

One Body One Spirit

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

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You have chosen a timely topic. The Holy Spirit, his work, and his gifts to the church top the list of topics being discussed and studied in the church of today. The Pentecostal movement, with its exciting growth and its supercharged expansion, claims to be the darling of the Holy Spirit. The Church Growth movement, with its empirical approach to the causes and effects within congregations and denominations, bills itself as the handmaid of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual gifts seminars are flourishing across the country. Scores of books on these subjects are flooding the market. One author, C. Peter Wagner, claims to have read 48 books in preparation for writing his. Frederick Bruner's monumental work, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, contains 34 pages of bibliography.

Why all the interest? I am convinced the interest flows mainly from the crying need in the churches. This need is aptly pictured by McRae:

The church today is like a football game.

Bud Wilkinson, football coach of Oklahoma University before he joined the *President's Physical Fitness Program*, was asked during an interview, "What contribution does professional sport make to the physical fitness of Americans?" To the surprise of no one, he answered, "Very little. A professional football game," he said, "is a happening where 50,000 spectators, desperately needing exercise, sit in the stands watching 22 men on the field desperately needing rest."

That's the typical mid-twentieth century church! A host of spectators, a handful of participants. We flock into our churches by the thousands on Sunday morning to watch the professional perform. If the pro is a real champion, chances are the stands will be packed. If he is a loser, it will probably be a different story.

Here is our dilemma then. Some of us are diligently serving the Lord in ways for which God has not gifted us. The result? Wasted energy. Others of us are spectators in areas for which the Lord has equipped us to be participants. The result? Unused potential.¹

We can certainly identify with that! How many of us have not agonized over the seeming inability of our churches to live up to the challenge of the Gospel? How many times has the pastor heard his members complaining about all the people who aren't "doing anything"? How many of the laity have fretted over the condition in which the church is kept? Something must be done! Are the Gifts of the Holy Spirit the answer? Are spiritual gifts the long-awaited answer to the desperate cries of the saints before the throne of God?

Part One: The Gifts of the Spirit—Their Nature

As we begin our look at spiritual gifts, a number of problems face us. We might acquaint ourselves with them right away.

Problems which face us

The first problem is: How many gifts should we expect? The question really revolves around another question. That is, Shall we limit the number of gifts to those found in the so-called "spiritual gifts"ⁱⁱ passages, or not? Wagner, who does not limit himself to those passages, finds in the New Testament a list of twenty-seven gifts which, he claims, are to be expected in the church.ⁱⁱⁱ Pastor (soon to be Professor) David Valleskey, who

stays within the confines of the passages, limits the number to eighteen.^{iv} This number will be further reduced if we subtract those gifts which are said to have been intended only for the church of the first century.

The second problem is, Should we expect the spiritual gifts in the modern church? Writers on spiritual gifts are divided on this question. One school believes that all twenty-seven gifts are still active in the church of today. The other believes that some of the gifts were temporary in the early church, and that we should not look for them now. The question hinges on a matter of interpretation. Should gifts be taken in the narrow sense or the broad sense? For example, the gift of apostle could mean “one personally chosen and sent out by the Lord Jesus.” Then only the original Twelve plus St. Paul would be included. But, the word apostle could be broadened to mean anyone chosen and sent out by the Lord’s church. Then it would include missionaries and those engaged in missionary work. I am not sure we can settle that question, for the Scriptures’ use of the terms is not consistent.

The third problem is: Should Christians seek to ‘discover’ their gifts? Some who have written on the subject^v strongly advocate that Christians strive to learn what their gifts are. They conduct or encourage seminars and workshops designed for that purpose. They believe that Christians are not likely to know what their gifts are, nor are they fully able to use their gifts, without such an effort. Others^{vi} find it hard to encourage individuals to make a concerted effort to discover their gifts. They believe the New Testament does not encourage this. They also think that there are distinct dangers in doing so. Wagner cites Gene Getz, professor at Dallas Seminary, on the latter position:

Getz’ point of view deserves thoughtful consideration...

in his book, *Building Up One Another*, Getz lists the reasons he rejects the idea of discovering spiritual gifts... Let me summarize them:

1. Confusion. Teaching Christians to discover spiritual gifts they received at conversion has, in fact, caused many people, even mature believers, to become confused.
2. Rationalization. Some tend to fix their attention on a supposed gift and use it as a rationalization for not fulfilling other biblical responsibilities.
3. Self-deception. Some people think they have a spiritual gift when they really don’t.

Getz is strong on this teaching because, as he says, “it suddenly dawned on me one day” that nowhere in 1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12, or Eph. 4 “can we find any exhortation for individual Christians to ‘look for’ or to ‘try to discover’ their spiritual gift or gifts.”^{vii}

The fourth problem is: How much emphasis should we place on this doctrine? There is no doubt that we can call spiritual gifts a doctrine. It is taught in four distinct places in the New Testament. It is referred to in dozens of other places. It is a doctrine; therefore it cannot safely be ignored. Nor do we wish to imply that it has been ignored in the past. R. C. H. Lenski, in his exhaustive commentary on the New Testament treated 1 Corinthians 12-14 with a proportional amount of space.^{viii} Yet the interest and excitement that have been generated in churchdom by the recent flurry of writing and discussing are rivaled by few other subjects. Are we behind the times, needing to get in step? Or are others just following a fad, a wisp of hope that will soon dissipate? Perhaps the proper course lies somewhere between the two. These are some of the problems that face us in our discussion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Getting Acquainted with the Gifts

Now let’s get acquainted with the spiritual gifts. In the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses two different expressions for gifts. In v. 1 he says: “Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.” Here his term is the Greek ‘*pneumatikos*’, literally “spirituals”, ‘spiritual things’. The word ‘gifts’ is not an inherent part of the term in the original. Seeing this some^{ix} have insisted that Paul is not yet thinking about gifts from the Holy Spirit. They think he is calling attention to the general lack of true spirituality in

Corinth. in their view he is opening these chapters in this vein: “You Corinthians think you are spiritual—more spiritual than some others. Let me tell you about real spirituality—the kind that comes from the, Holy Spirit.”

Whether or not Paul had ‘gifts’ in mind with the first term he used is difficult to prove. But it is plain that he did with the second. In v. 4 he says: “There are different kinds of gifts.” This is Paul’s own word. We know of one other use of it in the New Testament (1 Peter 4:10) and one outside the New Testament (Philo). Otherwise it is all Paul. And that is no surprise. The word is ‘charisma’ a derivative of ‘*charis*’, ‘grace.’ The whole concept of God’s grace and gracious gifts swirled in Paul’s fertile mind, causing ideas to germinate which have born fruit in the church ever since. With this word ‘gracious gifts’ Paul sets the tone of the whole section. Standing alone it is rich enough! Even if he were not thinking of ‘gifts’ in connection with his first term, the second would be enough to occupy us here.

To clarify our discussion of spiritual gifts we need to make some distinctions. First, we should not confuse the gifts of the Spirit with the gift of the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is faith in Jesus Christ. Every Christian has this gift. By this gift every Christian is a member of the body of Christ. Paul says in 1 Cor 12:3: “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord.’ except by the Holy Spirit.” The gifts of the Spirit are given to all Christians, but each Christian does not have all of them. They have a common source, but they are given in great variety. “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all people,” says the Apostle (1 Cor. 12:4-6).

Second, we should distinguish between spiritual gifts and natural talents. Both Christians and non-Christians have natural talents, but only people whom the Holy Spirit has united to Christ by faith have spiritual gifts. To further confuse things, our language has begun to attach the adjective ‘charismatic’ to people who have certain natural talents. Sometimes these people are not Christians. Language has the right to do that, of course, but how ironic that Paul’s ‘special’ word now loses its distinction! After a person has become a Christian, natural talents can be used in harmony with spiritual gifts.

Third, we should note a difference between gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit. All Christians are expected to produce the fruit of the Spirit. As the apple tree is expected to bear apples, so Christians can be expected to bear the love, joy, peace, and other fruits of the Spirit as listed in Gal. 5:22-23. But Christians are not expected to have gifts of the Spirit except the specific ones they have been granted. Paul’s imagery of the parts in the body, which we will have opportunity to explore later, makes that abundantly clear.

