

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Permanent Edifying Gifts, Part 1

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:8-10

Code: 1853

We have been discussing in our Sunday morning series for a while, in 1 Corinthians, spiritual gifts. And we're going to continue in that study this morning, and I hope you'll be encouraged and blessed by what we'll cover this morning, because it's very, very practical for the life of every one of us as believers, but especially for those of us who may have the gifts or a combination of any of the gifts which we are going to be talking about this morning, because we're going to be move away from the gifted men, which we discussed last Lord's Day and the one before, into the spiritual gifts themselves.

If you want to find out where we're going to be, you have to keep your hand in two places, Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. And in those two portions, we'll be examining the spiritual gifts that the Bible records.

Yesterday, something very significant happened in the track world. I don't know if you're a track buff, but I've always enjoyed track and field events. And I was reading the paper this morning and found out that Bruce Jenner had again broken the world's record in the decathlon. Ever since I was a little boy, the decathlon was always the most incredible achievement that a human being could achieve, in my mind, from the physical standpoint. Once when I was in high school, I competed in one, very insignificantly, I might add. But I did. And I gained a tremendous sense of appreciation for somebody who could compete in such an activity.

Last summer, I had the occasion to watch Bruce Jenner break the world's record then, which he broke again yesterday. When I was in Eugene, Oregon, I saw him last year in a meet between the USSR, Poland, and the United States, bringing together the greatest decathletes, as they're called, in the world.

And it's a tremendous thing to see. The ten various events that are required of that competition, all the way from sprinting to long distance, hurdling, high jumping, broad jumping, discus, javelin, shot put. All of those - pole vaulting - tremendous athletic events in themselves, any one of which would be an achievement worthy of great honor in the athletic world. But for somebody to excel at all ten of them and to be thus branded as the greatest athlete in the world is indeed something very exciting and interesting to see.

And I remember last year when I was watching the competition, and it goes over a two-day period, and it's very lengthy. It usually goes into the darkness of the night before they're ever through

competing. I was amazed to see what I saw. I saw about 25 of these athletes competing. And what was so overwhelming to me, and continues to be, is the reality that the human body can function like that. Now that's incredible, because it's such a contrast from what we know as the way the human body functions. I mean, you know, you can barely get it up out of bed on Sunday morning, and then sort of ease it over to the chair. And then sort of ease it into the kitchen and sit it down, and then sit it down in your car and get it here, and sit it down here, and try to stay awake so you can go home and put it back to sleep.

That really is not the intention that God had in mind when he made our bodies. Some of us don't understand what it means, "That we would have strength renewed like eagles." We can't even relate to that. We're sort of physical sparrows at best.

But what is amazing to me is to see the human body when it functions at a maximum output. It's incredible. And you can only - you can only see that when you see that kind of a specimen in action, and see the potential that God has placed within the human body for activity and capacity and productivity. And that's exciting.

And then I remember vividly, as I was watching that last year, I was thinking to myself, if only the body of Christ could operate like that. If every cell and every member and every capacity was operating at maximum output, what a tremendous influence we'd have in the world. But that is exactly what God intended. As when God intended the physical body to be used to that maximum output, so does He intend the Church to be capable of that.

You say, "But how?" Well, like the athlete, if he's going to operate like that, every cell and every muscle and every tissue and every fiber and every capacity in his body has to all come together from the mental to the physical to operate. And it's the same in the Church. If the Church is going to be all that God intended it to be, if it's going to give glory to Christ, as that athlete's body gives glory to him, it's going to have to function with every single part doing what it has to do at maximum. And that's just exactly where the ministry of the spiritual gifts comes together.

We're a body. We'll see that when we get to verse 12 of 1 Corinthians 12, as we discuss the body. And he goes down and discusses the members of the body, and how the members cooperate to make the body function the way it ought to function.

Spiritual gifts, then, are vital. If the body of Christ is to honor Christ, it will be when we are a whole, functioning, maximized body, and that will only happen when all of us are ministering in the area and with the gifts that the Spirit of God has so graciously given to us.

When the body functions as it should, there are four basic things that occur as a result, and these are very important, because all of us are result-oriented. There are four results when the body functions.

Number one, the people receive the blessing. You will be blessed when you minister and see the fruit of your labor. God never intended the ministry to be carried on by professionals while everybody else watched. God intends all of us to minister so that all of us see God at work, so that all of us see fruit, so that all of us understand joy and blessing in response to these. So one of the benefits when the body operates is that the people receive the blessing. That you receive the fullness of what God intended for you to receive.

