decisions on the same level as divine commandments. Question a financial demand, challenge an unsupported doctrine, or ask for biblical justification, and suddenly the objector is accused of attacking God's anointed servant. First Chronicles 16:22 declares, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm," but that historical statement concerning God's dealings with His people does not transform a modern pastor into an infallible monarch. It certainly does not cancel the New Testament's instructions concerning the qualifications and correction of elders. Acts 17:11 commends the Bereans because they searched the Scriptures daily to determine whether the things they heard were true. When examining the apostle Paul's preaching was considered noble, examining the modern pastor's preaching cannot reasonably be treated as treason. Truth does not become weaker when it is tested against Scripture.

The Lord Jesus Christ established the proper character of leadership when He contrasted worldly rulers with those who would serve Him. Mark 10:42–45 records His warning against Gentile rulers who exercise lordship and authority over others. Christ then declared, "But so shall it not be among you," and instructed His disciples that greatness among them involved becoming servants. The Son of man Himself came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." The immediate setting concerns the disciples during Christ's earthly ministry, but the principle of leadership through service agrees perfectly with the later instructions given to church elders. The Lord who possessed all authority did not need to manufacture importance by humiliating those beneath Him. Yet some men possessing a fraction of responsibility demand treatment that Jesus Christ never demanded for Himself. Spiritual authority should reflect the character of the Master, not imitate the arrogance of earthly dictators.

6. Submission, Accountability, and the Discipline Leaders Cannot Escape

Hebrews 13:17 declares, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account." This passage establishes a genuine responsibility toward spiritual leadership. The Christian should not develop a

rebellious attitude toward every pastor who confronts sin, corrects false teaching, or establishes legitimate congregational order. The verse also explains why faithful leaders deserve cooperation: they watch for souls and must give account. That responsibility is substantial. Yet obedience to human authority never cancels obedience to God. Acts 5:29 records Peter and the other apostles declaring, "We ought to obey God rather than men." The original confrontation involved authorities attempting to silence the apostles' testimony concerning Christ, but the governing principle remains unmistakable. A pastor's authority is legitimate only within the boundaries established by Scripture. The moment he demands what God forbids or forbids what God commands, his office does not transform the contradiction into righteousness. Submission is biblical; surrendering the final authority of Scripture to a man is not.

The New Testament also establishes procedures for correcting elders who sin. First Timothy 5:19 declares, "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses." The instruction protects elders from careless accusations, malicious rumors, and attempts to destroy reputations through unsupported allegations. Spiritual leadership is too serious to be undermined by every dissatisfied person who dislikes a sermon or resents necessary correction. Nevertheless, the following verse declares, "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." The passage does not make elders immune from discipline. It requires proper evidence and accountability. Paul continues by charging Timothy to observe these matters without preferring one person above another. The Bible does not authorize a congregation to destroy a pastor through gossip, but neither does it authorize a pastor to escape correction by hiding behind his office. Biblical justice protects against both reckless accusation and privileged wickedness.

Church discipline must likewise proceed according to Scripture rather than personal vengeance. First Corinthians 5 addresses serious open immorality within the congregation and commands appropriate action, demonstrating that Christian liberty is not permission to celebrate sin. Second Corinthians 2:6–8 also emphasizes the importance of forgiveness and comfort where proper correction has accomplished its purpose. The objective of biblical discipline is righteousness and restoration, not the satisfaction of a leader's injured pride. A pastor has no authority to weaponize congregational discipline against someone merely because that person asks a legitimate question or refuses an unbiblical demand. Conversely, believers should not accuse every faithful correction of being spiritual abuse simply because the correction is uncomfortable. A church that refuses to confront wickedness has abandoned discipline, while a church that uses discipline to punish honest questions has abandoned justice. Neither extreme reflects the order established by the Holy Ghost.

7. The Chief Shepherd, the Servant's Example, and the Final Accounting

First Peter 5:4 identifies the ultimate authority over every pastor and elder: "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." Jesus Christ is the chief Shepherd. Every faithful pastor serves beneath Him and will answer to Him. The promised crown concerns the Lord's recognition of faithful service, not the purchase of salvation or the establishment of eternal security through pastoral performance. Salvation remains by grace through faith in Christ, while the believer's works will be evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares that believers must appear before that judgment seat to receive according to the things done in the body. A pastor may intimidate his congregation into silence, but he will discover that the judgment seat of Christ is not impressed by his title, attendance figures, or ability to win arguments. The Chief Shepherd knows whether His sheep were faithfully fed or merely used to advance the reputation of an ambitious servant.

The practical character of faithful leadership also appears in Paul's conduct among the Ephesian elders. Acts 20:33–35 records his declaration that he coveted no man's silver, gold, or apparel, and that his own hands had ministered to his necessities. He reminded the elders that they ought to support the weak and remember the Lord's words concerning the blessedness of giving. This example does not abolish the biblical principle that faithful ministers may receive financial support. First Timothy 5:17–18 recognizes proper honor and recompense for elders who labor in the word and doctrine. The distinction concerns motive and conduct. Legitimate support sustains faithful ministry; greed exploits the congregation for personal enrichment. A preacher who considers every contribution insufficient until it supports his preferred standard of luxury has confused caring for the flock with shearing it. Biblical leadership handles resources with integrity, recognizing that the ministry belongs to Christ and that the contributors themselves deserve honest stewardship.

The highest example remains Jesus Christ Himself. John 13 records the Lord washing His disciples' feet, performing a servant's task while possessing unquestionable divine authority. Verse 13 declares, "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am." Christ did not deny His rightful position. He demonstrated that authority and humble service were not opposites. His example exposed the folly of leaders who consider ordinary service beneath their dignity. The pastor who faithfully teaches Scripture, cares for suffering members, corrects error without cruelty, handles money honestly, and leads through personal example reflects the character required by the New Testament. The Lord of glory could stoop to wash feet, but some modern religious dignitaries apparently consider themselves too important to help stack chairs after a service. The difference is

not a matter of educational credentials or ministry size. It is a matter of whether the servant has learned anything about the character of his Master.

Conclusion

Spiritual leadership is a legitimate provision of God, but its authority remains defined and restricted by the Scriptures. Romans 12 commands diligence in ruling, while 1 Corinthians 12 identifies governments among the functions established within the body of Christ. Ephesians 4 explains that ministers are supplied for the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edification of the body. First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 establish qualifications that cannot be replaced by charisma, religious ambition, or public popularity. Acts 20 requires elders to oversee and feed the flock while warning that dangerous men may arise from within the leadership itself. First Peter 5 forbids elders from becoming lords over God's heritage and directs their attention toward the appearing of the chief Shepherd. God established spiritual leadership to provide order, instruction, protection, and faithful service—not to manufacture a privileged class of men whose opinions become commandments and whose conduct escapes examination. Every office remains subordinate to Jesus Christ, and every exercise of authority must remain accountable to His word.

The church must therefore reject both authoritarian religion and rebellious independence. Faithful pastors deserve cooperation, proper respect, prayer, and legitimate support. Congregations need men who will preach sound doctrine, correct false teaching, care for suffering believers, administer responsibilities honestly, and refuse to surrender biblical standards when opposition arises. But those same pastors must be willing to submit their teaching and conduct to Scripture, accept legitimate accountability, and remember that the people under their oversight were purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ. A leader's office does not sanctify his personal opinions, and a congregation's respect does not confer infallibility. A pastor who demands obedience while refusing accountability has forgotten that the same Bible commanding believers to respect faithful leadership also commands leaders to meet biblical qualifications. Genuine authority does not fear the Scriptures because the Scriptures are the source and measure of that authority. The man who refuses their examination has already placed himself above the standard he claims to defend.

The final measure of spiritual leadership is not the size of the congregation, the magnificence of the building, the amount of money collected, or the number of people willing to repeat the pastor's opinions. It is faithfulness to Jesus Christ and His revealed word. The true shepherd directs believers toward the Saviour rather than constructing a permanent dependency upon himself. He feeds rather than exploits, protects rather than

intimidates, teaches rather than invents revelation, and corrects according to Scripture rather than personal irritation. He recognizes that the church belongs to Christ, that its members are fellow servants rather than personal subjects, and that his labor will eventually be examined by the Chief Shepherd. A pastor is supposed to feed the sheep, not train them to worship the shepherd. He is supposed to guard the flock, not build himself a throne in the sheepfold. He is supposed to teach believers to recognize the voice of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures, not convince them that his own voice is an acceptable substitute. When the ministry ends, the greatest testimony to faithful leadership will not be that everybody remembers the preacher. It will be that the people know their Bible, understand their Saviour, recognize sound doctrine, and remain standing when the preacher is gone.