Fourth, we should distinguish between the Christian’s gifts and the Christian’s responsibilities. Valleskey points out, “All Christians have the responsibility to serve, exhort, teach, give, witness, etc. But to some the Holy Spirit gives a special aptitude (charisma) for exhortation, teaching, giving, witnessing, etc.”^x In a previous quote we heard of Getz’ concern that a wrong emphasis on gifts might actually cause a Christian to neglect responsibilities because he is not ‘gifted’ for them.

Perhaps a definition is in order. McRae offers this: “What then is a spiritual gift? Simply stated: it is a divine endowment of a special ability for service upon a member of the body of Christ.”^{xi}

Which are these gifts? They are listed in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. We begin with the lists in Corinthians. The first comes early in the twelfth chapter (12:7-11): “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another the ability to speak in different kinds of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”

Paul starts with an emphasis on the spoken word, the “message (word) of wisdom” and the “message (word) of knowledge.” it is difficult to make an exact distinction between the terms ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge’. Perhaps one is theoretical wisdom and the other practical knowledge. That seems to be Valleskey’s view.^{xii} It is difficult to prove that Paul is here listing gifts in a descending order of importance, though many interpreters

make that point. But, as we will see in chapter 14, Paul certainly did stress the so-called ‘speaking gifts’ among the Corinthians. For the Corinthian congregation, as well as for ours, these gifts are needed.

The third gift Paul mentions is faith. This term needs comment. Of course, faith is a gift that every Christian has. When ‘faith’ is used in this sense, we are speaking of ‘saving faith’, the faith without which no one can be saved. That, too, is the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit. No one speaks more plainly on that than Paul. But in this context, in a listing of gifts which are given “to one ... and to another”, it must mean something different. Stedman says: “What Paul means here is essentially what we call the gift of vision.”^{xiii} He believes that God has given to certain individuals the ability to form a vision of the way things should be in the church, and to believe that it can be accomplished. Lenski, taking his cue from Jesus who said a little faith can move mountains (Matt. 17:20f) and from Paul in the next chapter (1 Cor. 13:2) prefers to see faith in this context as ‘miracle-working’ faith.^{xiv} The two are not real really so far apart. Anyone who plays host to visions about the way the church should be must believe in miracles!

Two more gifts involving extraordinary powers are next—“gifts of healing” and “miraculous powers.” The gift of healing was a fairly common gift in the early church. We see it often in the New Testament. Miraculous powers also were bestowed upon the church. These two will be included when we discuss the duration of certain gifts later.

Next Paul returns to gifts that have to do with speaking: “prophecy,” “distinguishing between spirits,” “tongues,” and “interpretation of tongues.” These, too, come under the question: How many of the gifts in the early church can still be expected today? If we take them in their narrow sense, then we would have to understand prophecy as direct revelations from God to individuals, distinguishing between spirits as the supernatural ability to know whether an invisible spirit is an angel or a devil, tongues^{xv} as the sudden ability to speak in a language never before learned, and interpretation of tongues as the sudden ability to translate tongues. If we follow the narrow sense, two courses are open to us. Either these gifts, and some others, must be seen as having passed away from the church, or the claims of the Pentecostals must be taken more seriously. However, some prefer to take these terms in a broader sense. Then we could understand prophecy as the ability to proclaim the word of God in an intelligible manner, distinguishing between spirits as the gift for testing the truth or error of what another says, tongues as the ability to learn other languages and use them for the church, and interpretation of tongues as the gift for translating from one language into another.

Frankly, I find this question to be a knotty one. The books are full of lengthy arguments, each taking a firm position. I lean toward the view that certain gifts were intended for use only in the early church. (This is a change from what I once wrote in the *Northwestern Lutheran*.) But more on that at the proper time.

Let’s move on to the second listing of gifts in 1 Corinthians (12:28-31). Paul uses the verb ‘Place, establish, appoint.’ “In the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts.” This list repeats some of the items from the earlier one. Additions are the gifts of apostle, teacher, one able to help others (lit. “helps”), and ‘administration.’

Two of the new terms have roots in the nautical language of classical Greek. An ‘*apostolos*’ was a vessel sent on a mission. Then it came to mean a person sent as an envoy. Hence our meaning, one called and sent

on behalf of the Lord. In the narrow sense it would be any of the original apostles of the Lord Jesus. In the broad sense it could be anyone, such as a missionary, sent out in the name of the Lord and his church. The other nautical term is ‘administration.’ The helmsman of the vessel, who set the course of the ship and steered her through the shoals, was the ‘administrator’. Certain individuals have this God-given gift of leadership, for steering the church on a course that will cause her to arrive at her port.

The gift of teacher is an important Biblical word. The rabbis were called teachers. John the Baptist was considered a teacher. Jesus was addressed as Teacher. Imparting knowledge to others in a somewhat formal

setting is the scene that is pictured with the word 'teacher' in the original. Our English word 'didactic' comes from the Greek root. The remaining new term in this section is, literally, 'helps'. It comes from the verb 'to take someone's part, to come to the aid of.' Those to whom this gift is given are ones who appear at your side when aid is needed. They see your plight, sympathize with you, and help.

My assignment is Corinthians 12 - 14, but I think it will be good to look briefly at the gifts which are found in other books. First there is Romans 12:6-8: "We have different gifts according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully." A number of these are different from the gifts we saw in 1 Cor. 12. Serving, encouraging, contributing, leadership, and showing mercy are all different words. However, 'encouraging' here in Romans and 'helps' in 1 Cor are similar, as are 'leadership' and 'administration'. 'Serving' is the ability to work under the direction of someone else, as the deacons did in the early church (Acts 6). 'Encouraging' comes from a beautiful New Testament word. It means to stand at the side of someone, to help, comfort, advise, counsel. It is used of Jesus, of the Holy Spirit (another Counselor), and of any person who has the gift of exhorting and encouraging others. 'Contributing' is the special gift that some seem to have been given. They are glad to dig deep, to give up things for themselves, so that they may give for others. 'Showing mercy' is the ability to forget about one's own needs while identifying with the pain and troubles of others, to lend a sympathetic and helping hand.

Only two short lists remain. One is in Ephesians 4:7,11: "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it...it was he who gave saw to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers." There are two terms here which we have not seen before. One is 'evangelist', the one who has the gift to proclaim the Good News, the evangel. Someone may say in surprise, "But I thought every Christian is supposed to be an evangelist." Every Christian is an evangelist in the sense that every Christian is a 'witness' (Acts 1:8). But only some Christians have the spiritual gift of evangelism, the ability to present the Gospel clearly to an unbeliever. The other new term here is 'pastors and teachers'. The wording of the original indicates that this is one office, not two. Some try to show this by hyphenation (pastor-teacher). The term is made up of a word we saw already in 1 Corinthians and a new one, "pastor," which is the Greek word for "shepherd."

The last section is valuable for two reasons. One, it is the only one not written by Paul, and two, it gives us a handy classification of gifts into speaking and serving categories. It is recorded in 1 Peter 4 (10-11): "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides." The section is short, but it is clear that Peter, the apostle who walked with Jesus, is in agreement on the subject of spiritual gifts with Paul, who was called to the apostolate later. Peter even uses Paul's word, 'charisma,' 'grace-gifts,' and, like Paul, sees the possession of spiritual gifts as a product of God's grace.

A Closer Look

Now that we have glanced at the gifts in their immediate context, it is time to take a closer look at them in their broader context. Paul was addressing the Corinthian congregation. What was the problem there? This is not the easiest question to answer. Chapter twelve seems to indicate an elitism among them. It seems to say, "Don't you realize, Corinthians, that you are abusing your giftedness? The possession of gifts makes you think you have attained a higher level of Christianity than others. Why? The same Spirit has bestowed gifts upon you as on them. You are members of the same body with them. How foolish for some members of a body to think that they are more honorable than others in the same body. What is more, you are not even desiring the higher gifts!"