Second thing, when everybody does his part and the body really functions, witness is really dynamic. A full-functioning redeemed community in the midst of a non-redeemed community is dynamic. When Peter exercised his gift of prophecy or proclaiming on the day of Pentecost, 3,000 people were saved. When other believers exercised the gift of giving and shared what they had, the Lord added daily to the Church people who saw that kind of love and wanted to be a part of it.

There is an illustration all the way through the life of that early Church in Jerusalem in the book of Acts that shows how the ministry of the gifts of the believers created response in the unredeemed, non-saved community.

A third result, not only that the people receive the blessing and the world receives the witness, but thirdly, leaders are made apparent. In a full-functioning body of believers, leadership rises to the top. It just emerges. We have a lot of leadership, "leadership material," available to the Church today because there's a real need for leadership. That's the great need of the Church. You can't get the people to do what the people ought to do unless you've got somebody to help them along and show them and work with them.

And leadership is a priority, and it's amazing how the Church tries to find its leaders. You can go to leadership seminars and read books on leadership, and you'll find a great amount of material that is simply an adaptation of the world's system of getting leaders. It's the old SNL syndrome, the strong natural leader. You get the guy with all the psychological qualifications, etcetera. And as the Church has become more like the world, we have tended to opt out for the world's standards.

Oh, when the Church says, you know, "We've got to educate our people," they want to get a guy with an education, or a guy with a degree in education. Or the Church says, you know, "We've got a lot of problems. We'd better get somebody with some psychological training to handle our problems." Or, "We've got a lot of young people who have needs. We'd better find an expert in the youth area." Or, "The world ought to hear about us. Let's hire a PR guy. We need somebody who can beat the bushes a little bit." Or, "Our worship services are rather dull. Let's get a lot of musicians and so forth and so on, and really perk up the thing. A little creative worship, and throw some balloons around, and have some people in leotards dancing up and down the aisles. And whatever it takes, let's get out of this cranked up routine that we have in worship."

And so the Church opts out for the stylized leadership that the world offers, when the truth of the matter is that all God ever expected out of leaders was that they have certain gifts of the Holy Spirit and certain moral and spiritual qualifications. And these things become manifest in the ministering community. As people minister, they simply will emerge as leaders. We see this here all the time, just continuously, day after day, new people popping out who have capacities to lead.

Spirit-filled leadership always emerges rapidly when God is freely at work in his body, and so that's another one of the benefits.

And fourthly, one of the other benefits of a functioning body is unity develops, and there is a beautiful love, a wonderful fellowship, and this fulfills our needs and reaches out to touch the lives of those who would like to have the same.

So these benefits result when the body really functions, and the key to making it function is the use of these spiritual gifts. All of us have received them, and we have talked about that in some detail in the weeks past, so we'll move away from that at this point.

Now we've been discussing the three categories where we want to kind of deal in the area of gifts. One was the gifted man. We've already gone into that. The gifted man, the apostle, prophet, evangelist, teaching pastor, and teacher. Those five individuals are the gifted people given to the Church to lead the Church, to direct it, to perfect it, if you will, in Ephesians 4:11 terminology.

Now having discussed the gifted man, let's go on to the next category. It's the permanent, edifying gifts. Now there are some gifts that the Spirit of God has given to the Church for the duration of the Church, for its permanence. And these gifts are to be ministered at all times in the life of the Church. There are other gifts, and point three, the temporary sign gifts, which were given only for a special period of time for a very specific purpose, and we'll get into these in the future.

But for now, the permanent, edifying gifts. Now there are two categories of them. Two categories of permanent, edifying gifts. Look at 1 Peter, 4:10. 1 Peter, 4:10 says this: "As every man hath received the gift," whatever your gift is, and it is mostly likely a combination of the various enablements that makes up your gift. "But as you have received the gift, so minister the same one to another." Use your gift. This is vital. As a good steward of the multi-colored Grace of God, literally. If you're a steward, minister your gift.

Now then he divides the gifts into two categories. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God. If any man serve, let him do it as the ability which God gives." Now you have two kinds of gifts: speaking gifts and serving gifts. All gifts serve in a sense, but simply to use Peter's terminology to help us distinguish, we'll draw those two categories, speaking gifts and serving gifts. Verbal gifts and

non-verbal gifts. But that's not totally accurate, because even the service gifts can have some verbalization. Let's just assume speaking gifts and service gifts as the two general categories for what will amount to 11 gifts that are permanent, edifying gifts.

Now as we look at the speaking gifts, I want to give you five of them that are mentioned in Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. And they're mentioned in either/or and one of them in both of those passages.