9 of 10 — Spiritual Gifts — Strange Fire, False Spirits, and the Religious Counterfeit Factory

Key Passages: Matthew 7:21–23; 2 Corinthians 11:13–15; 1 John 4:1–6; 1 Corinthians 14:26–40; 2 Thessalonians 2:9–12; Acts 8:9–24; 1 John 5:13

Introduction

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). There is a commandment that ought to be posted over the entrance of every church building where somebody claims to possess extraordinary spiritual power. John did not say to believe every manifestation, welcome every supernatural experience, trust every religious personality, or assume that anything producing excitement must have originated with the Holy Ghost. He commanded believers to try the spirits. That means examination, discernment, and judgment according to the revelation God has already given. Yet modern religion has developed an astonishing ability to accept practically anything as spiritual so long as somebody performs it beneath colored lights, accompanies it with emotional music, and announces that God is moving. The devil does not need to close every church to accomplish his purpose. Sometimes all he needs is to convince the congregation that examining the Bible would interfere with the excitement. When experience becomes the authority, deception has already found an open door.

The New Testament does not teach that every extraordinary occurrence is fraudulent, every emotional response is counterfeit, or every person claiming a spiritual experience is deliberately dishonest. God performed genuine miracles through His apostles, the Holy Ghost produced genuine conviction, and the early churches witnessed supernatural

manifestations that fulfilled divine purposes. The problem begins when people abandon the biblical standards governing those manifestations and begin treating personal experience as a substitute for revealed truth. Matthew 7 records men boasting of prophecy, casting out devils, and wonderful works while remaining unknown to Jesus Christ. Second Corinthians 11 exposes false apostles who disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. Second Thessalonians 2 warns of supernatural deception accompanying the future revelation of the man of sin. These are not insignificant warnings tucked away in obscure passages. God repeatedly warns His people about religious counterfeits because the most dangerous deception is not always found outside religion. Sometimes it is standing behind the pulpit explaining how wonderfully spiritual it has become. The outward appearance of power does not establish the presence of truth.

The proper biblical standard must distinguish facts revealed by God, faith responding to those facts, and the feelings that may accompany genuine conviction and obedience. Scripture does not teach that Christian experience is worthless. It teaches that experience cannot become the final authority for determining what is true. Romans 10:17 declares, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." First John 5:13 grounds assurance of eternal life in the written testimony concerning Jesus Christ, not in the ability to reproduce a particular emotional sensation. Meanwhile, 1 Corinthians 14 insists upon intelligibility, edification, and order within the congregation. These passages expose the fundamental weakness of religious sensationalism: it demands that believers trust what they feel before examining what God has said. A man who builds his faith upon feelings has constructed his house upon weather conditions. A man who builds upon the word of God has placed his confidence in something that does not change every time the wind begins to blow. The question is not whether an experience feels genuine, but whether it withstands the examination of Scripture.

1. Strange Fire: When Religious Activity Becomes Disobedience

Leviticus 10:1–2 records one of the most solemn warnings concerning worship in the Old Testament. Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, "offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not." The passage continues, "And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD." Notice that these men were not openly worshipping Baal or announcing themselves as enemies of Israel's God. They were functioning within the priestly system associated with the tabernacle. They possessed recognized religious standing, used instruments associated with worship, and approached the LORD with an offering. Yet their activity directly violated His commandment. The problem was not insufficient enthusiasm. It was disobedience. The fact that a man performs an activity inside a religious institution does not automatically make that activity

acceptable to God. Nadab and Abihu discovered that having the correct religious vocabulary is of little value when the worship itself contradicts divine instruction. Religious sincerity cannot sanctify what God has forbidden.

The historical and dispensational setting must remain clear. Nadab and Abihu served under Israel's Levitical priesthood, governed by commandments concerning sacrifices, offerings, and access to the tabernacle. Christians under grace are not Levitical priests offering incense according to the Mosaic law, and Leviticus 10 does not authorize preachers to threaten congregations with the identical physical judgment whenever somebody makes a mistake during worship. The doctrinal application concerns the authority of God's revealed instructions. The passage establishes that divine worship cannot be redefined according to human preference while claiming God's approval. That principle agrees with Paul's later warning in Colossians 2:23 concerning "will worship," a religious appearance of wisdom that does not possess the spiritual value its practitioners imagine. Man-made worship does not become God-approved worship merely because somebody attaches the Lord's name to it. A religious ceremony can be impressive, elaborate, expensive, and completely contrary to the word of God.

Modern Christianity has produced its own remarkable collection of activities advertised as divine manifestations without establishing their authority from Scripture. Supposedly uncontrollable laughter, theatrical collapses, public shaking, bizarre declarations, manufactured prophecies, and performances intended to demonstrate supernatural influence have all been presented as evidence of extraordinary spirituality. Each particular claim deserves examination rather than automatic condemnation, but none is exempt from Scripture simply because an audience becomes excited. The Lord has not authorized the church to invent manifestations and afterward search for isolated verses that can be stretched around them. First Corinthians 14:33 declares, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." When a congregation can explain every unusual performance by saying that the Holy Ghost is doing something mysterious, it has developed a remarkably convenient method of avoiding biblical accountability. The burden belongs to the person claiming divine authority to demonstrate that the claim agrees with what God has actually revealed.

2. Lord, Lord: When Wonderful Works Cannot Prove Salvation

Matthew 7:21 records the Lord Jesus Christ declaring, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." The statement comes near the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, where Christ addresses the righteousness and kingdom expectations associated with His earthly ministry to Israel. The immediate context includes warnings concerning false prophets who appear in sheep's clothing while inwardly

being ravening wolves. Verses 16–20 emphasize their fruits, and verses 21–23 expose the insufficiency of impressive religious profession without a genuine relationship to the Lord. These verses must not be carelessly converted into a denial of the Church Age gospel of salvation by grace through faith. Nevertheless, the warning against trusting religious appearances is unmistakable. A man can learn to pronounce the name of Jesus Christ with remarkable enthusiasm without ever having genuinely belonged to Him. Repeating "Lord, Lord" does not establish salvation any more than wearing a military uniform proves that somebody received a legitimate commission.

The warning becomes particularly serious in verse 22: "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?" Notice their defense. These people appeal to their religious accomplishments. They claim prophecy, deliverance from devils, and wonderful works, all performed under the name of Christ. They do not appeal to His finished redemptive work as the basis of their acceptance. Their argument concerns what they supposedly accomplished. Verse 23 records the Lord's answer: "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." The most terrifying words a religious performer could hear are not that his miracles were insufficiently impressive, but that the Lord Jesus Christ never knew him in the first place. Supernatural claims cannot establish salvation, and religious achievements cannot substitute for the Saviour.

This passage does not prove that every reported miracle is fraudulent or that every mistaken religious worker is unsaved. It demonstrates that claims of extraordinary accomplishments cannot serve as the final evidence of divine approval. Under the present dispensation, the gospel Paul preached concerns Christ's death for our sins, burial, and resurrection according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1–4). Romans 4:5 establishes justification through faith apart from works, and Ephesians 2:8–9 declares salvation by grace through faith. The believer's assurance therefore rests upon Christ and God's testimony concerning Him, not upon impressive ministry statistics or unusual personal experiences. A man who claims to have healed a thousand people must still face the question of whether he has believed the gospel. The possession of a religious reputation cannot purchase one second of eternal life. A man may convince an auditorium that heaven has endorsed his ministry while remaining desperately confused concerning the salvation heaven has provided through Jesus Christ. The miracle worker needs the Saviour just as surely as the crippled man needs healing.

3. False Apostles and the Devil's Remarkable Talent for Looking Religious

Second Corinthians 11:13–15 provides a direct warning concerning men who deliberately misrepresent their spiritual authority: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ." Paul was not describing ordinary believers who misunderstood a difficult passage. He was exposing counterfeit ministers who attempted to occupy positions of authority while opposing the genuine apostolic ministry. Earlier in the chapter, verse 4 warns about the preaching of "another Jesus," receiving "another spirit," and accepting "another gospel." There are three enormous dangers concealed beneath the appearance of Christian religion. A man may use the name Jesus while preaching a distorted Christ, claim the Holy Ghost while promoting spiritual deception, and employ familiar religious expressions while corrupting the gospel of grace. The devil does not always arrive with horns, a pitchfork, and a public announcement that he intends to destroy the church. Sometimes he arrives with a Bible, a pleasant smile, and a sermon that sounds respectable until somebody examines the doctrine. Religious appearances are among deception's most effective disguises.

Paul continues, "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:14–15). This passage destroys the childish assumption that spiritual deception must always look frightening, wicked, or obviously hostile to Christianity. Satan can imitate the appearance of goodness, and his servants may present themselves as defenders of righteousness. That does not mean every mistaken teacher is consciously serving Satan or that every unusual religious event is demonic. The passage establishes the necessity of examining doctrine rather than trusting outward appearances. A false teacher may speak of love, peace, blessing, victory, and faith while systematically denying the authority of Scripture or corrupting the gospel. Poison does not become nourishing because somebody places it in a beautiful bottle, and false doctrine does not become truth because a talented speaker presents it with an attractive personality. The contents determine the danger, not the attractiveness of the packaging.