Chapter thirteen points to a loveless use of gifts among the Corinthians. Didn't they know that the blessing of gifts is nothing if they are not used in love? Tongues, prophecy, miracle-working faith, generous giving—what are they worth if not used in love? Love alone is lasting; gifts will pass away.

Chapter fourteen expands on what seems to be the primary error of the Corinthians—their self-oriented use of the Spirit's gifts. They played down the importance of gifts that can build up Christians and reach out to unbelievers, while priding themselves on possessing gifts that are able to do neither. They elevated tongues, which do not edify, but neglected prophecy, which can communicate intelligent ideas.

In addition to these hints from within the context, Richards cites evidence from history that the Corinthians had come from a culture which placed a religious premium on ecstatic symptoms. He claims: "Epilepsy was known as the 'divine disease,' and the oracle at Delphi would breathe -in fumes and under their influence babble statements priests interpreted as the revelation of Apollo."^{xvi} How easily such people might be led to believe that ecstasy was godly!

It seems that the Corinthians had fallen into that error which keeps cropping up in the church—dividing Christians into two groups. It takes many forms. Sometimes it comes as a result of a denomination's doctrinal stance. In Pentecostalism, for example, the two groups consist of those who have received 'partial salvation' through 'mere water baptism' and of those who have received 'the baptism in the Holy Spirit'. Or, among many fundamentalists, the two groups consist of 'Christians' and 'born-again Christians'. At other times this distinction of groups in Christianity comes as a result of personal pride, though the denomination's doctrinal stance may not promote it. Among us, for example, the division could manifest itself in a tendency to label fellow Christians as 'doers' or 'non-doers' in the local church. Or, as some writers on spiritual gifts fear, it could surface in the grouping of Christians as 'those who have discovered their spiritual gifts' and 'those who have not.' I have heard my father refer to this tendency among Christians as 'religious snob appeal'. His term describes the symptoms perfectly, but I suppose the word 'elitism' is less inflammatory.

This weakness seems to be what Paul was treating in our chapters of 1 Corinthians. It explains his emphasis on "one body," "one Spirit," and "one baptism." Bruner has caught this:

Then we come to the important thirteenth verse (chap. 12). Here Paul comes closer to saying "baptism in the Holy Spirit" than anywhere else in his letters (he, like the other New Testament writers, nowhere uses the phrase itself)... Paul wishes to stress again the oneness of Christians in the present context. How may Paul now demonstrate the real unity of Christians to a church threatening to splinter apart into "the Spiritual" and "the Christian" as though the two were distinct?...If this verse is interpreted as speaking of a second, subsequent, and separate baptism in the Holy Spirit, beyond baptism in Christ, for only some Christians, then violence is done not only to the words of the text—"all ... all" - but to the purpose of the text in its Corinthian context. The burden of Paul's message is the oneness of all the baptized in Christ Jesus... All Christians are baptized by the one Spirit, Paul insists, "into one body." There are not two Christian bodies: one into which all name-Christians are baptized 'in water,' another into which all deeper believers are baptized 'in the Spirit.'^{xvii}

In contrast to the pride which was surfacing in the lives and attitudes of the Corinthians, Paul emphasized the grace of God. The gifts themselves are '*charismata*', 'grace gifts.' The distribution of them is not on the basis of individual merit but on the basis of God's gracious choosing. "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each One, just as he determines," says the apostle (1 Cor. 12:11). And again, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though at its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor. 12:12-13). In addition Paul points out that the gifts are useless unless they are used in love (chap. 13). The word for 'love' is 'agape', a word that breathes grace. It is the kind of love God had for us when we were unloveable.

The 'grace alone' issue had to be hammered out in the early church. At the council in Jerusalem Peter championed it (Acts 15:1-29). Bruner's words on this are of value for us at this point:

Peter's final words are: "But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (v. 11). Grace is everything, and only where grace is everything is there a gospel at all... it is through grace that we believe, as every Christian knows. And salvation—not just 'partial salvation,' as if there ever were such a creature; but the one salvation, the only salvation there is—is a result of the faith which comes through grace. So rich and so complete, and so now completed, is Peter's exposition of the gospel. Peter slips away now from the history of Acts entirely, but these his final words are among the clearest in the whole of the New Testament in their illumination of the gift of God.^{xviii}

Paul cared for the Corinthians too much to abandon them to their errors. He felt compelled to bring them out of their self-centeredness. They were thinking like children, who think only of the new treasure they possess and disregard the love and generosity of the one who gave it. This tendency in children is probably what Paul had in mind when he said (1 Cor. 14:20): "Stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be children, but in your thinking be adults." He longed to help them focus on the Lord's grace rather than their possessing of gifts. That meant shifting their sights from their gifts to their giftedness. This may seem like a fine point, but it is crucial. It is one of the most important points in this whole discussion.

The still broader context of the New Testament era sheds even more light on the subject of spiritual gifts, especially in regard to the question: How many of the gifts should we expect to find active in the church of today? Our three chapters do not help us with that question as much as we might wish. In 1 Cor. 13:8 Paul says: "Where there are prophecies; they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away." But neither this passage nor its immediate context indicate when this passing away will take place. In chapter fourteen Paul acknowledges that tongues and prophecy were still present in the church and gives no hint of their passing away during his lifetime.

There are two major schools of thought on this question. One, that certain of the gifts of the Spirit, by the Lord's own design, passed out of the picture at the end of the New Testament era; the other, that none of the gifts have ceased except where the church has neglected to seek them. The second is held mainly by those of Pentecostal persuasion, the first is held by most evangelicals.

McRae speaks for the evangelicals:

Some gifts are temporary, others are permanent...True, there is no clear text which states that there are temporary and permanent gifts. Worse still, there is no list that separates the permanent from the temporary. But the distinction does seem to be valid. Five lines of evidence lead to this conclusion.^{xix}

Let me summarize his five lines of evidence.

1. The evidence of the New Testament Writers. He cites 1 Cor. 13:8-13, taking the position that Paul is here saying that certain gifts will cease soon. He cites also Hebrews 2:3-4: "This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." In my opinion this passage is the more convincing of the two for the point he wants to make. It is too difficult to prove that the Corinthian passage is referring to a cessation before the day of judgment. But this passage is more clearly speaking about the period in the early church when confirmation of the Gospel message was needed.
2. The evidence of Old Testament history. Miraculous gifts were part of the Old Testament scene on only two occasions. One came with Moses, the other with Elijah and Elisha. The next outbreak came with Jesus and the Apostles.^{xx}

3. The evidence of the book of Acts. The purpose of miraculous gifts is suggested in Hebrews 2:3-4. The key word is *'bebaioo,'* to 'confirm, establish.' "Miraculous gifts appear on the biblical scene only during periods of prophecy and/or new revelation. **With the close of the canon of Scripture, the completion of the New Testament revelation, we would therefore expect a cessation of miraculous gifts**" (emphasis added).
4. The evidence of church history. After the age of the Apostles, tongues virtually drop from the scene. The reformers did not encourage a return to tongues when they were restoring the church to its apostolic roots.
5. The evidence of the nature of some gifts. For example, the gift of apostle was for that one period in history.^{xxi}

A third school might be the Church Growth Movement, which holds that all of the gifts are still active. But that is based on the broad interpretation of the terms, allowing for a less-than-miraculous manifestation of the gifts. For example, if a person has a gift with languages, Church Growth people would say he has the spiritual gift of tongues. Or, if a person excels in the medical field, he might be said to possess the spiritual gift of healing.

