

The Church's One Foundation: Spiritual Gifts and the Universal Church
1 Corinthians 12:1–13 | 02.26.2017 | Body Life @OBC

Let me begin with three related illustrations.

First, consider what it takes to build a house.

You don't begin with windows, shingles, or doors. You begin with the foundation.

In so many ways, the foundation is the most important part of the house. Because once it is put in place, it can't be removed without destroying the whole house.

You can repair windows, replace shingles, remove doors, but the foundation is different.

The foundation is a unique, one time, most important feature of the building.

Second, consider the formation of life.

A child is not born full-grown. Rather he or she begins as small as a mustard seed.

For nine months or so, that child is formed in the womb. While in the womb she breathes amniotic fluid and survives on the nutrients provided by the umbilical cord. In short, the baby is directly supported and sustained by her mother's body.

But then something wonderful and traumatic happens . . . Through the pain and violence of child birth, the baby is born.

And once he or she has left the birth canal, there's no going back. What sustained the child at the beginning is no longer in play. There may be an in-between season, where the mother's body continues to feed the child, but the formation of the body is complete; now maturation begins.

Then third . . . recall the way America was founded.

In 1776, when the Declaration of Independence was signed the Continental Congress was America's sole government agency.

It convened in Philadelphia and lasted from 1774 to 1789. In fact, it was this leadership structure that founded the country, wrote the Constitution, and created the presidency.

For more than a decade, America as we know did not exist. There was no presidency, no three branches of government. At one time, George Washington had to turn down being king . . . in order for America to avoid a new monarchy.

All that to say, the government needed to found the country was different than the government needed to maintain the country.

Now hopefully, you see the common principle in these three illustrations.

That what it takes to start something is not the same thing to continue it.

What it takes to get something started often requires unique power/procedures.

This is true in the building of a house, the formation of a child, and the founding of a country . . . **and I would suggest . . . the formation and foundation of the church.**

Scripture teaches that the events, offices, and gifts of the Spirit were needed to found the universal church.

But the same Scripture records how these spiritual offices and spiritual gifts . . .

. . . were given with a divinely-intended “transference” of power from apostles and prophets in the universal church to elders and deacons in the local church.

That is to say there’s a **chronological ordering** that moves from Apostle . . . to Prophet . . . to Evangelist in the Early Church . . . to now the twin offices of Elder and Deacon.

You may remember – the UC is the body of Christ that exists at all times and in all places,

TO THAT GLOBAL BODY God gave apostles, prophets, and evangelists . . .
. . . so that the universal church would share the same foundation.

ATST, the local church is gifted with elders and deacons to teach the word and serve the saints, so each local community comes in alignment with God’s Universal Church.

Scripture also teaches that . . .

Some spiritual gifts were given to the apostles, prophets, and evangelists . . . for the founding of the UC

While others were given to rank-and-file pastors and church members for the establishment and growth of local churches.

Much confusion about the spiritual gifts . . . comes when we misunderstand the various offices . . . and their associated gifts.

But great clarity is found when we see how the miraculous gifts functioned in the founding of the church, but not in its ongoing ministries . . .

Which brings us to our study today . . .

What does the Bible say about the sign gifts—the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10?

My argument is that each of these 9 gifts are miraculous, sign gifts given to the apostles and prophets for the founding of the church.

These gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 do not continue through all ages of the church, but are given for that particular season when the church was birthed.

Therefore, these gifts find their greatest use in the years following Pentecost . . . and are in fact distributed by the Holy Spirit, who was poured out at Pentecost.

Which leads us this morning (and next week) to consider the role of Pentecost in understanding the Spiritual Gifts.

What is Pentecost?

What does it matter?

Surely, you have heard the term Pentecostal . . . a denomination and approach to faith that began at the Azusa Street Revival in 1909.

That's where Pentecost is commonly heard of today . . . but that's not what I'm talking about

I'm talking about what Scripture says happened on the Day of Pentecost when the church was conceived.

Pentecost is the historic event in Acts 2 when the Spirit was poured out on the church.

This event came with signs and wonders and the gift of tongues—i.e., the ability for foreigners to hear the gospel in their own language.

As Peter proclaimed in Acts 2, the outpouring of the Spirit fulfilled OT prophesy.

Likewise, as Luke shows in the rest of Acts, the outpouring of the Spirit had ongoing effects in places beyond Jerusalem . . .

The church was **conceived** at Pentecost, but the rest of Acts shows how the infant church came to life . . . as the Spirit spread from Jew to Samaritan to Greek.