The same chapter supplies a warning against personality-driven ministry. Paul feared that the Corinthians might be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ, just as Eve was beguiled through the serpent's subtlety (2 Corinthians 11:3). The danger was deception working through attractive religious alternatives to revealed truth. A congregation that identifies spiritual authority primarily through charisma, apparent supernatural ability, or institutional success has made itself vulnerable to precisely the sort of counterfeit Paul exposed. Genuine ministers are to be judged by their doctrine and conduct according to Scripture, not by manufactured reputations. Matthew 24:24 also warns of false Christs and false prophets producing great signs and wonders, though that passage concerns the prophetic circumstances surrounding Christ's future return and must not be confused with

ordinary Church Age conditions. The underlying danger remains unmistakable: religious deception can be extraordinarily persuasive. A church that refuses to test its teachers because they appear spiritual has not demonstrated faith. It has demonstrated confidence in appearances that the Scriptures explicitly warn can be counterfeited.

4. Simon the Sorcerer: The Man Who Wanted to Purchase God's Power

Acts 8:9–11 introduces Simon, a man who previously practiced sorcery in Samaria and "bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one." The people regarded him with astonishment, and verse 10 records their extraordinary assessment: "This man is the great power of God." Consider the situation carefully. Simon possessed a substantial religious reputation before Philip arrived preaching Christ. The people were impressed by his sorceries and attributed spiritual greatness to him. Their confidence did not make his activities genuinely divine. The narrative demonstrates that a crowd can be deeply impressed by extraordinary performances while remaining confused concerning their source. Then Philip arrived, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, and the Samaritans responded to the gospel message. Genuine signs accompanied Philip's ministry, including deliverance from unclean spirits and the healing of afflicted people. The inhabitants of Samaria had already learned how to admire supernatural performances. What they needed was the truth concerning Jesus Christ. The difference between spectacle and salvation could not have been more important.

Acts 8:13 records that Simon himself believed and was baptized, afterward continuing with Philip and wondering at the miracles and signs being performed. Yet his subsequent conduct exposed a serious spiritual problem. When Peter and John arrived and the Holy Ghost was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, Simon offered them money, saying, "Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost" (verse 19). Simon did not ask how he might faithfully serve the newly converted Samaritans. He wanted possession of an extraordinary authority that would allow him to reproduce what he had witnessed. Peter's response was devastating: "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money" (verse 20). Simon saw divine power and immediately began calculating its commercial possibilities. Apparently, the religious merchandising business has been around considerably longer than modern television. The problem was not insufficient payment. The problem was attempting to buy what only God could give.

Peter continued by declaring that Simon's heart was not right in the sight of God, commanding repentance and describing him as being in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. Luke's record that Simon believed must be considered alongside Peter's severe assessment rather than casually ignored. The account certainly establishes that his

outward response and baptism did not make his present motives acceptable to God, while the passage does not provide a detailed account resolving every question concerning his final spiritual condition. Its warning against coveting supernatural power for personal advancement is unmistakable. First Timothy 6:5 later condemns men who suppose that gain is godliness, and 2 Peter 2:3 warns of false teachers who through covetousness make merchandise of people. A ministry that demands money in exchange for supposed miracles deserves examination under these passages. When a preacher discovers that suffering people will pay for promises of supernatural relief, the question is no longer how large his ministry can become. The question is whether he has learned anything from Peter's rebuke of Simon. God's gifts are not religious merchandise.

5. Lying Wonders and the Future Deception of the Man of Sin

Second Thessalonians 2:9–10 describes the coming of the Wicked one "after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish." These verses concern the future revelation of the man of sin, whom Paul describes earlier in the chapter as exalting himself above all that is called God. The passage must be interpreted in its prophetic setting rather than carelessly transferred to every contemporary religious meeting. Paul was addressing confusion concerning the day of Christ and events connected with the revelation of the man of sin. The passage anticipates a future period of extraordinary Satanic deception associated with the Tribulation and the rise of the Antichrist. The devil's future counterfeit kingdom will not depend entirely upon philosophical arguments and political speeches. Scripture says it will employ power, signs, and lying wonders. Satan understands that men who reject divine truth may nevertheless become enthusiastic followers of impressive supernatural displays.

Revelation 13 provides additional details concerning this future deception. The second beast exercises authority in connection with the first beast and performs great wonders, even making fire come down from heaven in the sight of men. Revelation 13:14 expressly declares that he deceives those dwelling on the earth by means of the miracles he has power to perform. The passage belongs to the prophetic events surrounding the beast and the false prophet, not to the present ministry of the body of Christ. Nevertheless, it establishes an important truth concerning supernatural evidence: a remarkable event does not automatically authenticate the doctrine attached to it. The Scriptures distinguish God's genuine miracles from deceptive signs operating according to Satan's purposes. The Antichrist's religious system will not need to abolish supernatural excitement. It will exploit supernatural excitement to direct worship toward the wrong object. The presence of impressive signs therefore cannot become the ultimate test of spiritual truth.

Second Thessalonians 2:10–12 identifies the fundamental issue: those deceived "received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." Paul then describes strong delusion and judgment upon those who believe a lie and take pleasure in unrighteousness. The passage concerns future prophetic judgment and must not be twisted into the claim that every presently deceived church member has already entered the same condition. Its moral and doctrinal warning, however, is unmistakable. Deception becomes especially dangerous where people develop an appetite for experiences while rejecting revealed truth. Second Timothy 4:3–4 describes those who will not endure sound doctrine but gather teachers according to their own lusts, eventually turning from truth to fables. The most dangerous counterfeit is not merely the lie somebody tells. It is the lie people become willing to believe because they no longer want the truth. A congregation can demand so much excitement that it eventually regards sound biblical instruction as an unwelcome interruption.

6. Religious Excitement Is Not the Same Thing as the Holy Ghost

First Corinthians 14:26 asks, "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation." Paul was addressing a congregation overflowing with competing claims to spiritual expression, and his conclusion was unmistakable: "Let all things be done unto edifying." He then restricted tongue-speaking to two or at most three, required speakers to proceed in order, and demanded interpretation. If no interpreter was present, the speaker was commanded to remain silent in the church. Prophetic claims likewise required examination, and verse 32 declared that the spirits of the prophets were subject to the prophets. These regulations demolish the notion that spiritual manifestations place individuals beyond self-control or biblical accountability. The Holy Ghost did not inspire Paul to regulate genuine spiritual gifts so that modern performers could ignore every regulation and call their disobedience a greater demonstration of the Holy Ghost. Divine inspiration does not excuse disobedience to divine instruction.

Religious excitement can be deliberately intensified through music, repetition, dramatic pauses, carefully arranged testimonies, public pressure, and the expectation that extraordinary events must occur. None of these methods, considered individually, proves dishonesty. Music has a legitimate place in worship, and believers may experience genuine joy, sorrow, gratitude, or conviction through hearing biblical truth. Colossians 3:16 speaks of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, while Ephesians 5:19 identifies singing and making melody in the heart to the Lord. The danger arises when the emotional response itself becomes the supposed evidence of supernatural authority. A congregation may be encouraged to expect unusual sensations, urged to repeat particular sounds, or pressured

to demonstrate visible reactions as proof that God is working. A skilled musician can move an audience to tears without preaching one word of the gospel, and a talented performer can produce excitement without possessing one ounce of apostolic authority. The existence of emotion does not identify its source or establish the doctrine accompanying it.

First Corinthians 14:33 declares, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." Verse 40 concludes, "Let all things be done decently and in order." These commandments must govern claims concerning public manifestations. Yet biblical order should not be confused with lifeless formalism, nor should every spontaneous expression of gratitude be condemned as counterfeit. The early Christians rejoiced, prayed, sang, preached, and sometimes experienced extraordinary manifestations genuinely supplied by God. The issue is whether an activity agrees with Scripture and contributes to the church's edification. A believer may weep under conviction without receiving new revelation, rejoice over answered prayer without possessing a miraculous gift, or express gratitude without demonstrating apostolic authority. Tears do not prove inspiration, shouting does not prove anointing, and falling to the floor does not establish that heaven has approved the person conducting the meeting. Genuine worship submits to God's word rather than demanding that God's word submit to the atmosphere of the meeting.

7. Fact, Faith, and Feeling: The Written Word Must Judge the Experience

First John 4:1 commands believers to try the spirits, and the following verses establish a doctrinal test concerning the confession of Jesus Christ. Verse 2 declares, "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God." Verse 3 warns concerning the spirit that does not confess Christ's coming in the flesh. John was confronting false teaching concerning the person of Jesus Christ, not supplying a magical phrase that makes every religious claim trustworthy merely because somebody pronounces the correct words. The wider apostolic testimony must govern the examination. Galatians 1:8 rejects another gospel even if supposedly delivered by an angel from heaven, and Acts 17:11 commends the Bereans for searching the Scriptures daily. The Christian is therefore commanded to examine the message rather than surrender judgment to the messenger. A false teacher may learn the vocabulary of Christianity without believing its doctrine, just as a counterfeit bill may reproduce the appearance of money without possessing its genuine authority. The test concerns truth, not appearances.