All right. Number one gift, and these are in an order which I'll explain to you at the end, and for a purpose which I'll explain to you at that time, as well. The first gift is prophecy. The gift of prophecy. Now there's a big debate today about whether the gift of prophecy still exists. There are people today who want to say that prophecy has passed away. Based on 1 Corinthians 13:8, they want to say that prophecy shall be done away. And the perfect thing has come, because they say the perfect thing is the Bible, and when it was done, prophecy passed away, and so did tongues, and so did knowledge.

Now usually, that is a viewpoint that is given in order to eliminate tongues, and when they have eliminated tongues, they've got to get rid of tongues - or prophecy and knowledge with it, because it's in the same verse. And they want to get rid of tongues in one fell swoop that way, to eliminate the modern movement, and in so doing, they get rid of prophecy and knowledge along with it. And I believe that poses some very serious problems. We'll get to 1 Corinthians 13:8 in the future and explain all about it, but let's start at this point with the gift of prophecy, and assume that it has not been done away with. Okay? Because we haven't arrived at 1 Corinthians 13 yet. We're still reading chapter 12. So we'll assume that it still exists, and I'll show you why, and then we'll see later on whether 13:8 cancels out and we have to redo the tape. But at this point, we'll assume that it's still in.

The word prophecy, prophateia, from the verb prophatuo for you Greek students, simply really a basic word coming from the concept of prophameia, which is pro, before, phameia, to speak. And what it means is to speak before, but it does not mean to speak before in time, but to speak before in terms of an audience. It's not to speak before in terms of foretelling the future. It is to speak before an audience. Literally, to speak before someone. To speak in public. To publicly proclaim, that is the gift of prophecy. It is not a reference to any content. It does not say whether it's revelatory; that is, a revelation from God direct; or non-revelatory, proclaiming something God already revealed in the past. It's simply a communicative gift, not a content gift, as such, in terms of the root meaning of the word.

The idea of predicting the future, as I said before, was only an English addition to the English word prophecy that came in the Middle Ages. A Greek or a Hebrew knew what the word meant. It simply meant to proclaim before somebody. To speak publicly.

Now what is the gift of prophecy then? Simply from its definition, it is the ability given by the Spirit of God to a person to proclaim God's truth to others. To proclaim God's truth publicly. That's the gift.

Look at chapter 14:3, 1 Corinthians. This will help. "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men." Now there, in a very simple term, you have the definition of the gift. He speaks unto men. The gift of proclaiming. I wish that the Bible translated the word proclaiming. It is the gift of proclaiming. The gift of speaking before men. And that's the simplest definition you can find in the Bible.

Now God has always given this gift. There has never been a time in the history of God's dealing with men that somebody hasn't had this gift, because at all times, God had somebody speaking His Word. See, that's all the term means. The Old Testament, for example, abounds with uses of the enablement to prophesy. The primary function of the Old Testament prophet? Proclaiming God's Word. Some of it was future; some of it was present; some of it was a reiteration of the past. Very often, the prophets would speak about what God had done. Read Habakkuk. Read all the other minor prophets. They would often speak about God - what God was doing. What God would do. But prophecy was not always prediction. That was only one-third of its capacity and element.

It was simply to speak before someone, to proclaim God's truth and speak God's Word. And I'm confident, and I'm sure you would be, too, if you studied the Old Testament in detail, that prophets and the gift of prophecy ranked number one in the Old Testament. It is the most critical aspect, because it is the composite of that prophecy that is the Old Testament. It is what God proclaimed that is recorded here. Right? That constitutes the Old Testament. So it is the most vital.

In fact, Peter comments on the Old Testament and says, "For this, prophecy came not by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:21. This prophecy? What prophecy? The Old Testament he's talking about. It is a proclamation of God, the whole thing.

And the New Testament is no different. In the New Testament, prophecy is just as vital, because God is not through revealing himself. So in the New Testament, God reveals himself again. He discloses all of the mysteries. He makes known to the apostles His will. He - "The Spirit of God brings into their remembrance all things whatsoever I have said," said Jesus, "that they might write it down." The New Testament writers claimed to be inspired by God. They were proclaiming God's Word, and when the whole of the New Testament was done, it too is a prophecy, a proclamation from God. In fact, John says in Revelation 1:3, "Blessed is he that hears and that reads and understands the prophecy of this book." What does that mean? The proclaiming of God's truth.

So the Old Testament, the most vital thing, the people proclaiming God's truth. The New Testament, the most vital thing, the people proclaiming God's truth. And I believe in this age, post-New Testament, still the most vital thing, people proclaiming God's truth. I don't think it's changed at all. I

think that's still vital. I still think that's what God desires. That's what God wants. That's a priority.