Listing the Spiritual Gifts

Perhaps it would be helpful now to list the gifts of the Holy Spirit. One way to list them is to divide them into the two categories St. Peter offers (1 Pet. 4:10):

SPEAKING	SERVING
Prophesying	Giving
Apostleship	Administration
Teaching	Mercy
Pastor-teacher	Faith (vision)
Evangelism	Healing
Exhortation	Miracles
Tongues	Helping
Interpretation	
Discerning of spirits	
Message of wisdom/knowledge	

Another way to list the gifts, showing a different set of categories, is as follows:

TEMPORARY	
FOUNDATIONAL	CONFIRMATORY
1. Apostleship	6. Miracles
2. Prophesying	7. Healings
3. Discerning of spirits	8. Tongues
4. Word of Wisdom	9. Interpretation of Tongues
5. Word of knowledge	
PERMANENT	
1. Faith	6. Giving
2. Teaching	7. Mercy
3. Helps	8. Evangelism
4. Administration	9. Pastor-teacher
5. Exhortation	

I find myself in basic agreement with the above lists, with the possible exception of prophesying. I have wrestled with this matter. All of the arguments for including prophesying under the heading of foundational

gifts are weighty ones. But there are two reasons why I am inclined to think that at least this gift should be understood in its broader sense. One is expressed well by Lenski:

‘Prophecy’ is used to designate the gift or the office of a prophet. In Rom.12: 6 it is mentioned together with two other gifts. This term is used in a double sense: broadly to indicate any and all ability to communicate the saving will of God to others so that every true teacher and preacher may be called a prophet; and more narrowly to designate the receiving and the communicating of direct and specific messages from God. The apostles were prophets in both senses of the term. Their regular assistants were prophets in the former sense. Agabus, Acts 11:28-31, and Philip’s daughters, Acts 21:9, were prophets in the latter sense.^{xxii}

The other reason why I am inclined to take prophecy in its broader sense is found in one of our chapters, I Corinthians fourteen. There Paul places prophecy on a high plane, as we will see later. As I read that chapter, I find it hard to imagine that the gift of prophecy, so useful to the church, would pass out of existence. The ability to utter intelligible speech to God’s people is timeless. No wonder Paul said (1 Cor. 14:19): “In the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.”

Some scholars, especially in the Church Growth Movement, include other gifts on the list. I follow the view that they should not be included because we do not find them listed in the primary ‘spiritual gifts passages’ (see note 2). You may be interested to know what they are, however. They follow:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Celibacy (1 Cor. 7:7) | Martyrdom (1 Cor. 13:3) |
| Hospitality (1 Pet. 4:9) | Missionary (Gal. 1:16) |
| Intercession (James 5:14f) | Voluntary |
| Exorcism (Matt. 10:1) | Poverty (1 Cor.13:3) |

Pentecostalism

Before we move on to the second major division of this study we should pause to nail down a few points regarding Pentecostalism. Pentecostals would probably disagree with virtually every point we have discussed so far. Perhaps it would be pleasant to simply dismiss them without further ado. But the movement is so strong and is gaining such a grip on American churchdom, that it would not be wise to pass over their claims without comment.

This section could easily be expanded to a full essay, yes, to a large book. So it will be necessary to be brief. The Pentecostal, or Neo-Pentecostal, movement is gradually assuming the name ‘charismatic.’ Perhaps that is because of the adverse associations many have with the word ‘Pentecostal.’ Or, perhaps that is because of a special affinity for the word that St. Paul loved so much. But, as Bruner says, “Behind all these names stands the same central reality: the Pentecostal... experience of the Holy Spirit in a life- and speech-transforming event in the career of the Christian.”^{xxiii} The Pentecostal has strong feelings on the subject of spiritual gifts:

The Pentecostal places unusual stress upon the gifts of the Spirit and particularly upon the gifts discussed in 1 Cor. 12 to 14. He believes that the spiritual gifts should be taken with their deserved seriousness and he finds in their full restoration the return of the church to its early power. But he holds that the gifts were never really suspended, only the infidelity of the church occasioned the gifts’ eclipse and made them appear to have been suspended or superseded... in the Pentecostal movement, it is averred, God is showing what he can do with a church that recognizes and exercises the gifts of the Spirit.^{xxiv}

When the Pentecostal reads Acts he senses power, the power of the Spirit at work. When he looks at the contemporary church, he sees a lack of such power. He believes that he has found the source of power again. He calls it the 'baptism in the Holy Spirit.' He believes this baptism is the only hope for pulling the church out of its doldrums. The Pentecostal tends to make a distinction between the Christian who has received the Holy Spirit and the one who has not. Bruner says:

While it is granted that all believers are somehow, or in a sense, indwelt by the Spirit, or are at the very least affected by him, it is usually felt by Pentecostals that not all believers are (1) permanently, (2) personally, or (3) fully indwelt by the Holy Spirit until they have experienced the Pentecostal baptism in the Holy Spirit.^{xxv}

Pentecostals vary widely in their beliefs, particularly since it is the 'experience,' not the 'doctrine' that holds significance for them. But in one area they have almost unanimous agreement:

"The distinct doctrine of the Pentecostal churches," writes Donald Gee, "(is) that speaking with tongues is the 'initial evidence' of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This article of belief is now incorporated in the official doctrinal schedules of practically all Pentecostal denominations." "Of practically all," it must be said, for there appears to be here and there... a certain hesitation in allowing tongues-speaking the spiritual baptism's only initial evidence.^{xxvi}

In other words, unless you have spoken in tongues, you have not been fully indwelt by the Holy Spirit, nor can you have any confidence that you possess any of the other of his gifts. This results, among Pentecostals, in an almost frantic desire to obtain the gift of tongues. Of course it does, for who would want to go through life as a second-class Christian?

Carefully devised 'systems' for guaranteeing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit have cropped up among them. They vary greatly. But, in general, they require the person who desires the gift of tongues to 1) be converted, 2) wait in full obedience to the will of God, and 3) have faith that the Holy Spirit will come as promised. If the gift of tongues does not come, it must be that the conditions were not met—conversion not real, the obedience not complete enough, or the faith not genuine. If the gift of tongues does come, it is then very difficult for the recipient to avoid the feeling that somehow it was his or her effort that brought it about.

In response to this brief statement of the claims of Pentecostalism, let me share with you this selection from Bruner:

The absence (in Acts) of the seeking of the speaking in tongues is significant.^{xxvii}

This (Acts 1:5) is the first announcement of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts. Had there been a wish to generate a fuller participation by the apostles (or future readers) in the procuring of the coming gift we may have expected a teaching with more challenge, or an invitation with several conditions. Sitting is not the posture **of heroes** (emphasis added). The command to remain in Jerusalem could have been supplemented in Luke's record with instructions on how to wait, how best to fill the time while waiting, or with requisite obedience in prayer and devotional exercise. But we have no account of these; only the quiet "wait," "remain," "sit"... There is no record in Acts of any believer in a group of believers failing to receive (or partly receiving) the promised Holy Spirit when he descended. The Holy Spirit comes as inclusively as he does unconditionally. Both belong to his character as gift.^{xxviii}

It appears to be historically true that every supplement to faith has within, itself the almost irresistible tendency of becoming eventually a specific advancement beyond faith and thus to become inevitably the goal of a new spirituality of a purportedly higher Christian type. Faith itself then becomes but a step in

the right direction. In a word, the supplement ‘and’ is pregnant with the ineluctable tendency to become the central ‘more’.^{xxix}

Part Two: The Gifts of the Spirit—Used for the Body

As we have seen, there is much disagreement in the church regarding the nature of the Holy Spirit’s gifts. I hope we have helped, amid the confusion, to show what the mind of Paul was on the nature of the gifts. I also hope we have begun to attain a clearer understanding of the gifts for our own use. Paul went far beyond the merely theoretical. In the three chapters of 1 Corinthians which are the primary basis for our study he has much to say about the practical use of the spiritual gifts. This is now the focus of the second part of this paper.

The Purpose of the Gifts

In general Paul teaches that gifts are given for the common good. “Now to each am the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” (1 Cor. 12:7) in saying that Paul had two emphases in mind. One is his stress on the unity of the church. We find this in the verses preceding v. 7: “..the same Spirit, ...the same Lord, ... the same God works all of them in all people” (1 Cor. 12:4-6). He also gives expression to this emphasis in vv.12-27 in his graphic illustration of the church as a body, which he begins very carefully with the words: “The body is a unit.... the parts form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (Cor. 12:12-13). So then, it is plain that Paul wants us to realize all through this discussion that the purpose of the gifts must be found in the unity of the body of Christ.