The relationship between fact, faith, and feeling becomes especially important when examining salvation and assurance. The facts of the gospel are established by God's written testimony: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day

according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Faith responds to that testimony by trusting the Lord Jesus Christ rather than human works or religious experiences. Ephesians 1:13 describes believers hearing the word of truth, believing the gospel of salvation, and being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. First John 5:13 declares, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life." Notice the basis of assurance. John points believers toward what has been written, not toward whether they experienced a particular sensation. God did not instruct the sinner to examine his emotional temperature to determine whether Christ had finished the work of redemption. He instructed him to believe the testimony concerning His Son. The facts support faith; feelings cannot replace either.

This distinction does not eliminate genuine spiritual affection. The believer may rejoice in salvation, grieve over sin, experience peace through prayer, and become deeply moved by the promises of Scripture. Philippians 4:4 commands believers to rejoice in the Lord, while Romans 5:1 establishes peace with God through justification by faith. The important distinction concerns authority and order. Feelings may accompany biblical faith, but they cannot become its foundation or final verification. A saved person who experiences fear, sorrow, weakness, or emotional difficulty has not thereby lost the eternal life promised through Jesus Christ. Likewise, somebody experiencing tremendous religious excitement has not thereby demonstrated genuine conversion. A man may feel wonderfully religious while remaining lost, and a saved man may feel absolutely miserable while remaining eternally secure in Christ. The deciding issue is not the intensity of the feeling but the truth of God's promise and the believer's relationship to Jesus Christ through faith.

Conclusion

The Scriptures leave no room for the careless assumption that everything advertised as spiritual originates with the Holy Ghost. Nadab and Abihu demonstrated that religious activity can directly contradict divine instruction. Jesus Christ warned of men claiming prophecy, deliverance, and wonderful works while remaining unknown to Him. Paul exposed false apostles transforming themselves into ministers of righteousness, while Acts 8 revealed Simon's corrupt desire to purchase divine authority. Second Thessalonians 2 describes future Satanic signs and lying wonders, and First Corinthians 14 establishes that genuine spiritual manifestations were subject to apostolic regulations. These passages do not require Christians to reject every unusual experience or deny God's continuing power. They require discernment. The Bible does not command believers to fear every extraordinary event. It commands them to stop treating extraordinary events as substitutes for biblical truth. A miracle claim must be examined, a supposed revelation

must be tested, and a religious leader must remain accountable to the Scriptures. The Lord has never required His people to abandon discernment as evidence of faith.

The religious counterfeit factory thrives wherever people prefer experiences to exposition, personalities to Scripture, and excitement to sound doctrine. False claims can be financially profitable, socially influential, and emotionally persuasive without becoming true. A preacher who sells supposed supernatural power, manipulates suffering people, invents private revelations, or demands unquestioning obedience is not entitled to exemption from biblical examination because he claims a spiritual gift. Neither should Christians become so suspicious that they condemn genuine prayer, appropriate expressions of worship, or sincere believers who have misunderstood a particular doctrine. Discernment requires more than cynicism. It requires the careful application of Scripture to what is actually being claimed. The answer to counterfeit fire is not spiritual darkness. The answer is the light of God's revealed word, which exposes the counterfeit while preserving everything genuine. Faithful believers can pray, rejoice, serve, and worship without surrendering their judgment to religious performances that contradict the commandments of the Lord.

The final authority remains the written word of God, and the final object of saving faith remains the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is not established through prophecy, tongues, healing, visions, emotional intensity, or extraordinary religious accomplishments. It is received by grace through faith in the Saviour who died for our sins and rose again. The believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, furnished through the Scriptures for faithful service, and commanded to walk according to revealed truth. Spiritual experiences must be judged by that truth rather than enthroned above it. The church needs preaching that explains Scripture, pastors who refuse to exploit the flock, believers capable of discerning false doctrine, and congregations more interested in obeying the Holy Ghost's written commandments than manufacturing new manifestations in His name. The devil does not have to close every church to do his work. Sometimes all he has to do is put on a religious performance, convince the crowd that excitement equals authority, and keep everybody too busy feeling something to examine the Scriptures. But a Christian standing upon the written word of God does not have to purchase the performance, applaud the counterfeit, or surrender his judgment to the man conducting the show. The facts are established by Scripture, faith rests upon what God has said, and feelings must remain where they belong. When the Bible speaks, experience does not get the final word.

10 of 10 — Spiritual Gifts — Charity Never Faileth: What Remains When the Signs Have Passed Away

Key Passages: 1 Corinthians 12:31; 13:1–13; 14:1; Romans 12:9–21; Galatians 5:22–26; Ephesians 4:11–16; 1 Peter 4:7–11

Introduction

"Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away" (1 Corinthians 13:8). There stands the divine verdict upon the temporary manifestations that fascinated the Corinthian believers, and it delivers a rather uncomfortable message to the modern religious industry that has built entire denominations around the gifts Paul said would cease. Notice the contrast. Prophecies shall fail. Tongues shall cease. Knowledge, referring to the extraordinary revelatory manifestation under discussion, shall vanish away. But charity never faileth. Evidently, God placed greater importance upon something considerably less spectacular than the ability to astonish an audience. A man may possess enough religious excitement to rattle every window in the building, but if he cannot love the brethren, speak the truth, and serve anybody without demanding applause, his spiritual fireworks have illuminated remarkably little. Paul was not attempting to diminish genuine spiritual gifts. He was correcting Christians who had forgotten that gifts were given to serve the body of Christ, not provide decorations for religious pride.

The placement of 1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most important details in the entire discussion. Chapter 12 identifies spiritual gifts, their distribution, their diversity, and their relationship to the one body. Chapter 14 regulates the exercise of prophecy and tongues, insisting upon understanding, interpretation, edification, and order. Between these chapters stands Paul's magnificent correction concerning charity. That arrangement is not an interruption in his argument. It is essential to the argument. The Corinthians possessed genuine supernatural manifestations, yet their congregation was troubled by divisions, spiritual boasting, disputes, and disorder. First Corinthians 3:3 had already exposed their carnality through envying, strife, and divisions. Apparently, a congregation could possess extraordinary spiritual gifts while behaving in a remarkably ordinary fleshly manner. The possession of a gift never guaranteed the maturity of the person possessing it. The Corinthians needed more than additional supernatural manifestations. They needed to understand the character that ought to govern every gift, every ministry, and every relationship within the body of Christ.

The final consideration of spiritual gifts must therefore return to the question that should have governed the subject from the beginning: What does God actually intend to

accomplish through His people? The apostolic signs authenticated the original witnesses. Revelatory gifts communicated divine truth during the foundational period. Tongues served their particular historical purpose. Healing and miracles demonstrated God's extraordinary power. Teaching, exhortation, giving, helps, mercy, and faithful leadership contributed to the edification of the church. Yet none of these functions was ever intended to replace obedience, sound doctrine, humility, or charity. Romans 12, Galatians 5, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4 demonstrate that genuine Christian service remains indispensable after the foundational signs have fulfilled their purposes. When the spectacular manifestations have passed from the scene, the Christian has not been left with an empty toolbox. He still possesses the word of God, the indwelling Holy Ghost, and a lifetime of opportunities to serve the Saviour who redeemed him. The question is whether he intends to use them.

1. A More Excellent Way: Why Paul Placed Charity Between the Gifts

First Corinthians 12:31 concludes the discussion of spiritual gifts with a remarkable statement: "But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way." The Corinthians had become occupied with comparing spiritual manifestations and evaluating personal importance according to the gifts individuals possessed. Paul had already explained that the Spirit distributed gifts according to His own will, that all members did not possess identical functions, and that seemingly weaker members of the body remained necessary. He then introduced something greater than the competition surrounding individual gifts. Charity was the more excellent way. It was not another spectacular manifestation to be added to the list, nor was it an excuse for neglecting the responsibilities God had actually assigned. It was the governing quality without which even extraordinary service could become spiritually worthless. The Corinthians wanted to know which gifts made a man important. Paul wanted them to understand why a man with remarkable gifts could still amount to nothing. That was a much more uncomfortable question.

First Corinthians 12:25–26 explains the practical necessity of charity: "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another." Paul continues by declaring that when one member suffers, the members suffer with it, and when one member receives honor, the others rejoice. There is the opposite of spiritual competition. The believer does not become jealous because another Christian receives recognition, nor does he become indifferent when a less prominent member encounters difficulty. Each belongs to the body of Christ, and their responsibilities are interconnected. The church at Corinth had allowed divisions and personal boasting to corrupt its fellowship, despite possessing genuine gifts from the Spirit. A congregation that can advertise nine spiritual manifestations but cannot get its members to treat one another

decently has developed an impressive inventory of equipment without learning how to operate the machinery. Spiritual usefulness requires more than possessing an assigned function. It requires exercising that function according to the character and purpose of Christ.