And that's why, in 1 Corinthians 14:1, it says this: "Follow after love, desire spirituals, but rather that you may prophecy." This is vital. When you come together as a congregation, desire prophecy to be the gift that is used. Look at verse 39 of chapter 14. "Wherefore, brethren," plural, "covet to prophecy, and forbid not to speak with tongues." All they were doing when they came together was speaking with tongues. He says, tongues has a place, but you ought to quit doing that all the time, and you ought to desire when you come together that prophecy be exercised. Why? Because it is the most vital. Why? Because it is a proclamation of God's truth.

Now that's a simple look at the concept of prophecy. Now let me hasten to add this, to help you understand it. Prophecy is vital because it ministers to believers. Look at verse 3 of chapter 14. "He that prophesies speaks to men edification, exhortation, and comfort." It ministers to believers in those three ways. Prophecy is important. It ministers to unbelievers. Look at verse 24. "If you all prophesy and there come in one that believes not or one unlearned, he will be convicted of all and judged of all, and the secrets of his heart made manifest, and so falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God truly is in you." He says, "Look, when you come together and you all babble in these languages, people come in your midst and think you're nuts. They think you've lost your mind. But if you would prophesy, they would come in and they would listen, and they would be convicted, and they would fall on their face, and they would repent, and they would believe."

Prophecy then ministers to believers and to unbelievers, and that's why he says you need to be sure you're exercising that area. Now beloved, I don't feel for a minute that we can restrict that to only revelation. Sometimes, when those people spoke, they were reiterating something already revealed. They certainly couldn't preach the Gospel as direct revelation. The Gospel had already been given. And if they were giving the Gospel, as indicated in verse 24 and 25, to unbelievers, they would simply be reiterating something God had already revealed.

So then we conclude that the prophecy would fall into one of two categories: revelation or reiteration. Revelation or reiteration. And I believe prophecy had those two purposes. Proclaiming. The simple meaning of the word. Proclaiming.

Now look at the revelatory aspect. What is revelation? I'll give you a simple, thumbnail definition of revelation: disclosing something never before disclosed. Saying something never said. Knowing something never known. That's revelation. When God reveals what has never been known. Now sometimes, a prophet opened his mouth and spoke something never before said. Right? It came right out of the mind of God. That was Scripture. That was divine revelation. And it could even have been a practical word that isn't recorded in Scripture, that came directly from God.

So there is the revelatory aspect. Now that is the common Old Testament usage. The prophet spoke. "The Word of the Lord came unto Ezekiel, and Ezekiel said." "The Word of the Lord came unto me," says Amos, "and it was - when the Word of the Lord came unto me, the lion roared, and what could I do but speak?" "The Word of the Lord came unto me," said the prophet, "and it was like fire in my bones." In other words, this was revelation. God's pouring his Word through the prophet.

But there were other times when a prophet preached and simply repeated a message which God had already given. There are occasions in the Old Testament when the prophets simply reiterated something that was common knowledge, and simply were proclaiming something God had already revealed. The same in the New Testament. Sometimes, the New Testament prophet or apostle who exercised the gift of prophecy would have divine revelation, and he would be speaking for the first time something never said. Other times, he would be repeating something that had been said.

But in that area of revelation, sometimes the prophecy was doctrinal. Sometimes it was practical. For example, a group of elders came together to set apart Timothy for the ministry. Read it in 1 Timothy 1:18 and 1 Timothy 4:14 and you'll see it. "And they laid their hands on him." And Paul says, "Don't neglect the gift that was given thee by prophecy at the laying on of hands." At that occasion, when they laid their hands on Timothy and commissioned him, somebody received the prophecy from God, a message from God, and proclaimed, "Timothy, you have the gift of evangelist," etcetera, etcetera. And there were multiple prophecies regarding his life. Now that would be direct revelation, again.

Some of that direct revelation then was scriptural. Some of it was a practical area for someone's life. Some of it also was practical for some believing community. In Acts 11:27-28, a prophet named Agabus prophesied a famine, and so there were some Christians who sent relief to those who would be oppressed in the famine.

So prophecy does have a revelatory sense. There are times, biblically, in the writing of the Scripture, in the era of the Scripture, when God spoke directly through the prophet His Word, and there was no way that it could ever have been known because it had never been said before.

But also, prophecy can be reiteration. I don't think it's fair to just say there's nobody proclaiming today. There's nobody with the gift of speaking before people. Then what do you call my gift? Well, that's different. Well, what is it? Well, we'll have to come up with a new name? Why bother? That's as good a word as any, proclaiming.