At the same time, Paul places another emphasis before us. Within the unity of the body, he sees a marvelous diversity. Again we find this stressed in the verses preceding v.7: “There are different kinds of gifts... There are different kinds of service... There are different kinds of working...” (1 Cor. 12:4-6). This second emphasis is also found in his illustration of the body: “The body ... is made up of many parts; ... and all its parts are many” (1 Cor. 12:12).

As we reflect on this diversity within unity, we come to several conclusions about spiritual gifts. One, they are given only to members of the body of Christ, to Christians. There may be a similarity between the natural talents of unbelievers and the spiritual gifts of believers, but the unbeliever’s natural talents do not yet have the purpose of serving the common good of Christ’s body. Two, the spiritual gifts are given to every Christian. Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. There is no Christian who need fear that he or she has been left out. Every Christian has saw gift to contribute to the ‘common good.’ And three, the spiritual gifts are given on an individual basis.

Kent Hunter is a Lutheran pastor who has adopted principles of the Church Growth Movement. Before he started his own institute, in which he works full-time, he led a church which called a full-time ‘minister of spritual gifts.’ He says:

Spiritual gifts (are) God’s way for the members of the body to find where they ‘fit in’ with the Body of Christ. It is God’s way of equipping the church to complete the Great Commission... First, every Christian has a ministry to perform. Second, every person is given that ministry by the Holy Spirit. Third, every ministry is different. Fourth, the Spirit gives every person a gift for the common good.^{xxx}

People who have done research in the field of spiritual gifts are convinced that most Christians have more than one gift. Wagner states his opinion on this:

Many Christians are multi-gifted. How many are, I do not know. This is a fascinating subject waiting for further research. But I would suspect that probably the majority or perhaps all Christians have what we could call a “gift-mix” instead of a single gift. Given the variety of gifts, the degrees of giftedness in each case, and the multiple ministries through which each gift can be exercised, the combination of

these qualities that I have given may be the most important factor in determining our spiritual personalities.^{xxx1}

In chapter 12 Paul states the general purpose of the gifts for the common good. In chapter 14 he addresses their particular purpose—for edification. He expresses this narrowed-down purpose in the opening verses: “Follow the way of love and early desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.” (1 Cor. 14:1-4).

Bruner states:

It appears in this chapter that Paul sees the highest expression of spiritual gifts in the free, helpful discussion of Christians together and their contribution in thoughtful speech to each other. (It is, in fact, our impression that expressions such as ‘thoughtful speech,’ ‘testimony,’ or even ‘counsel’ better translate the word rendered now somewhat archaically ‘prophesy.’)

Paul, however, favorably contrasts intelligible testimony to unintelligible tongues: “Everyone who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.” This important sentence defines prophecy. ‘Upbuilding’ then becomes the theme of this chapter. As the undivided Godhead is the source of the graces (ch.12), and as love is their manner (ch.13), so upbuilding is their goal (ch.14). In Paul’s thought the ultimate criterion for a gift of the Spirit is this: Does it upbuild the church?

Two facts must be kept in mind in order to be fair to Paul’s representation of the tongues problem. There apparently was a gift of tongues and Paul did not despise it. While significant curbs and regulations for the use of the gift will be observed, Paul did not deny that speaking in tongues was a gift. The second fact... is that he not only neglected expressly to urge that tongues be sought, he diplomatically substituted alternative goals of seeking. He urged seeking ‘the higher gifts’ in chapter twelve, love in chapter thirteen, and testimony in chapter fourteen.^{xxxii}

Apparently the Corinthians had some difficulty in following these stated purposes for the spiritual gifts. Instead of seeing them as having been given for the common good, there seems to have been among them a tendency to glorify themselves for having them in their possession. We spoke of this earlier when we discussed the nature of the spiritual gifts as “grace-gifts.”

In addition, the Corinthians seem to have elevated some gifts above others. Not only does Paul see this as contrary to the purpose for which the gifts were given, but he also suggests that they had elevated the wrong gifts. As we said before, some feel that Paul’s lists of gifts in 1 Cor. 12:8-10 and 28-31 are arranged in a descending order of importance, and that Paul did so consciously. In chapter 14 he did not score the use of tongues as being wrong—How they would have rebelled at that!--but he quietly played down their importance (‘I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct than ten thousand words in a tongue.’). Perhaps his gentle way of saying it was more effective than a thorough denunciation of tongues would have been.

Using the Spiritual Gifts

The three chapters in 1 Corinthians serve as an outline for Paul’s teaching on using the spiritual gifts. The twelfth chapter, especially the long section comparing the church to a body, teaches that the gifts are to be used within the Body of Christ. His argument follows along three lines.

First, as gifts are used within the body, no believer should feel insignificant. No gift has been given without an important purpose in the sight of him who assembled the body in divine wisdom. As the foot should not feel inferior because it is not a hand, and as the ear should not feel short-changed because it is not an eye, so each Christian should realize that he or she has been gifted by the Spirit to play a vital part in the operation of the

Body of Christ. Paul says: “if the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them. Just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body” (1 Cor. 12:17-20). Bruner states: “In any living body there are ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ parts, or better, more or less prominent organs; but these differences in a single body, particularly in Christ’s single body, are purely functional. They are not qualitative or ‘spiritual.’ No part should feel either inferior or superior.”^{xxxiii} Many Christians suffer from the feeling that they are insignificant. They need the assurance that God has a role for them to play in the Body of Christ. They would not be in the Body if this were not so.

Second, as gifts are used within the body, no believer should feel his or her gifts are superior to those of another. Paul says with humor:

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ On the contrary those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor... But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other” (1 Cor. 12:21-25). He concludes this thought with a most telling remark: Off one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). If some Christians have too low an opinion of their gifts, causing them to depend too much on the gifts of others to carry on the work of the body, some others have too high an opinion of their gifts, causing them to despise what others may contribute to the work of the body.

Third, as gifts are used within the body, each believer should remember that he or she possesses gifts which are different from those of others. Paul says: “(The Spirit) gives (gifts) to each one just as he determines... Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?” (1 Cor 12:11,29-30) If Christians will remember this, it will help them to be more patient with fellow Christians who have different gifts, to be more appreciative of gifts they themselves do not possess, and to be more eager to bring more gifts into play within the body by working closely with other Christians.

The thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians is a very special chapter, which, standing alone, could be the basis for a convention essay. It is our intention to touch on it just enough to catch Paul’s train of thought in connection with spiritual gifts. In this chapter he teaches that the spiritual gifts should be used in love. His thought actually begins with the last words of chapter 12: “And now I will show you the most excellent way.” Lawrence Richards writes:

Paul now inserts his famous hymn to love as the “more excellent way. His argument is not that gifts or their expression in the body are inferior. His point is that if one is to seek a measure for true spirituality, evidence should not be looked for in the particular kind of gift an individual may have. Instead, evidence may be looked for in the love expressed in an individual’s gift. Love is one of the never-failing evidences of the Spirit’s work in the believer. Without love, such gifts as tongues, prophecy, and faith, and such works as giving all to the poor, are empty and meaningless. ...in the body of Christ functioning in unity is made possible by the Spirit’s great fruit of love.”^{xxxiv}

In the first part of the chapter Paul points out that it is love that fixes value to the gifts of the Spirit. He says: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding going or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor. 13:1-3). If love is absent, even the gifts of the Holy Spirit lose their value.

In the second part of the chapter Paul shows how love behaves. People who are using their spiritual gifts, of necessity must interact with other people. That is when love is needed. Paul writes: “Love is patient,

love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1 Cor. 13:4-7). If love is present, it is like oil in a complex engine, it allows the different parts to do their assigned tasks with a minimum of friction.

In the third part of the chapter Paul teaches that love outlasts the gifts of the Spirit. Love is needed in the church on earth, and it will last into eternity. Gifts are needed in the church, but they will cease at some point in time. Therefore, to use gifts without love would be to choose a poor set of priorities. He says: “Love never falls. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away (1 Cor. 13:8). If love be compared to gifts, love should have priority.