First Corinthians 14:1 completes the connection: "Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy." The command was given during the period when revelatory gifts operated, and it must be understood within that historical setting. Paul did not tell the Corinthians that charity eliminated the need for sound doctrine, intelligible communication, or biblical order. He instructed them to pursue charity while governing the actual gifts according to the Lord's commandments. The priority of charity did not authorize an assembly to descend into confusion or permit anybody to introduce false revelation under the pretense of being loving. First Corinthians 14:40 still commanded, "Let all things be done decently and in order." Biblical charity does not throw away the rulebook because somebody might become offended by the rules. The Holy Ghost who commanded believers to pursue charity also commanded them to submit their conduct to Scripture. Genuine love and obedience were never enemies.

2. Tongues, Knowledge, Faith, and Sacrifice Without Charity Amount to Nothing

First Corinthians 13:1 begins with an extraordinary comparison: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." Paul deliberately selects one of the manifestations that had caused considerable excitement in Corinth and demonstrates its worthlessness when separated from charity. Even the most remarkable imaginable speech cannot compensate for the absence of the character God requires. The reference to the tongues of angels occurs within Paul's argument concerning extraordinary abilities and should not be transformed into a complete doctrine of a private heavenly prayer language supposedly necessary for every Christian. The passage is emphasizing the insufficiency of spectacular speech without charity. A man may produce sounds that astonish an entire congregation, but if he cannot communicate truth, exercise humility, or treat the brethren properly, he has accomplished little more than turning himself into a religious percussion instrument. The brass may sound impressive, but noise is not spiritual maturity.

Verse 2 intensifies the indictment: "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." Consider the abilities Paul places beneath charity. Prophecy involved supernatural communication of divine truth. Understanding mysteries and possessing remarkable knowledge would represent extraordinary insight. Faith capable of removing mountains would appear to demonstrate tremendous spiritual

power. Yet Paul declares that without charity, the person himself amounts to nothing. This is not a denial of salvation by grace through faith, nor is charity being introduced as another condition for receiving eternal life. Paul is evaluating the spiritual worth of extraordinary gifts when exercised without the proper character and purpose. A preacher may explain mysteries that leave everybody astonished, but if he cannot practice the ordinary commandments concerning his brethren, his knowledge has traveled considerably farther than his obedience. The Bible never identifies unusual ability as a substitute for Christian character.

Verse 3 removes the possibility that enormous personal sacrifice automatically establishes spiritual greatness: "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." Here the apostle includes extraordinary generosity and the surrender of one's own body. These actions might attract admiration, produce an impressive reputation, or become the foundation of a celebrated religious legacy. Nevertheless, Paul declares them profitless without charity. The distinction concerns motive and spiritual value, not the denial that feeding poor people accomplishes practical good. A person may perform a beneficial act while seeking personal glory rather than the honor of Christ. Matthew 6:1–4 had already warned against giving alms for the purpose of being seen by men. A man can empty his bank account for religious publicity and still manage to make the entire transaction about himself. Charity is not established by the size of the sacrifice alone. God examines the purpose governing the sacrifice.

3. Charity Suffereth Long: The Character That Religious Spectacle Cannot Manufacture

"Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up" (1 Corinthians 13:4). Every expression confronts something that had appeared among the Corinthians. Longsuffering requires patience when difficulties continue and brethren prove imperfect. Kindness requires appropriate conduct toward others rather than merely expressing favorable opinions about them. Refusing envy means rejoicing when God uses another believer instead of resenting his usefulness. Refusing to vaunt oneself excludes the continual promotion of personal importance, while remaining free from pride directly rebukes the spiritual boasting that had infected Corinth. These qualities are not manufactured through spectacular performances. They must govern ordinary relationships where nobody is watching and applause is unlikely. It takes very little patience to love somebody who continually agrees with you, praises your ministry, and never inconveniences your schedule. The examination begins when the brother needs your help,

challenges your pride, or receives the recognition you wanted for yourself. Charity must survive circumstances that expose the flesh.

Verse 5 continues, "Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil." Proper conduct matters because the character of charity cannot be separated from the treatment of other people. A believer who continually humiliates others, demands special privileges, or responds to correction with uncontrolled anger has failed the standard regardless of his supposed spiritual gifts. Seeking not her own does not abolish legitimate personal responsibilities or require Christians to surrender every rightful boundary. It condemns selfish conduct that places individual advantage above biblical responsibility toward others. Likewise, thinking no evil does not mean pretending that documented wickedness is innocent or refusing to exercise discernment. It rejects a disposition that assumes evil without cause and delights in attributing corrupt motives where evidence is absent. Charity does not require a Christian to become gullible, and discernment does not authorize him to become suspicious of everybody who disagrees with him. The believer must judge according to truth rather than according to pride, irritation, or imagination.

Verse 6 establishes the boundary that sentimental religion desperately wishes were absent: "Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." Charity cannot celebrate wickedness, excuse false doctrine, or defend rebellion merely because correction might make somebody uncomfortable. Verse 7 then declares that charity "Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." These expressions describe the enduring, faithful character of Christian love; they do not command unquestioning acceptance of every claim or passive submission to abuse. First Thessalonians 5:21 still commands believers to prove all things, while Galatians 6:1 requires the restoration of those overtaken in a fault. A man who uses charity to silence every biblical correction has not discovered a higher form of Christianity. He has discovered a convenient way to protect error from examination. True charity remains patient and hopeful while refusing to rejoice in anything contrary to God's revealed truth.

4. Prophecy Shall Fail, Tongues Shall Cease, but the Foundation Remains

First Corinthians 13:8–10 returns to the temporary character of particular gifts: "whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." Paul continues, "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part." The gifts associated with supernatural revelation operated during the formative period of the New Testament church, when divine truth was being disclosed through the apostles and prophets. Ephesians 3:5 identifies revelation given to those foundational messengers concerning the mystery of the body of Christ. Hebrews 2:3–4

describes God confirming the original proclamation through signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost. These manifestations served definite historical purposes rather than constituting permanent decorations for every future congregation. God did not provide supernatural signs so that religious organizations could spend two thousand years trying to reproduce the opening ceremonies of the Church Age. The church was established upon the apostolic testimony, and the present responsibility is to believe, preserve, and obey that testimony.

Paul's statement concerning "that which is perfect" in 1 Corinthians 13:10 must also be examined alongside verses 11–12 rather than reduced to a convenient slogan. He illustrates the movement from childhood to maturity, then declares, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." This language points toward a fullness of knowledge beyond the believer's present condition. First John 3:2 likewise connects the believer's future likeness to Christ with seeing Him as He is. The completion of the apostolic testimony and the future perfection of the believer are related to God's purposes but are not identical events. The cessation of foundational revelatory ministries can be understood through Ephesians 2:20 and Jude 3 without pretending that Christians already possess the fullness of knowledge anticipated in 1 Corinthians 13:12. The completed Scriptures furnish the believer for present obedience, while the believer himself still awaits the completion of his redemption. One truth does not cancel the other.

Ephesians 2:20 declares that believers are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. Jude 3 commands Christians to contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints, while 2 Timothy 3:16–17 identifies the inspired Scriptures as sufficient to furnish the man of God unto all good works. The foundational revelation has been supplied; the church's responsibility is to proclaim and obey it. God remains able to perform miracles and answer prayer, but His continuing power does not establish the need for another generation of foundational apostles or new doctrinal revelation. Nor does the cessation of extraordinary revelatory gifts mean that ordinary biblical knowledge, teaching, discernment, and charity have disappeared. The workman still has the Bible, the preacher still has a message, the Christian still has responsibilities, and the church still has a Head. The signs fulfilled their purposes; the truth they authenticated remains authoritative.

5. The Fruit of the Spirit and the Love That Actually Obeys Scripture

Galatians 5:22–23 declares, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." Notice the difference between the fruit of the Spirit and the supernatural gifts discussed in

Corinth. Spiritual gifts concerned particular abilities and manifestations distributed according to the Spirit's will. The fruit of the Spirit concerns the character produced through walking in the Spirit rather than fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. Galatians 5:19–21 first identifies the works of the flesh, including hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, and envyings. These are precisely the kinds of sins that can corrupt religious service even when the participants claim extraordinary spirituality. A man who advertises his supernatural gifts while displaying hatred, pride, uncontrolled anger, and envy has managed to make his religious reputation grow in the opposite direction from his Christian character. The Holy Ghost does not supply gifts as permission to cultivate the flesh.