Listen. The point of prophecy is not that it's always revelatory. The point of prophecy is given in Revelation 19:10, and in that Scripture, we find a definition of prophecy. Listen to what it says, the end of verse 10. "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." In other words, the heart of all proclamation is Christ. And somebody who gets up and proclaims Christ is fulfilling the spirit of

prophecy. Somebody who gives the testimony to Christ is fulfilling the gift of prophecy.

Now there are people who really want to fight that prophecy has ceased. Let me give you a couple of Scriptures why, in addition to what I've already said, which is convincing to me, but let me give you some more. The word itself, as I mentioned - I'll give you three or four reasons that it's still around, I think. The word itself means to speak before, and that it still going on. There are still people today who have the ability to speak before other people and proclaim God's Word. And that word, by its very simplicity, has the possibility of broad implications.

1 Thessalonians 5:20. This is most interesting. You know, 1 Thessalonians 5, at the end there, has been sort of done a terrible injustice because of the way it's been organized. It's organized as a whole lot of little short spurts with no connection. And we read, "Rejoice evermore," period, paragraph, space. "Pray without ceasing," period, paragraph, space. "In everything give -" You know, zip, zip, zip. And we don't connect it, but it's connected.

You know, in the original writing of the New Testament, there were no paragraphs and there were no verses. So there probably was no punctuation either, at all. So it really ran together. But read it this way. Verse 19, 1 Thessalonians, 5:19. "Quench not the Spirit. Hate not prophesyings. Test all things. Hold fast that which is good." Now that is very interesting. Listen. He says, "Don't hate prophesyings." People today, we don't believe in prophecy for today. All right. Don't hate prophesying. Why? Verse 19. If you do, you will what? Quench the Spirit. Why? Because that's something the Spirit has given. Don't just throw it all out, but rather, verse 21, do what? Test it, and hold on to what is what? Good.

It's too easy to just dump the whole thing. The Spirit has given to the Church people who proclaim. Don't despise that, but don't quench the Spirit by such despising. Just examine the prophecy and hold on to what is good.

You say, "But John, how do we do it, when we have all these voices? How do we examine them?" All right, 1 Corinthians, 14:37, says how. 1 Corinthians 14:37 says this: "If any man think himself to be a prophet or a spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." Now what are the things that Paul has written that's the commandments of the Lord? The New Testament epistles. Right? So he says, if anybody claims to be a prophet and he prophesies, just him by what? By the written word.

So don't despise prophesying. That would be to quench the Spirit. Simply test it. Find out what is good. And what is the test? How do you know whether a prophet's right or wrong? If he agrees with this, he's right. If he doesn't, he's wrong. That's the test.

Let me give you another Scripture to support the same thought. Back to Romans 12:6. I was surprised no else that I had read had thought of this, and I was going through Romans 12 in my Greek text, I came across this reality running all the way through, and it just kind of shook me up. And I bounced around on my chair a little bit, and thought, "I've really discovered a gold mine here." Listen to this. Romans 12:6: "Having then gifts different according to the Grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith." It goes on to mention other gifts. Interestingly enough, not one of the gifts mentioned here is miraculous, and prophecy is included with them, which is interesting, because all of the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12 have a miraculous possibility. None of the ones here really are, and prophecy is included here, which says to me, prophecy could be the miraculous, revelatory sense, or it could be the normal proclaiming sense, so that it could be included in both groups.

But notice. Prophecy, "Let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith." What is so beautiful about this, the word proportion means the measured out, the limited, if you will, folks, the limited, the measured out, the apportioned, the that's all there is, there ain't no more. The proper proportion.

Now listen. See the word faith there? We say, "According to the proportion of faith," and we feel that means whatever proportion faith God has given you. Whatever ability to believe God. No. You want to know something interesting? The definite article is there in the Greek, and it reads this way. "According to the measured out amount or proportion of the faith." If you're going to prophesy, be sure your prophecy agrees with the already revealed body of truth called the faith. See that? It's a fantastic thing.

So here you see the non-revelatory aspect in a list of gifts that themselves are non-miraculous. They're supernatural, as energized by the Spirit. Yes. But he's saying, if you have the gift of prophecy, then be sure you prophesy according to the proportion of the faith, or the measured out truth of the faith, what has already been revealed. The Word of God. It is the faith, the exact same construction as Jude 3, where it says that we are to contend for the faith, once for all, delivered to the saints. The faith. The revealed truth. That's the faith. Not our subjective faith, but that objective faith is to be the criteria upon which the gift of prophecy in its non-revelatory sense functions.