The fourteenth chapter teaches that spiritual gifts should be used in service to the body, for edifying, building up, the Body of Christ. Servanthood is a difficult concept to instill. This goes back to the disciples of our Lord. Richards comments:

The New Testament reveals dimensions of a servant ministry. We see clearly what was only intimated in the Old Testament the Servant of God Himself. This servant attitude was reflected in everything Jesus did, and especially in the way he reached out in compassion to those in need. It was reflected in his ultimate self-giving, foreshadowed by the portrait of the cross in Isaiah 53.

The disciples were never too comfortable with Jesus’ servant approach to life. They knew who he was, the Son of God, so when he chose to take a Servant posture among them they were embarrassed. This embarrassment was brought into focus by an act of Jesus at the Last Supper... What Jesus did was both symbolic and didactic. His actions graphically symbolized his whole approach to ministry.^{xxxv}

Richards further claims that to the Greeks, becoming a servant was repulsive. Freedom was their most prized right. Paul’s teaching about servanthood flew in the face of some of their most fundamental values. In the fourteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians we can see Paul’s beliefs regarding the role of Christians as servants. A Christian should use his spiritual gifts as a servant. To this end the Christian has been gifted by the Holy Spirit.

As we noticed earlier, the Corinthians had a self-centered view of their gifts, especially the gift of tongues. It made them feel ‘soooo spiritual.’ Without degrading their gift of tongues, Paul turns them to think of themselves as servants. In effect he asks: in what way does the gift of tongues serve? He begins the chapter: “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.” Why prophecy? “For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy.” (Cor. 14:1-6a)

In the following section the Apostle expands that point. In v. 9 he says: “Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying?” In v. 12 he adds: “Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.”

Then the Apostle launches into a very persuasive section. In the interest of serving others, the gift of tongues should be restrained. That is because unbelievers from the outside will be turned away by tongues. He writes: “Tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers” (1 Cor. 14:22a). Paul shows that he meant the phrase “tongues are a sign” in the negative sense by quoting from Isaiah (28:11-12): “Through men of strange tongues... I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me.” Then he continues: “Prophecy however, is for believers not unbelievers” (1 Cor. 14:22b). What is Paul’s point? It is a very important point: “if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’” (1 Cor. 14:23-25) This evangelistic argument shows the servant

quality in the use of gifts. How can one person serve another better than to bring him or her to the conviction that they are sinners and that they have a Savior in Jesus?

Those who possess spiritual gifts should be willing to restrain their use of gifts also in the interest of orderly worship. Those with the gift of tongues are not serving others if they ramble on without an interpreter. If there is no interpreter, there should be no tongues speaking (v.27-28). Those with the gift of prophecy are not serving others if they insist on prophesying whenever they feel like it. They must take turns (v.29-31). Can one really control the manifestations of the Spirit? Yes, for Paul says: “The spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of the prophets” (v.32).

This willingness to restrain the use of God’s gifts for the sake of order and service to others applies to women as well. Though there is no hint in Scripture that women are less gifted by the Holy Spirit than men, Paul does say in this section that the women in Corinth should not use their speaking gifts in the assembled church (vv.34-35). I know that this portion of Scripture is often cited in tandem with a similar passage from 1 Timothy 2. But it is my belief that Paul’s main thrust here is not the role of women, but the use of gifts by women. The parallel passage, as I see it, is not in the distant context of 1 Timothy, but in the nearby context of the preceding verses. The two thoughts are related. As the prophets are able to hold their spirits in submission, so women are able to hold themselves in submission for the sake of order. This is the true spirit of servanthood. Sometimes not using spiritual gifts is the best way to build up the body.

Implications for the Church Today

We Lutherans ought to find the topic of spiritual gifts particularly interesting. Though it is receiving intense scrutiny in our times, it was not a strange subject for our forefather, Dr. Martin Luther. He wrote:

All Christians must be holy priests and must have the ‘beauty of holiness.’ For here is another man who consecrates them priests -the one High Priest Christ, who gives them an anointing and priestly consecration of another kind, namely, the Holy Spirit, who gloriously and purely graces and clothes them with his power and gifts.^{xxxvi}

To my knowledge, Luther did not devote much print, if any, to a listing of the gifts of the Spirit, nor did he encourage Christians to discover their gifts. But the concept of all believers being gifted and empowered for working within the body of Christ was a major tenet in his Reformation. The Priesthood of All Believers is rarely omitted from a list of the basic beliefs of Luther. He believed that God intended to use all the gifts which he bestowed upon his people. His vision of a church in which laity and clergy worked side by side for the common good never left him. It was only partially realized during his lifetime, but it never left him.

That is our heritage as Lutherans. At least we say it is. We share Luther’s vision; we believe that we are all kings and priests before God. We believe this because we know that we are the people of God, the people Paul pictured so graphically as a body in 1 Corinthians twelve. Richards has this to say:

God has taken individuals who believe in Jesus, both Jew and Gentile, and has called them apart from the ‘*ethnoi*’ (nations) to make them a ‘*laos*’ (people) for himself...When we deny a clergy-laity distinction, we are affirming the equality of all believers! To some this seems a threatening doctrine. It appears to drag the clergy down to the level of the laity. In fact, equality in the church must be understood as lifting every believer up to realize his full potential as one of the ‘*laos*’ of God! The basic reality on which this commitment is based is simply that each believer is equal: no distinction can be made between ‘first class’ Christians (the clergy) and ‘second class’ Christians (the laity).^{xxxvii}

Upon reading those words, it struck me that Richards touches a raw nerve here. He charges that, wherever in the main-line churches there is denial of the equality of clergy and laity, either explicitly or implicitly, the same basic error of the Corinthians and of the Pentecostals takes place. There is a dividing of the Body of Christ, if

not between ‘Spirit-baptized’ Christians and ‘water-baptized’ Christians, then between ordained Christians and non-ordained Christians. Ordination was never intended to imply a theology of ‘more’. It was intended to imply a different function in the body, a function requiring a Christ-like spirit of servanthood. How far removed this is from the ‘pedestal perspective’ with which many view the clergy! We are the people of God, and we simply must see ourselves in that Spirit-wrought unity.

The doctrine of spiritual gifts makes it clear that we are a gifted people. To shy away from the doctrine of spiritual gifts because we are uneasy about abuses we fear may creep into it is not Paul’s way of dealing. The Corinthians used gifts wrongly. But Paul did not therefore avoid the topic. He said at the outset: “Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant” (1 Cor 12:1)

We Lutherans were blessed with an emphasis on the people of God as a gifted people from the outset of our denomination. Why should we neglect this heritage now? If the Lutheran church has not fully succeeded in shedding the image of the clergy as a cut above the laity, more capable of doing the various tasks assigned to the Body of Christ than ‘mere’ lay persons, perhaps it is because we have not fully implemented one of the doctrines that once was distinctively our own.

In the Lutheran Church we put a lot of stock in education. We decry emotional crusades. We are suspicious of anything that smacks of mass hysteria in the church. Quiet teaching is our way. Patient instruction is our watchword. Repeating the precious truths from generation to generation is our method. I would not want to suggest for a moment that such a way and method is wrong. In fact, I am deeply committed to them in my own ministry. But I wonder: Where is the quiet teaching about the people of God as a gifted people? Where is the patient repetition of the various gifts that the Spirit bestows? Where is the attempt to lead God’s people to study the gifts and their use within the body? I haven’t seen much.

If every member of the body is not confronted with the challenge that the doctrine of spiritual gifts holds, how can we expect an enthusiastic response from them? I am convinced that we are touching here on one of the fundamental problems that plagues our church. People feel ill-equipped to serve. God has gifted them to serve, but either they do not know it, or do not believe it, or do not care. And heaven help us if the last is true in more than a few cases!

Perhaps the problem still resides with pastors. D. Elton Trueblood wrote:

The worst story I know is about the preacher who came to laymen’s Sunday... and preached on the lay ministry. He was persuasive...because at the end, when he said, “Will any men who are willing to dedicate themselves to the lay ministry please come forward?” a hundred men responded! And someone who was right close to the pastor heard him mutter softly, “O God, how can I use a hundred ushers?”