Galatians 5:25 commands, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." Verse 26 adds, "Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another." This distinction is indispensable. The believer receives the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ, as Ephesians 1:13 establishes, but he is subsequently responsible for walking according to the Spirit rather than the flesh. Salvation is not maintained by successfully producing spiritual fruit, because eternal life rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, a saved person's conduct can either honor the Saviour or contradict the character expected of His servants. Paul specifically warns against vain glory and envy, the very sins that flourish when Christians turn ministry into a competition. The Holy Ghost did not seal believers unto the day of redemption so that they could spend the intervening years competing for the largest share of religious applause. Spiritual maturity is demonstrated through obedient conduct, not continual announcements of personal importance.

Romans 12:9–13 brings these principles into daily practice: "Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." The word "dissimulation" exposes pretended affection. A Christian is not exercising biblical charity by speaking pleasantly in public while secretly working to injure his brother. Paul continues by commanding believers to be kindly affectioned, to prefer one another in honor, to remain diligent in service, to continue in prayer, and to distribute to the necessity of saints. Hospitality appears among these practical responsibilities. None requires supernatural spectacle, yet all demand genuine obedience. Romans 12:15 adds, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." The man who can deliver an impressive sermon on love but cannot rejoice when another believer succeeds has mistaken the explanation of charity for the practice of charity. Biblical affection is revealed in conduct when another person's circumstances require a response.

6. Charity in the Local Church: Serving the Saints Without Excusing Sin

Ephesians 4:11–16 identifies Christ's provision of ministers for the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ. The passage culminates in the command to speak "the truth in love" and describes the body growing through the proper contribution of its members. Truth and love are joined because neither is sufficient when separated from the other. A preacher who possesses doctrinal knowledge but delights in humiliating people has neglected the character required of a faithful servant. A congregation that prides itself upon love while refusing to identify false teaching has abandoned the protection that sound doctrine supplies. Ephesians 4:14 specifically warns against being carried about by every wind of doctrine through the cunning craftiness of deceivers. A church that sacrifices truth to preserve pleasant feelings has not become more loving. It has simply removed the fence while assuring the sheep that wolves are entitled to equal consideration. Charity protects through truth rather than replacing truth.

First Peter 4:8 commands, "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins." This does not instruct Christians to conceal criminal conduct, protect abusive leaders, or ignore persistent wickedness. The surrounding passage addresses believers living soberly, praying, practicing hospitality, and ministering as faithful stewards of God's grace. Charity refuses to magnify every personal offense into a public controversy and remains willing to forgive genuine wrongs. Yet Matthew 18:15–17 provides instructions concerning confronting an offending brother, and 1 Timothy 5:19–20 establishes accountability for elders through proper evidence and correction. Covering sins through charity must never be confused with hiding wrongdoing to protect a religious institution's reputation. Forgiving an offense is one thing; burying evidence of wickedness beneath a church carpet is another. The carpet may conceal the dirt temporarily, but the Holy Ghost never commanded Christians to become professional custodians of unrepentant sin. Biblical love confronts what must be corrected.

The practical opportunities for charity remain abundant. Acts 9:36 describes Dorcas as a woman full of good works and almsdeeds, and the widows who mourned her displayed the garments she had made. Her work did not depend upon a spectacular gift, yet it demonstrated genuine concern for people who needed assistance. Galatians 6:2 commands believers to bear one another's burdens, while verse 10 instructs them to do good unto all men, especially those of the household of faith. Romans 12:19–21 forbids personal vengeance and directs believers to overcome evil with good. These instructions distinguish charity from weakness, because refusing personal revenge is not the same as refusing legitimate correction or protection against harm. The Christian who carries groceries to a struggling widow, comforts a grieving brother, supports faithful ministry, and refuses to retaliate against personal wrongs may accomplish more genuine spiritual good

than a celebrated performer whose entire ministry depends upon being noticed. The Lord measures faithfulness differently from the crowd.

7. Faith, Hope, and Charity: The Three That Abide

First Corinthians 13:13 concludes, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." Paul has contrasted temporary spiritual manifestations with qualities that remain essential to Christian life. Faith rests upon God's revealed truth, hope looks toward the fulfillment of His promises, and charity governs the believer's relationships and service. Romans 10:17 declares that faith comes by hearing the word of God, while Hebrews 11:1 identifies faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Christian faith is not the ability to generate enough confidence to make an imaginary promise come true. It believes what God has actually revealed. Likewise, biblical hope is not wishful thinking concerning uncertain religious possibilities. Titus 2:13 directs believers toward "that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." The Christian does not possess hope because the world appears to be improving. He possesses hope because the Lord Jesus Christ has promised something infinitely better than this present world can produce.

Charity is greatest among these three because it expresses the character that should govern every responsibility and relationship of the redeemed. First John 4:7 declares, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God," while verse 19 explains, "We love him, because he first loved us." Christian charity is therefore not a human achievement that purchases God's acceptance. It responds to the love God has demonstrated through His Son. Romans 5:8 declares that God commended His love toward us while we were yet sinners, and Christ died for us. Salvation remains by grace through faith, not through attaining a particular degree of charity. Nevertheless, the believer who has received such mercy ought to demonstrate mercy toward others. The cross did not merely provide a subject for beautiful sermons about love. It demonstrated the love of God toward undeserving sinners and established the greatest possible reason for Christians to abandon selfish pride. Charity reflects the Saviour rather than advertising the servant.

The judgment seat of Christ places all Christian service beneath the proper final authority. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares that believers must appear before that judgment seat to receive according to the things done in the body. First Corinthians 3:12–15 explains that Christian work will be tested, with some enduring and other work suffering loss. This concerns the evaluation of believers' service, not the loss of eternal salvation purchased by Christ. First Corinthians 4:5 adds that the Lord will bring hidden things to light and reveal the counsels of the hearts. The preacher's reputation, the teacher's popularity, the giver's financial importance, and the servant's public recognition will not replace that

examination. God knows whether the work was performed according to His truth and for His glory. A man may collect enough religious awards to cover an entire wall, but not one of them will persuade Jesus Christ to mistake selfish ambition for faithful service. The final accounting belongs to the Master, not the audience.

Conclusion

The doctrine of spiritual gifts begins with the sovereignty of God and concludes with the responsibility of His people to serve Him faithfully. The Holy Ghost distributed gifts according to His will, the apostles received extraordinary signs confirming their foundational commission, and supernatural manifestations served particular purposes during the establishment of the New Testament church. Prophecy, tongues, knowledge, healing, and miracles must be examined according to their actual biblical functions rather than the claims of modern religious performers. Yet the cessation of foundational manifestations does not leave believers without responsibilities or spiritual resources. Teaching, exhortation, faithful leadership, practical ministry, giving, mercy, and brotherly care remain indispensable to the functioning of the body of Christ. Above them all, charity governs the manner in which these responsibilities ought to be performed. God never intended the church to spend its existence mourning the disappearance of apostolic signs while neglecting the ordinary commandments that remain plainly written on the pages of Scripture. The original gifts served their purposes, and the continuing responsibilities still demand obedience.

The proper relationship between fact, faith, and feeling supplies an essential final safeguard against religious counterfeits. The facts of salvation are established through the written testimony concerning Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures. Faith responds to that testimony by trusting the Saviour rather than religious works or extraordinary experiences. First John 5:13 establishes assurance through what God has written to those believing on the name of His Son. Genuine spiritual affection may accompany faith, but feelings must never replace the truth upon which faith rests. Charity likewise must remain governed by Scripture rather than reduced to sentimental tolerance. It does not excuse false doctrine, conceal deliberate wickedness, purchase spiritual authority, or demand that suffering people manufacture experiences to prove their salvation. A man may feel wonderfully spiritual while believing a lie, and another may endure great affliction while standing firmly upon the truth. The difference is not the intensity of their emotions but the authority upon which their confidence rests. God's word remains the foundation, faith believes that word, and proper Christian affection proceeds from knowing and obeying it.

The final question is not whether a Christian can astonish a congregation, claim a supernatural gift, establish an impressive ministry, or persuade the crowd that he possesses extraordinary spiritual importance. The question is whether his life contributes to the glory of Jesus Christ and the edification of the body according to the written Scriptures. The faithful teacher explains God's word. The pastor feeds the flock without claiming ownership of it. The giver contributes willingly without purchasing recognition. The servant helps those in need without demanding applause. The believer exercises charity without compromising truth, remains patient without excusing wickedness, and trusts the Lord without requiring spectacular experiences as evidence of divine acceptance. Paul declared that charity never faileth, and his statement remains the proper conclusion to every argument concerning spiritual gifts. A man may claim every spectacular gift the Corinthians ever heard of, but if he cannot tell the truth, love the brethren, endure correction, or serve anybody without applause, his religious fireworks have illuminated remarkably little. The signs have served their purpose, the apostolic foundation has been laid, and the written word remains. The church does not need another religious performance to prove that God is still at work. It needs believers who will open their Bibles, obey their Saviour, serve one another, and remember that the greatest spiritual accomplishment is not making much of themselves but making much of Jesus Christ. Charity never faileth—and when everything else has finished drawing attention to the servant, charity continues pointing to the Master.