So you see, prophecy is proclaiming. Revelatory, yes, at one period of time. But believe me, when the Bible was closed, it says, "If any man adds to the words of this book, shall be added to him the plagues written." Right? Revelation 22:18. The revelatory aspect is done. It was for the infancy of the Church, for the closing of the canon, and it ceased at that point. The non-revelatory reiterative proclamation goes on, and thank God throughout the history of the Church there have been great proclaimers, haven't there, of Christ? And there still are today.

All right. Let's go to the second gift. We took a little longer on that one, because that's one that's misunderstood. That's the gift of proclaiming, the ability to stand up before a crowd and proclaim

Jesus Christ.

All right. Number two. 1 Corinthians 12 lists the gifts. In verse 8, "One is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge." Let's look at that one. Gift number two, the word of knowledge. The word of knowledge. Now the word knowledge is such a broad word that it defies definition in a closed sense. It just is so broad. It's very hard to specify what it means. It says a word of knowledge, and that's why I say it's a speaking gift. The utterance of knowledge. The word logos there can mean written on a page, spoken to a crowd, spoken privately to individuals.

What is it? It's speaking knowledge. This is a special gift. You say, "Well, what is it, John?" Here's a definition. It's the Spirit-given ability to observe - listen now - to observe biblical facts and make conclusions. The spiritual gift of observing biblical facts and making conclusions. In other words, it's the ability to understand the Bible.

I praise God for people like this. I don't have the gift of knowledge. I have to read other people who have it to help me to understand it. Then I can take it from there and apply it. The gift of knowledge, the ability to observe biblical facts and make conclusions.

You know, it's fantastic. You'll go the bookstore and you'll a book written by somebody who has the gift of knowledge. And you'll take all these different biblical truths, put them all together, and come up with a fantastic - a fantastic conclusion about some truth. This is the kind of gift that is basic, bottom line, for biblical interpretation. People like this, they go on in training to be able to deal - you know, these people who go and get a PhD in cuneiform and Sanskrit, so they can read caves and all that, and come back and say, "Well, you know, this is this little thing, and this little deal here, and this little segment of archaeology," and all that bottom line stuff. And out of that, they begin to collect biblical facts and come to conclusions, which later on can be translated into practical insights and information. That's a vital area. The ability to understand the Bible.

There are all different ways this is manifested. It can belong to people in our family here who've never been to college. Never been to seminary. But they have an ability to study the Bible and draw out facts. Make conclusions by observing. It's a tremendous gift.

And it comes in all different energizings. There could be a hundred people with it, and it would always work differently, and it might be in combination with wisdom a little bit, and a little bit of knowledge, sort of splattered around. Sometimes I think I got like one-tenth of the gift of knowledge and nine-tenths of the gift of wisdom, and it's sort of mixed and matched. But that's the beauty of how it all works.

At one time, the word of knowledge was surely revelatory sometimes, where a word of knowledge would come to somebody. God would give His will somebody, and they would say, "Here is the truth.

Here is a divine truth." And they would utter it, right from God. I believe that Paul received that kind of knowledge. Read Ephesians 3. Read Colossians 1. "God gave him direct word of knowledge, and he proclaimed that word." It was revelatory on occasion.

But other times, it was not. Other times, it was simply taking what was already down, what was already there, and expanding on it. Listen. The word for knowledge is used over 300 times in the New Testament, which so much variation that there's no way you can isolate it only to revelation. Some people want to say it's never used outside of revelation. Not possible. It's used for all kinds of things.

The Bible even says that the Christian is to be filled with knowledge. I think the best definition of the gift is in 1 Corinthians 13:2, "Though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge." This is the gift of understanding, beloved. This is the gift of understanding the mysteries that have been revealed. He says, "If I have the gift of proclamation, and I understand everything that's proclaimed, and all knowledge is mine." And he goes on to make his point there. But all I'm drawing out of it is that it's simply the ability to understand.

There are some people, they are writers. They are scholars. They are teachers, professors, researchers. I know people who do nothing but research. They simply are available to be hired by a writer or an author or an institution to research a given area of biblical truth and to draw out of it all the basic conclusions as a basis for somebody's book, or somebody's course, or whatever that the groups wants done. The word of knowledge. They can write down or speak out with understanding of God's truth.

And the third gift, and that is the word of wisdom. Also 1 Corinthians 12:8, the word of wisdom. And again, I think this could be in a revelatory sense also, in the early Church, when God would give some special wisdom. Incidentally, the word wisdom, sophia, is used so many times again in the New Testament, and so many different ways, that it's impossible again to isolate it only to revelation.