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God used the father of our church to dust the cobwebs of Catholicism from the Priesthood of All Believers. Why, then, have the most impassioned pleas for its implementation come from outside our denomination? What a shame to the Lutheran Church that the current emphasis on spiritual gifts and life in the Body of Christ has had to come from others, whose doctrinal heritage has, naturally, injected some foreign elements into its bloodstream and dulled some of the glory of its resurgence! And what shall we Lutherans do? Scold the others for not doing it right? Will we, who should be doing it best, hardly do it at all because we have seen their errors?

We are the gifted people of God. Our people must know it. We must challenge them to believe it.

Paul teaches that we are an empowered people of God—all of us. Richards points out:

If it were true that only some believers possessed the Spirit, it might be reasonable to argue that God has given them the task of being interpreters of Scripture for the others, or has charged them to structure organizations through which the work of Jesus in the world could be accomplished. But the emphasis in Scripture is on the coming of the Spirit upon all flesh.” it was Jesus who promised that “anyone who has

faith in me will do what I have been doing,” and who based this promise on the gift of the Spirit, who “will be in you.” (John 14:12,17)^{xxxix}

All believers have a gift or gifts from the Spirit. No one is omitted from the promise of the Savior, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” (Acts 1:8). We are an empowered people; we have our Lord’s word on it! The power is there for the Body to function according to the design of its Head. There is no reason under heaven why we cannot nor should not, be implementing the doctrine of spiritual gifts among our people.

But the church is so weak! Call for a work day; how many people show up? Ask for special offerings for a needed project; what is the response? Organize a program for getting people into the word; how many weeks does it run before people start to drop out? Run a special seminar or series; how long do the positive effects in people’s lives last? Daily home devotions grow less frequent and stop altogether. Many Christians miss more worship services than they attend, and miss much of the ones they do attend. Newly confirmed adults start their church membership with enthusiasm, but before long they are trying out other churches. The congregation invests thousands in Christian day school training for its children, but you hardly see them after they graduate. Is this the church with spiritual gifts?

Were a Pentecostal to hear these words he would thump the table and say, “See! That’s exactly what we mean. You Lutherans are so weak because you do not have the Holy Spirit!” But we do have the Spirit. We are saying, from the heart, “Jesus is Lord.” And we couldn’t do that if we didn’t have the Holy Spirit. What is more, we have the Risen Lord Jesus Christ, who has said: “Surely, I will be with you always” (Matt. 28:20). Well, then, if the triumphant Lord is with us and the Holy Spirit has empowered us, is it possible that our definition of ‘weak’ needs to be scrutinized?

Weakness is not easy to define. Usual criteria leave one helpless, grasping for new concepts, in the face of Scripture’s comments. What does weakness mean when Jesus says: “Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are those who mourn... Blessed are the meek” (Matt. 5:3-5)? What is weakness, really, if Jesus can say: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). How shall we view weakness when God says to the Apostle lamenting his weakness: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9)? Read the correspondence of Luther. Sing his hymns. There was a man of God who saw weakness through a different window than most.

I certainly do not want to whitewash all the neglect of God’s promises, all the lethargy in the Body, all the sleepiness on the part of watchmen, all the love devoted to the world’s shrines—these certainly are in our church! But while bemoaning them how dare I fall to praise God for what he is doing among us? The Great Shepherd is keeping the wolves at bay. He is sending his angels to gather souls to their eternal homes. He is implanting everlasting concepts deep into the souls of lambs and sheep. He is comforting troubled hearts with the only Comfort that really comforts. He is maintaining congregations of his saints across the land and around the world. He is causing his love—though not always the kind of love people think they want—to be reflected in countless ways as Christ’s brothers and sisters go about their daily lives. We have to be so careful, we who live in the world, that we define ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ in terms that reflect God’s thinking, not the world’s.

Such a careful scrutiny of terms, and an equally careful application of them to our way of doing things in the church, may be very revealing. It may show that what we have been bemoaning as ‘weak’ is not so weak after all. On the other hand, what we have been feeling smug about as “strong’ may not be so strong, either! The Corinthians thought they had found something superior in their tongues. Paul had to tell them otherwise!

Having said that, permit me now to share my convictions regarding the place that spiritual gifts should have in our church. I think we should be wary of ‘jumping on the spiritual gifts bandwagon.’ In my opinion much of what has been written is fad. The Pentecostal influence is readily evident in much of the material. The Spiritual Growth Movement is riddled with rank unionism. The evangelicals that I have read, though far more sober in judgment than either of the above, still show their reformed tendency to categorize and make square cubicles into which nicely-rounded Scripture is forced to fit. The titles sell books—who can resist “Your

Church Can Grow!'"? -- but does anyone really need to read 48 of them? There is a certain tedium of repetition beyond the first few.

Yet spiritual gifts theology holds a valid place among us. As we said, it is a doctrine, perhaps a neglected doctrine. Among us there should be the following:

1. Thorough study of Scripture on the subject of spiritual gifts. The study should concentrate on the spiritual gifts passages (see note 2). But the context of the entire New Testament, and especially the book of Acts, should not be ignored. I am deeply indebted to Bruner for his work. This is the kind of theology which impresses me. I think he succeeds in avoiding much of the fluff that clings to the spiritual gifts literature. Sound materials should be prepared which would make it feasible for the average pastor to preach a series of sermons and do a Bible course on the Spirit's gifts. Self-study materials in the hands of our people would be good, too. I believe such offerings would be well received by our people. They have many questions as a result of the burgeoning Pentecostal churches in their communities, because of their own sense that something is glaringly missing in their own life, because of their awareness of the struggles that local churches are going through, and because of the vital lessons that Scripture holds in the type of sections we have been studying here. We ought to be providing answers to these questions.
2. Helping people to discover their spiritual gifts. Earlier we quoted Getz who reversed his position and no longer encourages people to discover their spiritual gifts. His position is to a degree shared by Richards:

Debate over the place of tongues in the present age or attention to the lists of body gifts (without any recognition that they are body gifts and do not sum up the Bible's teachings on giftedness) may be more harmful than helpful. Nor is it especially helpful for individual believers to speculate about what their spiritual gifts may be. Instead we need to focus our attention as God's people on the Bible's teaching about the nature of the body of Christ. We need to live out the reality of the body in unity and love. As we live out that reality and support and minister to one another, spiritual gifts will appear. It is then, when the gifts are actually functioning in the body as they were in the Corinthian community, that our teaching can be meaningful. Then individuals in our congregations will discover through teaching and experience what their spiritual gifts are.^{xl}

Though it could be counterproductive to insist that every Christian must search out and discover what his or her gift or gifts might be, it certainly cannot hurt for Christians to know which ones are available. In fact it is very helpful, when a Christian has found himself or herself enjoying a certain 'success' in some area of work within the Body, to know that this is one of the gifts that God the Holy Spirit does give. To that end I have no quarrel with those who want to conduct a 'spiritual gifts seminar.' But I am highly suspect of some of the material I have seen. I have the 'discovering your gifts' materials produced by the American institute for Church Growth in Pasadena, California, and the ones developed by the Seventh Day Adventists. I don't think I could use much from either of them in my own congregation. David Valleskey leaned heavily on the material from Pasadena, but he tailored his to make it more of a Bible Study on the nature of the gifts, and less of a workshop on discovering personal gifts. I think that helping people to discover their gifts means acquainting them with which gifts are available, and then encouraging them to serve in the body, and enabling them to serve in the body.^{xli}

3. Making spiritual gifts a real part of our practice. Christian people are conceived by God to be ministering people. He has gifted them so that they might minister within the Body. Again we turn to Richards:

But what are specific areas with which we need to be concerned... if we are to develop a ministering people? At least seven areas of concern are suggested by our exploration of a core theology.