Spiritual Gifts

What Remains, What Ceased, and What Religion Counterfeits

Series Conclusion

After examining the spiritual gifts recorded in the New Testament, the signs that accompanied the apostolic ministry, the supernatural manifestations that served their appointed purposes, and the counterfeits manufactured by modern religion, one conclusion stands above all the religious noise: **God never gave spiritual gifts to make much of the servant while making little of the Saviour.** The apostle Paul settled the matter when he declared, "Charity never faileth" (1 Corinthians 13:8). Those three words ought to be enough to bring a considerable number of modern religious performances to an abrupt conclusion. Prophecies shall fail. Tongues shall cease. Knowledge, in the sense of the supernatural revelatory manifestation under discussion, shall vanish away. Yet charity remains. That is not because the gifts were unimportant, nor because the Holy Ghost

somehow made a mistake in distributing them. They were given for definite purposes during particular periods of God's dealings with His people. But the Corinthians had become so fascinated with possessing extraordinary manifestations that they were neglecting the very character those manifestations were supposed to serve. They could argue about gifts, compete for recognition, and boast about spiritual accomplishments while demonstrating the ordinary carnality Paul had already condemned. **A church can possess impressive spiritual equipment and still have a congregation that does not know how to behave. The Corinthian believers proved it, and modern Christianity has spent considerable time demonstrating that the lesson has not been universally learned.**

The first truth that must remain firmly established is that the Holy Ghost distributes gifts according to His own will, not according to human ambition. First Corinthians 12:11 declares that the Spirit divides His gifts "to every man severally as he will." Romans 12:6 identifies gifts differing according to grace, while 1 Peter 4:10 commands believers to minister what they have received as good stewards of God's manifold grace. These passages leave no room for spiritual aristocracies in which certain Christians are treated as superior because their responsibilities attract greater public attention. Neither do they authorize religious organizations to manufacture supernatural abilities through emotional pressure, repeated ceremonies, or spiritual-gift inventories. A natural talent may be useful in Christian service, but talent is not automatically a supernatural manifestation. A recognized office may involve genuine spiritual responsibility, but a title does not guarantee the qualifications required to occupy it. The fruit of the Spirit concerns Christian character, while the indwelling and sealing of the Spirit concern the believer's position in Christ. **The Bible distinguishes what modern religion repeatedly mixes together, and a preacher who cannot distinguish these things has no business announcing that the Holy Ghost has appointed him to explain mysteries nobody else understands.** Every gift must be examined according to Scripture, and every recipient must remember that whatever he possesses was first supplied by God.

The signs of the apostles furnish an especially important example of what happens when biblical distinctions are ignored. Paul did not describe his miracles as the permanent equipment of every future Christian congregation. He identified them as "the signs of an apostle" in 2 Corinthians 12:12. Hebrews 2:3–4 describes God bearing witness to the original proclamation through signs, wonders, divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost. Mark 16:20 records the Lord confirming the preached word with signs following. These manifestations authenticated the witnesses through whom God was establishing the New Testament church and delivering foundational revelation. Ephesians 2:20 identifies the apostles and prophets with the foundation, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner

stone. That foundation was not intended to become a perpetual construction project requiring another collection of apostles every generation. **The Lord Jesus Christ did not establish His church upon a foundation so unstable that it requires a fresh set of miracle-working contractors every time somebody discovers a more impressive religious title.** The apostolic testimony has been delivered, the foundation has been established, and the church must build upon what God supplied rather than continually pretending that the original work remains unfinished.

The gift of tongues demonstrated the same necessity of recognizing historical context and divine purpose. At Pentecost, the witnesses heard recognizable languages and understood the wonderful works of God being proclaimed. Acts 2:8 records their astonished question: "And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" The gift was supernatural, but the languages were genuine means of communication. Paul subsequently identified tongues as a sign to unbelievers in 1 Corinthians 14:22, connecting the subject with the prophetic warning of Isaiah 28. He also established strict regulations concerning interpretation, intelligibility, and orderly conduct. Most decisively, 1 Corinthians 12:30 asks, "do all speak with tongues?" The anticipated answer is no. Nevertheless, modern religion has repeatedly attempted to transform the gift into a universal requirement for salvation, a necessary evidence of receiving the Holy Ghost, or a badge identifying spiritually superior Christians. **A man has to work rather hard at misunderstanding Scripture to take a gift that Paul says not everybody possesses and make it the requirement by which everybody is judged.** The Holy Ghost does not contradict His own inspired instructions, regardless of how enthusiastic the congregation becomes while disregarding them.

Healing and miracles likewise demonstrate the difference between God's sovereign power and man's presumption. Peter healed the lame man at the Beautiful gate, and the man immediately stood, walked, and praised God. Acts 5 records extraordinary healings associated with the apostles, while Acts 19 describes special miracles performed by God through Paul. These were genuine supernatural events, not theatrical performances constructed through carefully selected testimonies and persuasive advertising. Yet the same apostle who performed extraordinary miracles prayed three times concerning his thorn in the flesh and received the answer, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Epaphroditus became sick nigh unto death, Timothy experienced frequent infirmities, and Trophimus was left at Miletum sick. These accounts establish that miraculous healing was never an independent power operating according to a man's personal discretion. God remains able to heal, preserve, and deliver according to His will, and James 5 instructs believers concerning prayer for the sick. But that does not establish that modern religious performers possess apostolic healing authority. **The Almighty has**

never needed a television contract, a donation envelope, a sacred handkerchief, or a preacher wearing an expensive suit to accomplish a miracle. When suffering becomes a sales opportunity, the ministry has departed considerably farther from the apostles than its advertising department is willing to admit.

The supernatural gifts associated with revelation require an equally firm distinction between what God has revealed and what men merely claim He has revealed. Ephesians 3:3–6 identifies divine revelation given concerning the mystery of the body of Christ. The apostles and prophets occupied a foundational position in communicating truth necessary for the establishment and understanding of the church. First Corinthians 13 announces the temporary character of partial revelatory gifts, while its language concerning seeing "face to face" points toward the fullness of knowledge still awaiting believers. The completed apostolic testimony and the believer's future perfection must not be confused, yet neither does future perfection require an endless succession of men delivering new foundational revelation. Jude 3 commands believers to contend for "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints," and 2 Timothy 3:16–17 establishes the sufficiency of inspired Scripture for furnishing the man of God unto all good works. **The preacher's responsibility is to explain what God has written, not announce that God has supplied him with additional information because the Bible apparently failed to include everything his congregation needs.** A man may discover something new to himself through diligent study, but personal discovery does not constitute additional divine revelation.

That distinction becomes especially important whenever somebody begins a declaration with the familiar expression, "God told me." The words may sometimes be used loosely to describe conviction arising from Scripture or a providential circumstance, but when they are employed to demand unquestioning obedience to a supposed private revelation, the matter becomes considerably more serious. Jeremiah 23 records the LORD condemning prophets who spoke visions of their own hearts rather than messages received from Him. First John 4:1 commands believers to try the spirits, while Galatians 1:8 rejects even an alleged angelic message that contradicts the gospel already delivered. The Scriptures do not instruct Christians to surrender discernment when a religious personality announces that heaven has spoken. They instruct believers to examine doctrine and remain faithful to the revelation God has established. **When a preacher's private revelation contradicts the written word of God, the problem is not that heaven has changed its mind. The problem is that somebody has mistaken his own thoughts for divine authority.** The church does not need to despise prayer, wisdom, or legitimate spiritual understanding to reject counterfeit prophecy. It simply needs to remember that the Lord's written word outranks the personal declarations of every man standing beneath it.

The danger of counterfeit spirituality is not imaginary, and the Scriptures provide warnings too serious to be dismissed as unnecessary criticism. Matthew 7:21–23 records men claiming prophecy, deliverance from devils, and wonderful works who nevertheless hear the Lord declare, "I never knew you." Second Corinthians 11:13–15 identifies false apostles and deceitful workers, warning that Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Acts 8 exposes Simon's attempt to purchase supernatural authority, while 2 Thessalonians 2 describes future Satanic deception involving power, signs, and lying wonders. These passages demonstrate that impressive religious activity cannot establish spiritual truth independently of Scripture. Not every unusual experience is necessarily fraudulent, and not every mistaken believer is deliberately deceptive. Nevertheless, sincerity does not convert error into doctrine, and enthusiasm does not make an unauthorized claim genuine. **The devil does not need to destroy every church building when he can persuade enough congregations to replace biblical discernment with religious excitement. A counterfeit does not become genuine because the crowd enjoys the performance.** The written word must judge the experience, never the experience the written word.