What is it, then? Well, this gift differs from knowledge in this way. The emphasis is on the skill of application rather than the knowledge of facts. Wisdom is the ability to take the facts that the gift of knowledge has brought out and make a skillful application of them. This could belong to a Christian counselor who sees a problem, and by his knowledge of the Word of God, he draws out the principles that can be practically applied to the solving of the problem. This is the gift of the expositor, who can take the Word of God and study the commentaries, as I do, and read from all those who have the gift of knowledge, and out of that, draw the applicable principle to living.

This can be something that a believer ministers to another believer, in the area of assisting in his practical life. And you know, the gifts of knowledge and wisdom are so different. You know, you've all met people who have so much Bible knowledge, but they don't have enough wisdom that they're

just ridiculous when it comes to application. You know, the absent-minded professor routine. There's all this stuff in their mind, and they can't make any of it work, seemingly. They're just way out on cloud nine.

I mean, I've read stuff like that. I have a very dear friend who just is really - now I would say he has the gift of knowledge. I don't always know - that's something. That's mixed in with whatever gift he has. Knowledge. And he said, "I want you to read my first article that's been published." And we went to seminary together.

And he gave me his article, and I read it, and I did not understand one single, solitary thing that he said. I mean, not anything. I got all done, and I said, "I just want to tell you this. This article might be good, but you could never convince me, because I don't even know what you're talking about." It was all in technicalities of Hebrew and all kinds of stuff. And when it was all said and done, I didn't even know what he was talking about. All I could think about was, "Well, I mean, what does this have to do with this marital problem over here, or how is that going to solve my problem with this certain situation over here? I mean, what is that going to do for this guy who doesn't know Christ?" You know, my whole thinking isn't that way. But his - oh, months and months he wrote that thing.

But somebody's going to take that basic thing, that basic understanding that he drew out of that, and somebody's going to translate that into something practical, because that's basic. Wisdom, then, is the skill to apply the facts that have been discovered by the gift of knowledge.

Now sometimes, somebody might have both of those. Or as I said, a lopsided combination of them, or whatever. But the word wisdom, sophia, is such a broad word. Don't confine it only to revelation.

In fact, in the New Testament, 12 of the 27 books use the word sophia, and it is seen in five categories. Sophia is seen as an attribute of God; it is seen as intellectual ability; it is seen as the person of Jesus Christ, who is _____ the wisdom of God; it is seen as proud human wisdom, opposed to God, in James 3; and it is seen, and this is its dominant use, it is seen as spiritual understanding of God's will. That is the primary use of sophia. Spiritual understanding of God's will. And I believe that's exactly what the gift is. It's the ability to understand God's will and make an application to obedience. And that's the way it's used mostly in the New Testament. To know God's will and to behave in response to it.

And I'm not going to take the time to give you the 20 illustrations that I jotted down, Scripture passages, but they're there. I'll just mention some references. In Matthew 11:19, 13:54, Mark 6:2, Luke 7:35, Luke 21:15, Acts 6:10, James 1:5, James 3:13 and 3:17, and 2 Peter 3:15.

Now those passages incorporate the main use of wisdom, that we know and behave in accord with God's will. What is the gift of wisdom? The Holy Spirit-given ability to show us the principles that we

need to know and obey to fulfill God's will. Yes, it had a revelatory aspect surely in the early ages. All of these speaking - first three speaking gifts did. But that was not its exclusive use. Much broader than that. _____ says, "Knowledge makes the teacher; wisdom, the preacher and pastor." But I would even go further than that, and I would say knowledge is the collecting of facts; wisdom is the application.

Now I spent some time on that, because I wanted you to see how important it is that we understand it. And the people who want to come along and they want to eliminate all those, knowledge, wisdom, prophecy, have got a problem, because if you eliminate prophecy, then what are you going to call the people who proclaim the Word. And if you eliminate knowledge, what are you going to call the theologians the people who dig out deep truth with their skill? And if you eliminate wisdom, what are you going to call the gift of being able to take truth and apply it to life? You've got to come up with new names, because God's still doing it. Isn't he? There are people still ministering in that way.

_____ two other gifts, speaking gifts. Four and five. Number four, the gift of teaching. And again, Romans 12:7, and this is very interesting, again. It says, "For ministry, let us wait on our ministry, or he that teacheth -" Oh, this is good. "He that teacheth on the teaching." Again, the definite article. Here is the gift of teaching, and whatever you teach, let it be consistent with the teaching. And what is the teaching? It's this, isn't it? This is the teaching. So if you teach, be consistent with the teaching.

What is the gift of teaching? Well, we should distinguish between the gift and the office. You can be a teacher in the Church, and that's an official position. And if you were a teacher, you would certainly have the gift of teaching. But not all who have the gift of teaching are recognized as official teachers, because the gift could be exercised in so many ways.