For us . . . Pentecost comes to mind this morning because of what Paul says in 1 Cor 12:12–13 . . . **READ**

This baptism of the Spirit first occurred at Pentecost. . . . and then continued across Acts.

In Acts 8, the Samaritans received the Spirit . . . then in Acts 10 the Spirit goes to the Gentiles . . . and finally in Acts 19 . . . the followers of John the Baptist received the Spirit.

Each of these events continue the impact of Pentecost . . . and record Jesus' baptism of these people into his universal church.

Altogether, Acts which follows Peter and Paul, shows how Jesus Christ **by his Spirit** lays the foundation of the church, as the gospel is preached to all nations.

Yet, Acts is not entirely paradigmatic for our experience of the Spirit today.

IOW, we experience the same Holy Spirit, but in slightly different ways.

Because the foundation of the church has been laid . . . our baptism happens at the moment of salvation . . . **In Acts the baptism of the Spirit came after salvation.**

The reason for the difference is a result of God working in time. Acts is a transition book.

For instance, Acts shows the effects of Pentecost to have concentric circles of impact.

First, the Jews received the Spirit . . .

Next, the Samaritans received Spirit when the apostles Peter & John laid hands on them

Then, the Gentiles and the Old Covenant followers of John the Baptist received the gospel with signs of tongues . . . when Peter and Paul preached the gospel.

This is why we call Acts a transition book . . . because it does not give a paradigm for our spiritual experience.

Rather, thru the ministry of Spirit-anointed apostles . . . the EKK's foundation is laid

For our purposes in 1 Corinthians 12 . . .

It's necessary to see the relationship between the outpouring of the Spirit and the gifts of the spirit . . . because Paul makes the connection between the baptism of the Spirit (vv. 12–13) and the spiritual gifts listed in vv. 8–10.

These gifts . . . listed in verses 8, 9, 10 . . . are given to the apostles and prophets during the founding era of the church.

The universal church, described as the body of Christ in v. 12 . . . was founded by the men who received these miraculous gifts.

Therefore. . .

Like the foundation of the **house**, the formation of the **baby**, or the founding of our **country**, these gifts are not meant to be exercised throughout church history.

Rather, they are for the beginning phase of God's universal church.

In fact, in **1 Corinthians 3:10** Paul uses the architect imagery:

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it.

Paul is not unaware of his unique role in the church. He is an apostle sent by God to lay the foundation of the church. Likewise, he calls Peter and John pillars in the church (Gal 2:9), because they too serve as foundation stones in God's new covenant temple.

Another evidence of Paul's awareness of his unique position in the church is in 1 Cor 12.

Here, Paul speaks about the church as a universal body, not just a local institution.

Therefore, when he speaks about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he is not just talking individual Christians, or independent churches. He's talking about the Universal Church.

Like a child is brought into the world through birth pangs, so church is brought to life through birth pangs – pain and difficulty and danger.

The only way it survived was through the direct action of the Holy Spirit.

For this reason, the context makes the best sense of seeing these gifts as unique.

But it is not only the CONTEXT, but also the CONTENT of what Paul says in verses 8–10

. . . that lead me to see these as **9 Spiritual Gifts as Given to the Apostles and Prophets for the Founding of the Universal Church, and not for us today.**

Nine Gifts

The first thing we need to see is the way in which Paul organizes this list of gifts.

If you have notes, you'll see something of my understanding of his arrangement.

There are 5 pairs of gifts, with the 3rd gift – **workings of power** – set alone in the middle.

Paul uses the word “another” repeatedly, but twice he uses *heteros* instead of *allos*.

Thus, he divides the first 2 gifts from the next 5, and those same 5 from the last 2 gifts.

The first 2 are both tied together by the word “*logos*” – word of wisdom / word of know.

Then the last 2 are both related to tongues.

In the middle 5 . . . the first pair is tied together with the phrase “**by the Spirit**” – faith and healing both come by the Spirit.

And prophecy and discernment are conceptually related. The Spirit gives the power to speak prophecy and the ability to discern it.

With this arrangement, we can better understand Paul's thinking – **at least 3 things to see.**

1. He puts tongues last to de-emphasize this gift which the Corinthians make so much of.
2. He puts the wisdom and knowledge first. . . . The reason for this will become obvious but it has to do with the way wisdom and knowledge relate to the gospel.
3. ‘Workings of power’ is in the center of this list, stressing its importance.