The matter reaches directly into salvation and assurance, where religious experience has often been substituted for the finished work of Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 15:3–4 establishes the gospel: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares salvation by grace through faith, apart from works. Ephesians 1:13 identifies the believer as sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise after hearing and believing the gospel. First John 5:13 explains that believers may know they have eternal life because of the written testimony concerning the Son of God. These facts must govern faith, and faith must never become dependent upon obtaining a particular emotional sensation. Genuine feelings may accompany conviction, conversion, gratitude, or Christian fellowship, but feelings cannot establish a truth that contradicts Scripture. **A sinner is not saved because he cried enough tears, spoke enough unusual syllables, experienced enough excitement, or impressed enough religious observers. He is saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose finished work requires no improvement from human performance.** The believer's assurance rests upon God's promise, not upon the changing condition of his emotions.

Yet rejecting counterfeit manifestations must never become an excuse for neglecting the spiritual gifts and responsibilities that remain indispensable to Christian service. Romans 12 identifies ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, and showing mercy. First Corinthians 12 includes helps and governments, while Ephesians 4 describes ministers supplied for the perfecting of the saints and the edifying of the body. First Peter 4 commands believers to minister faithfully as stewards of God's grace. These are not unimportant leftovers from a more exciting period of Christian history. They are genuine

responsibilities through which believers strengthen one another and glorify the Lord. The teacher who accurately explains Scripture, the servant who assists a struggling family, the Christian who helps an elderly widow, and the believer who encourages someone enduring affliction may accomplish considerable spiritual good without producing a single spectacular manifestation. **God never instructed the church to despise faithful service merely because it lacks the dramatic appearance of an apostolic miracle. The man carrying groceries to a struggling widow may be doing more useful work than the fellow who needs three microphones to explain how extraordinarily spiritual he has become.** Faithfulness does not require publicity to become valuable before God.

Giving, mercy, and hospitality deserve particular attention because religious ambition has repeatedly corrupted their purposes. Second Corinthians 9:7 declares that God loves a cheerful giver, while Romans 12:8 commands the one giving to do so with simplicity and the one showing mercy to exercise it cheerfully. Christian generosity is not an opportunity to purchase divine favor, secure an impressive position within a congregation, or finance a minister's personal extravagance. Neither is giving an investment formula guaranteeing riches to every person who contributes a particular amount. The Lord has no obligation to make a donor wealthy because somebody behind a pulpit promised an extraordinary financial return. Biblical mercy likewise must remain grounded in truth, refusing to confuse compassion with the encouragement of deliberate irresponsibility or open wickedness. Galatians 6 commands believers to bear one another's burdens while preserving individual accountability. **A cheerful giver does not need a financial guarantee, a merciful Christian does not need an audience, and a faithful servant does not need permission from a religious celebrity to perform an ordinary act of kindness.** Grace produces service without transforming the service into a business arrangement.

The continuing ministries of preaching, teaching, exhortation, and pastoral oversight must likewise remain governed by the written Scriptures. Paul commanded Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). He later commanded, "Preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2). Those responsibilities cannot be fulfilled through motivational speeches that avoid doctrine, public performances that entertain without instruction, or private revelations invented to compensate for insufficient biblical knowledge. The preacher must rightly divide the Scriptures, preserve the distinctions between Israel and the Church, proclaim salvation by grace through faith, establish believers in sound doctrine, and correct error according to God's word. He must recognize that the congregation belongs to Jesus Christ, not to the personality occupying the pulpit. First Peter 5 commands elders to feed the flock without becoming lords over God's heritage, while Acts 20 warns that wolves can arise even from within the leadership itself. **A pastor is supposed to feed the sheep,**

not train them to worship the shepherd. A teacher is supposed to explain the Bible, not convince the audience that his personal opinions deserve equal authority with it. Genuine leadership produces believers capable of standing upon Scripture rather than permanent dependents upon a religious personality.

All these responsibilities return to the great standard of charity. First Corinthians 13 does not define charity as weak sentimental tolerance or the refusal to confront false doctrine. Verse 6 expressly declares that charity "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." Charity suffers long, demonstrates kindness, rejects envy, refuses self-exaltation, and does not behave itself unseemly. It remains patient without excusing wickedness and merciful without abandoning discernment. Galatians 5 identifies love among the fruit of the Spirit while condemning hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, and envyings as works of the flesh. Romans 12 commands sincere love, hatred of evil, brotherly kindness, diligence, hospitality, and practical concern for others. These are not optional decorations upon Christian service. They are the conduct expected of people who belong to Jesus Christ. **A man who claims extraordinary spiritual knowledge while continually demonstrating pride, dishonesty, cruelty, and envy has confused knowing the vocabulary of Christianity with obeying the commandments of Christ.** Charity does not make doctrine unnecessary. It governs the manner in which sound doctrine is lived and communicated.

There is also an approaching examination that ought to discourage every form of religious grandstanding. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." First Corinthians 3:12–15 explains that the believer's work will be tested, and that some labor will endure while other work suffers loss. This examination concerns Christian service, not the loss of eternal salvation secured through the finished work of Christ. Yet it establishes that motives, conduct, and faithfulness matter far more than earthly recognition. First Corinthians 4:5 declares that the Lord will bring hidden things to light and reveal the counsels of the hearts. The world may remember the famous preacher and overlook the elderly believer who quietly labored for decades, but the judgment seat of Christ will not depend upon public records, popularity contests, or promotional advertisements. **Heaven does not require a publicity department to keep accurate accounts. The Lord knows what was done, why it was done, and whether the servant sought His glory or his own.** A religious empire may impress the crowd while producing little that survives divine examination, whereas quiet faithfulness may possess a value that nobody fully recognized on earth.

The believer's future hope also places the entire subject in its proper perspective. Romans 8:23 declares that Christians await "the redemption of our body," while 1 Corinthians 15 explains the future resurrection and transformation into incorruption and immortality. The

saved person has been redeemed through Christ's finished work, sealed with the Holy Spirit, and promised an eternal inheritance, yet he still inhabits a mortal body subject to weakness and suffering. The church therefore does not need to pretend that every believer should enjoy permanent physical health or uninterrupted earthly prosperity. The Lord has promised something far greater than the temporary removal of every present difficulty. Titus 2:13 identifies "that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." The Christian's confidence rests upon what Christ has accomplished and what He has promised to complete. **A faith that depends upon having every present difficulty removed has not yet grasped the greatness of the future redemption purchased at Calvary.** The Lord who saved the soul will fulfill His promise concerning the body, and no spectacular religious performance can improve upon the glory of that coming completion.

When Paul concluded his great discussion of charity, he declared, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (1 Corinthians 13:13). There is the final measure by which the entire discussion must be understood. Faith rests upon the truth God has revealed. Hope looks toward the promises He will fulfill. Charity governs the believer's service and relationships according to the character of the Saviour. These are not substitutes for sound doctrine; they proceed from the truth that doctrine establishes. A Christian who knows the Scriptures should become more faithful in serving, more discerning concerning error, more generous toward genuine needs, more patient with the brethren, and more determined to glorify Jesus Christ. A congregation that possesses remarkable organizational ability but neglects charity has missed the purpose of its service. A preacher who understands difficult doctrines but cannot practice ordinary Christian kindness has demonstrated the difference between possessing knowledge and applying it. **The highest expression of spiritual maturity is not the ability to convince everybody that God has given you something extraordinary. It is the willingness to use whatever God has entrusted to you for His glory and the good of His people.** The gift should direct attention toward the Giver, never compete with Him for recognition.

And so the final verdict is unmistakable. The apostles fulfilled their foundational commission. The supernatural signs authenticated the testimony God appointed them to deliver. The revelatory gifts served their purposes during the establishment of the New Testament church. The written Scriptures remain the believer's final authority, and the Holy Ghost continues His work through the truth He inspired. The church still needs faithful preachers, sound teachers, responsible pastors, diligent servants, cheerful givers, merciful brethren, and Christians who understand that obedience is more important than religious exhibitionism. The counterfeit must be exposed, false doctrine must be corrected, suffering believers must be cared for, and the gospel of grace must be proclaimed without

compromise. Above all, Jesus Christ must receive the glory that belongs to Him alone. **When the religious celebrities have finished performing, the counterfeit prophets have exhausted their announcements, the miracle merchants have counted their offerings, and the applause has finally died away, the word of God will still stand. The finished work of Jesus Christ will still be sufficient. The Holy Ghost will still belong to God rather than to the men who claimed to control Him. And charity will still be the more excellent way. The greatest spiritual gift is not a platform upon which a man can display himself; the proper use of every gift is an opportunity to make much of the Saviour. God never called His people to become spectators in a religious performance. He called them to believe His word, stand upon His truth, serve His body, and glorify His Son. The signs have served their purpose, the foundation has been laid, and the Scriptures have spoken. Now it is time for the church to stop chasing what religion counterfeits and start faithfully practicing what God actually commands. Charity never faileth.**