Let me tell you what the gift is. It is the ability, in the Holy Spirit, to pass on truth to somebody else. That's simply enough, isn't it? Prophecy is proclaiming Christ to an audience. Teaching is passing on truth to somebody else so that they receive it and implement it. So that they receive it and implement it.

It's a communicative ability, but you could do - people say, "Well, what gift is it when you can one on one with somebody and really build them up?" Maybe the gift of teaching, because what you're doing is passing on truth to them so that they can receive it and implement it. That's teaching. That's teaching.

This is a vitally important gift. Why? We're to teach and teach and teach. The New Testament just goes on and on about it. We've covered it so much. Let me give you something interesting about it. This will help you. The word dedascolos, dedasco, dedactocast- there's a zillion forms of it. Not quite that many. A lot of forms. But in all those various forms, there is a root meaning that is most

interesting. In tracing this back, I found out that the root meaning in that word is a systematic teaching, or a systematic - watch this word - training. It is the word, for example, that is used to refer to a choir director who trains a choir over a long period of rehearsals until they can perform.

Listen. The gift of prophecy could be a one-time proclaiming of Christ, but the gift of teaching is a systematic training program to take a person from here to there. The difference may be in the continuity involved.

Teaching systematically the truth of God. What's the curriculum for the teacher? The Bible. The Word of God. It can be used with men, one on one, one on two, one on three, one on 5,000. It can be used with women, one on one, one on two, one on three, one with 5,000. It can be used with a lady and little group of children. It can be used from a mother to a son. It can be used from a husband to a wife. It can be used in any conceivable way the Spirit of God desire. The ability to pass on truth in a systematic progression so that somebody receives it, implements it, and a change of behavior takes place.

In fact, it's a gift that belongs to a lot more of us, I think, than we realize.

Fifth. The last gift is exhortation. Romans 12:8, "He that exhorteth on the exhortation." If you're going to exhort somebody, use the exhortation. Here it is. The word again. The revealed exhortation of God's demands.

What is the word exhortation? Paracalan. Paraclete. Paracletas. We know that word. The comforter. The word means to comfort or help or advise or strengthen. I like strengthen. The gift of strengthening. Oh, that's good, isn't it? God has given some people to the body. There isn't necessarily to proclaim. It's not to dig out the facts. It's not to figure out the principles and apply them in wisdom. It's not even to systematically teach. It's just to go around and sort of strengthen people. It's those little interjections that sort of shake you up. They encourage you. They help. They advise. They strengthen. This, if you want a simple definition, is the ability to provide comfort and courage and help and strength to somebody who needs it.

It could come through a proclaimer. It could come through the pulpit, because the prophecy is exhortation. It could come through teaching. It could come through counseling. It can come a lot of ways. It's the gift of strengthening someone. It's the ability to get by somebody who has a problem and build them, encourage them, strengthen them. Bear their load.

People say, "Oh, yes. It's the gift of counseling." Wrong. That's wrong. Counseling is not a gift. Counseling is a process. And I'm quite confident there are some counselors who exercise the gift of teaching, some counselors who exercise the gift of strengthening. And there are counselors like me who exercise the gift of proclaiming, which doesn't always work in a counseling situation. But there is

no gift of counseling.

The gift could be used in counseling. It could be used in teaching. It could be used in informal conversation. I know people in this congregation, I know people on our staff, who have the gift of strengthening, because they strengthen me, and I see them doing it to you.

Luther - I like Luther's definition. Luther said this: "Teaching is directed to the ignorant; exhortation to those who know better." Oh, that's good, isn't it?

All right. Listen now close. Now watch. Five gifts. I want you to notice a beautiful progression. Are you ready for this? This is how God ministers to His body. Prophecy proclaims the truth. Knowledge clarifies the truth. Wisdom applies the truth. Teaching imparts the truth to somebody else. And exhortation demands that it be obeyed. See the progression?

Prophecy proclaims the truth. Knowledge clarifies it. Wisdom applies it. Teaching imparts it. Exhortation demands it be obeyed. All that comes together as we minister to each other, so that the body might be built. Let's pray.

Lord, thank you again this morning for ministering to us. Thank you for the gifts that you given to us that we've been able to share, and we pray that we might minister these gifts for those who have the gift of prophecy or proclaiming. The gift of knowledge or wisdom or teaching or strengthening. We pray, Lord, that they might minister the gift as good stewards of the manifold Grace of God. As you have so graciously poured out these abilities, may we in obedience and gratitude minister the same one to another. Thank you for our fellowship and for being here with us. In Christ's name, amen.

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