You notice, I don't say “miraculous powers.” The reason is the word *dunamis* is most regularly translated power.

My sense is that the word MIRACLE is too heavily tainted my modern ideas . . .

Whenever deciding the meaning of a word, we need to see how it is USED . . .

And in this case . . . *Dunamis* / POWER is usually related to the gospel and especially the resurrection.

In this way, the spiritual gifts listed here may include resurrections, healings, and supernatural power . . . but always for this purpose . . . to elevate the Gospel of Jesus.

With that introduction in place, let's walk through these five pairs of gifts.

The first pair relates to wisdom and knowledge.

It'd be easy to understand wisdom and knowledge as general abilities given to M & W. It could be like the wisdom that Solomon sought and received.

But general wisdom doesn't fit how Paul speaks earlier in his letter.

In chapter 1 and 2, Paul contrasts the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of Christ. In fact, in 1:30, he calls Christ the wisdom of God. And in 2:6–7, he says,

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. ⁷ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

What is this secret and hidden wisdom now revealed?

It's the wisdom found in Christ.

Paul has wisdom b/c God showed it to him. As Ephesians 3 confirms, the gospel was a spiritual gift of grace. Hence, he calls himself a "wise" master-builder in 1 Cor 3:10.

He builds with the wisdom given to him in the gospel, and he affirms other preachers like Apollos and Peter who do the same.

A word of wisdom then relates to the revelation of the gospel message.
A word of knowledge is very similar, but perhaps one step removed.

As one commentator put it:

"With respect to the nature of the gift [of knowledge], it appears to have consisted in the immediate communication of an exact and competent knowledge of the truths, which God had already revealed through the inspired prophets and apostles. (Henderson, 166).

IOW . . . God gave gospel wisdom to men like Paul to preach the message of salvation.

And he gave knowledge to others—prophets and evangelists—who would join Paul in laying down the foundation of the church.

In this way, the wisdom and knowledge described here are not the same as the wisdom and knowledge that God gave to OT saints

. . . nor are they the same as the insight God gives today through study of his Word.

Rather, as Paul says the Spirit gives words of wisdom and knowledge to preach and write God's Word . . . thus establishing the foundation of the church.

This is the first pair.

Next, we look at the spiritual gifts of faith and healing.

First, the faith mentioned here is not saving faith or even strong faith.

It is miraculous faith . . . faith to believe God for mountain-moving miracles.

Strikingly, this kind of faith can exist without saving faith, as in the case of Judas.

But in the early church, it was a gift founding apostles and prophets received as they raised the dead, cast out demons, and healed the sick . . . **which Paul addresses next**

Now as it relates to healing . . . I must say: we do not need to deny God's power to heal today.

We deny the work of faith-healers who market themselves as sources of divine power.

We affirm the power of God to heal in response to believing prayer.

To be sure . . .

Scripture, church history, and personal experience all testify to the way God miraculously heals. And we pray for healing b/c we believe that God can heal and is glorified in healing

But this steadfast prayer is different than the gift of healing reported here.

How do we know? Again, Scripture is our guide.

In the Gospels, Jesus sent out his apostles with the explicit command to cast out demons and heal people. But this power and commission is not repeated to ensuing generations.

In Acts, we Peter and Paul healing, even raising the dead. But not always.

Early in their ministries P & P raised the dead and heal miraculously. Acts 5 reports how people were healed by Peter's shadow; Acts 19 says the same of Paul's handkerchief.

These are true testimonies . . . but they are true of these men in order to found the church. They do not carry with them enduring application.

Again . . . Healings were given to make plausible the power of the gospel. Not the reverse.

The gospel isn't given so believers could see signs, wonders, miraculous healing.

The gospel is given so that the spiritually blind we might see Christ.

So . . . whenever healing and powers are emphasized today they detract from that message.

At the same time . . . such faith-healers necessarily create a new church / new ministry . . . built on their works and their personality. **This is not God's plan!**

No . . . God's plan was to grant mighty works to the first generation of Christians, so that the church would be built on the gospel foundation of the apostles and prophets.

This is why "workings of power" is put at the center of Paul's list.

Mighty works of power have always been given to confirm God's messengers.

In Egypt . . . mighty works were put in Moses hand to prove he was God's spokesman.

In Israel . . . the prophets Elijah and Elisha raised the dead and the healed the sick.

In Jesus' life . . . His ability to heal and raise the dead bore witness to his identity and saving message.