- 1) We must communicate a vision of the purposes God seeks to achieve through his people.
- 2) We must build a community of love in which close personal relationships are nurtured.
- 3) We must learn to make disciples and not simply church members.
- 4) We must guide the people of God to become servants of one another and the world.
- 5) We must provide training in ministry so that members of the body will be effective in their service.
- 6) We must extend freedom to the people of God to respond to the voice of the Spirit.
- 7) We must come to a better understanding of leadership in the body of Christ.^{xlii}

I know from my own ministry that the nominating committees in our congregations rarely consider the spiritual gifts that are needed for a particular office, much less whether the candidate is believed to have them. I know that we are not doing enough, not nearly enough, to bring people into ministering situations in regard to one another. I know that discipleship has too low a priority in the church. Spiritual gifts principles can help our churches, but they must be taught and brought into practice.

Permit me a few closing thoughts regarding our church body and spiritual gifts. First, the synodical level. Our synodical structure could be of help to us. One area in which I think the Church Growth Movement has something to teach us regards empirical studies. I am suspect of some of their conclusions. But I do wish such studies, based upon actual research around the country, could be conducted in our denomination. Why are the growing churches growing? Which ones have been successful in lay ministries? Why?

I think the best place to produce spiritual gifts study materials is on the synodical level. The editorial skills and printing know-how are there. The methods for promotion and distribution are there. If the impetus comes from the synodical level, then the confidence that many of our people have in their synod will overcome some of the feeling that a local pastor is 'Just doing his thing.'

I believe that our synod is already taking steps, though not, perhaps, as a result of spiritual gifts motivation, to evaluate the specialized ministries in which many of our officials are engaged. Do they have the gifts for their work? Do they like it? Are they effective at it? These are questions that have a bearing on whether or not a person is working in harmony with his giftedness, or in spite of it.

The synod is responsible for our worker training schools. On this subject Wagner says:

Most ministers in the United States are trained in Bible school or seminary... Both are set up on a pre-service model and neither bases its programs on spiritual gifts... What do I mean by this? Christians, as we have seen, are supposed to discover, develop and use their spiritual gifts. The purpose of the professional training that is offered in Bible schools and seminaries is to prepare Christian ministers. But one of the basic problems is that, generally speaking, the people who enter those institutions have not yet discovered their spiritual gifts and had them confirmed in any significant way by the Body of Christ. Since they have never been in the ministry, there is no way for them to know for sure whether they have a gift-mix appropriate for pastoral work.^{xliii}

Second, the district level. I think the districts are able to choose their officers and board members more in keeping with the doctrine of spiritual gifts. They are able to, because members of a district usually get better acquainted with the gifts of their fellow workers than on the synodical level. I would guess that restructuring will increase, rather than decrease, this tendency. I say the districts are able to; I am not sure they do. Here too, should we not be asking with each election: What gifts are needed? Is the candidate trying to do a job for which he is not gifted? Are we electing on the basis of the Spirit's gifts, or just on the candidate's willingness to serve (or reluctance to say No)?

The districts of the synod, it seems to me, are the level at which workshops could be organized. A certain inertia clings to many of us, and to many of our congregations. It will be a long, long time before spiritual gifts instruction gets into some of our congregations unless those in the district who have the gifts of

encouragement and vision will do their work within the Body. On the district level the materials that have been provided by the synod could be urged upon the local congregations.

Third, the congregational level. Most of this paper has been on the congregational level, for that was the level of the situation in Corinth. As I have stated, I believe that the subject of spiritual gifts touches on many of the problems that plague our congregations. Two of them deserve another brief mention. Among us there is an unbiblical elevation of the clergy. Sometimes we pastors ourselves give the impression, and believe in our hearts, that certain tasks in the ministry can be done only by us. It is difficult to prove, in the light of what Scripture says about the gifts, that only pastors should be visiting the sick and troubled, that only pastors should be holding the hands of the elderly, that only pastors can lead Bible classes, that only pastors can conduct opening devotions, that only pastors can call on drifting church members. Yet how many of us have really used others for these ministries? At other times it is the people who do this to their pastors. Hunter says:

The mind set that lets the pastor do it all cripples the power of the church. The Lord knew this when he designed his church to be a living organism with every member functioning. The pastor is their public spokesman. They have called him to lead them in worship so that there can be order in the church. Often he is a person with more training than the rest of the people. His training does not establish him as the one to do the ministry for the people. Rather, it enables him to be a resource person. He is not a replacement for the people's ministry. He is a motivator and trainer. He is given by God to equip God's people so that they do the work of ministry; so that they build up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12).^{xliv}

Among us there is also a frustration on the part of the faithful few who are doing most of the work. Now, there is bound to be some of that in the church. People are at different rungs of the ladder of faith. We just can't expect people who are new to the faith, or people who have not grown in their faith for years, to produce fruit at the same level as those who have been carefully nurtured on word and sacrament for years. Yet, we are in danger of losing more and more of the faithful, if we cannot succeed in drawing more members of the body into the various ministries of the church. There is a crying need for better functioning bodies!

Spiritual gifts are not the panacea for the church. But a good dose of them will do our churches a lot of good. Paul's three chapters on spiritual gifts did not remove all the problems in Corinth, but following them he was able to write his second letter to that congregation in a more positive vein, even speaking comfortably about giving! May the Holy Spirit, who inspired Paul, fill us with a fervent love for the church, the Body of our Lord. And may he lead us to know our gifts, to use them in Christ's service, for the upbuilding of others, and may he help us to lead others along that same path.

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- ⁱ McRae, William, *Dynamics of Spiritual Gifts*, p. 11
 - ⁱⁱ 1 Cor 12:7-11, 27-31; Rom 12:6-8; Eph 4:3-7, 11-13; 1 Pet 4:10-11
 - ⁱⁱⁱ Wagner, C. Peter, *Your Spiritual Gifts*, p. 259ff
 - ^{iv} Valleskey, David, *Gifted to Serve*, pp. 2-5
 - ^v e.g. Wagner, Hunter, Stedman, McRae, Valleskey
 - ^{vi} Bruner, Richards/Martin
 - ^{vii} Wagner, op. cit. p. 45f
 - ^{viii} Lenski, R.C.H. *Interpretation of 1 and 2 Corinthians*, pp. 489-622
 - ^{ix} e.g. Bruner; Richards
 - ^x Valleskey, op. cit. p. 4
 - ^{xi} McRae, William, *Dynamics of Spiritual Gifts*, p. 18
 - ^{xii} Valleskey, op. cit. p. 14
 - ^{xiii} Stedman, Ray C. *Body Life*, p. 44
 - ^{xiv} Lenski, op. cit. p. 501
 - ^{xv} I take 'tongues' to mean 'known languages', not a so-called 'heavenly language'.
 - ^{xvi} Richards, op. cit. p. 113
 - ^{xvii} Bruner, op. cit. p. 291
 - ^{xviii} Ibid, p. 203
 - ^{xix} McRae, op. cit. p. 90
 - ^{xx} Moses, Elijah, and Jesus were together at the Transfiguration!
 - ^{xxi} Ibid, pp. 90-98
 - ^{xxii} Lenski op. cit p. 503
 - ^{xxiii} Bruner, op. cit p. 52
 - ^{xxiv} Ibid, p. 203
 - ^{xxv} Ibid, p. 70
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 - ^{xxxvi} Plass, Ewald, *What Luther Says*, Vol. 1, p. 237
 - ^{xxxvii} Richards, op cit., p. 17-18
 - ^{xxxviii} Trueblood, E. Elton *Leadership*, Winter, 1983 p.19
 - ^{xxxix} Richards, op. cit. p. 99
 - ^{xl} Richards, op. cit. p. 122-123
 - ^{xli} In several sources, I have seen the five E's suggested:
 1. Explore the possibilities ("Do I have this gift?")
 2. Experiment with as many as possible ("Have I tried it?")
 3. Examine your feelings ("Do I like it?")

4. Evaluate your effectiveness (“Have I seen results?”)

5. Expect confirmation from the Body (“Do others agree?”)

^{xlii} Richards, op. cit. p. 150

^{xliii} Wagner, op. cit. p. 165

^{xliiv} Hunter, op. cit. p. 159