Ultimately . . . in the age of the apostles, we read that signs, wonders, and mighty works were given to confirm their office (2 Corinthians 12:12) and their message (Hebrews 2:4).

Likewise, in 1 Corinthians we "power" is related to the gospel.

Consider a few verses.

First, there's **1 Corinthians 1:18 and 24**, where Paul says that preaching the cross of Christ is the power and wisdom of God.

Next, in **1 Corinthians 2:4–5**, Paul emphasizes that faith must be dependent on God's power, not man's speech.

Third, in **1 Corinthians 5:4–5** Paul stresses the power of Jesus in their midst.

We might ask: What power does the church have? It is the power to exercise gospel-defined discipline when a member of their community sins against God.

Fourth, in **1 Corinthians 6:14**, Paul references God's resurrection power, which is able to strengthen sinners bought by Christ's death to now walk in his life.

Thus, by the time we get to "power" in 1 Corinthians 12:10, we learn it is not an isolated term, but rather one that is directly related to the gospel and the resurrection of Christ.

All the apostolic gifts of power are but visible confirmations of what the Gospel promises.

True power is seen visibly in changed lives more than miraculous healings and sign gifts.

This was undeniably God's plan when apostles and prophets laid the foundation of the church, and it remains true today . . .

We are not lacking in power today . . . we have the Gospel . . . which is the power of God unto salvation . . .

Finally, the last 2 pairs of spiritual gifts are prophecy & discernment, tongues & interpretation of t

Because we will spend all of chapter 14 on them, I will only mention them briefly.

First, there is prophecy.

And in this passage, it is not the office of the prophet in view, but the gift of prophesy. For that reason, I take Paul to be speaking of the gift of **predictive prophecy**.

This sort of prophesy is evidenced in the places like Acts 11 and 21, where Agabus foretells something of the future.

It is also seen in some NT books—1 Corinthians 15, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation include predictive prophecy. This is what Paul has in mind here.

And not surprisingly, . . .

There is the complementary gift of spiritual discernment, the ability to discern what is true and not.

This too is evidenced in Acts, when Peter discerned the lies of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), or when Paul discerned that the servant girl in Philippi had a demonic spirit.

Truly, in an age of signs and wonders and mighty works, a spiritual gift of discernment was needed, and based on the evidence of Acts . . . it goes beyond any type of wise discernment today.

And then . . . Right along with prophesy is tongues and their interpretation.

This gift is clearly assoc. with the early church as the Spirit moved from the Jews to all nations.

And as we will see when we study ch. 14, tongues are not ecstatic utterances lacking meaning—groans too deep for words.

They are real words in other languages that need translation.

This is proven from a comparison of Acts 2 . . . and from they are described in ch. 14.

The Corinthians thought this gift was at the top of the list and prided themselves on their possession of them.

But Paul puts them at the bottom of this list . . . to remind them that tongues is not the greatest gift.

. . . And that all gifts are from the Spirit, given for the purpose of building up the body.

Indeed . . . two thousand years later . . . we need to remember how these gifts build up the body in all ages and all places.

1. The Spirit gave these gifts to the founding generation of the church in order to confirm the ministry of the apostles and prophets

And . . . by confirming their ministry, they not only served the church in Corinth but every local church ever since.

In this way, the apostles and prophets along with evangelists like Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John . . . served a unique, unrepeatable role in the church.

Today, we benefit massively from their labors.

And the gifts God gave to them to empower them are still bearing fruit.

Thus, our first point of application from this study is to praise God for the way he revealed his gospel through his apostles and prophets, and preserved it for us.

2. Second, we can stop looking for God to speak in anything other than his word.

God has given us everything we need for life and godliness, and it is all found in this book

Friends, the danger and deceit of the charismatic movement is that it leads people away from the pure and simple gospel of Jesus Christ.

Learning that the miraculous gifts were given to the apostles and not to us doesn't take away from their power or importance.

Instead, it clarifies the message. Just as the apostles and prophets pointed to the gospel, so we can understand all these sign gifts as pointing to the same gospel.

In this way, limiting these gifts to the early church makes us stop looking for other signs and wonders . . . and presses us back into the promises and commands of Scripture.

This is the way of true discipleship and true spiritual power.

While our experience-seeking world tempts us to chase our own miraculous powers . . . such invitations only move us away from the gospel.

God gave us a good foundation on which to build our church and our lives.

We don't need to go looking to found another house, form another body, or build another country . . . God has supplied us with all of that through his apostles and prophets.

Therefore, let us learn from them . . . and seek the God of power in his Word.