

Rich Nathan
December 2 and 3, 1995
God's Empowering Presence
1 Cor. 12:7-11

A Church Alive With the Presence of God

This evening [morning] I am continuing in my series on the Holy Spirit. And for the last few weeks, we have been looking at the subject of spiritual gifts. Now, last week we continued in our study from 1 Corinthians 12 and I talked with you about some of the reasons why God gives spiritual gifts to the church. If you remember, I said that spiritual gifts were power tools given by the Triune God—the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, to build the kingdom of God. We can use hand tools in getting a job done. You can use a hand saw, you can use a hand drill or you can use a power saw and power drill. Spiritual gifts are like power tools. Rather than simply operate in our own human strength with our own human wisdom and natural abilities, the Lord gives spiritual gifts to assist us in building the kingdom of God.

We also discovered that spiritual gifts are meant to be manifestations of the Spirit. The apostle Paul writes in 1 Cor. 12:7, “To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given.” And there we discovered that spiritual gifts are designed to manifest God in our midst, to make the invisible God visible.

A lot of people in the world today say, “Where is your God? How do you know God even exists? Is it all just theory and discussion and words? Your theory is as good as any other theory about God. Why should I believe in Jesus rather than Allah or Buddha or one of the Hindu gods like Krishna? What makes Jesus special? How do I know he even exists?”

One of the ways that Paul says we can know that Christ exists is through spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts manifest God, the Christian God, the Triune God—Father, Son and Spirit. When these things are in operation, things like healing, prophecy, tongues, and the message of wisdom, then people will say, “Ah, now I see evidence of your God. He is no longer just far away in heaven, he has now come to us and he is in our midst.”

This is the theme that I want to pick up on today. You know, the church in 1 Corinthians and actually elsewhere in the New Testament, in the book of Romans and in Ephesians, the church is described as the body of Christ. See, church in the New Testament is not the building that we meet in. The building houses the church. The building is the place where the church meets. But if this building burned down or was struck by lightening, our church would still exist because we, the Vineyard Church, are just meeting here on Cooper Road. And in describing what we, the Vineyard Church, are meant to be, the New Testament uses the word “body.” We are collectively and of course together with all other Christian churches, the body of Christ.

Now, the body of Christ is meant to be a living, breathing, functioning organism. The body of Christ is not an organization. When Paul describes the church, he doesn’t describe the church in corporation terms. He doesn’t say, “You all are a business partnership. That is the church, a business partnership. You are all simply a not-for-profit corporation organized under the laws of the State of Ohio and of the Internal Revenue Code.” He doesn’t say, “Individual members, you’re shareholders of the great corporation called the church.”

No, when he speaks of the church, he almost always uses living, breathing metaphors like: family, God's field and perhaps the most living metaphor, the one that speaks of organism over against organization is the metaphor of the body.

Here is what I am getting at friends. I believe that the Holy Spirit through spiritual gifts animates the body, makes the body alive with the presence of God. When spiritual gifts are withdrawn from the church, the church becomes a dead church, a dead place. If you don't see any spiritual gifts operating in the church, and the Holy Spirit is restricted in what the Spirit of God is allowed to do, the body is dead. It is the Spirit, the Holy Spirit that makes a church alive. The Holy Spirit manifests himself and shows that he is present in the church through spiritual gifts.

Well, today I have called my message on spiritual gifts, "A Church Alive With the Presence of God." Let's pray.

"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, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of the one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines."

Before looking at individual gifts, one of the questions that arises in many people concerns classifying the gifts. And, frankly, I think that our desire to classify, to have neat categories for everything is really part of a western mind-set. We want to know

exactly how many gifts are there and what slots to fit them all in. Paul, here, lists nine spiritual gifts.

You need to know that other Bible passages list many other spiritual gifts that are not found here in 1 Cor. 12. For example, in Romans 12 Paul adds gifts like mercy, encouraging, and serving. In 1 Cor. 7, Paul speaks of still other gifts—the gift of celibacy and marriage (1 Cor. 7). He is speaking about marriage and celibacy and Paul says, “I wish that all men were as I am.” In context, he is talking about celibate, unmarried. “But each man has his own gift from God, one has this gift and another has that.” How many of you have prayed for the spiritual gift of celibacy? It is a gift. It is just not one that is highly valued in American culture today.

My point in all of this is that I think it is inappropriate to speak of nine spiritual gifts. In the scriptures, there are about twenty-eight gifts listed. And in Paul’s mind, I think these gifts that he mentions here are merely illustrations of God’s activity in the church. He is saying, “Here are some ways that God makes a church alive. There are lots of other ways, and I have mentioned them in some of my other letters, but here are a few things that God will give to the church as he animates a church with his presence.” So, we see here nine gifts, but as I am underlining for you, there are many others.

Now, in terms of classifying these nine gifts, there are a number of systems that people have devised to classify the gifts. Probably the one that I like best is by using a picture of a body. These nine gifts can be grouped in groups of three starting with the mind of Jesus. In verse 8, Paul speaks of one being given through the Spirit, the message of wisdom and another, the message of knowledge, or the word of wisdom and the word

of knowledge. Those two gifts can be coupled with a gift in verse 10, the ability to distinguish between spirits. That is all under the mind of Jesus.

Then we see the hands of Jesus in verse 9. By the hands of Jesus we are talking about gifts of power. “To another faith by the same Spirit, to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit and to another miraculous powers.” Those are the hands of Jesus.

And then in verse 10, essentially, we have the mouth of Jesus, “...to another prophecy, to another different kinds of tongues and to another the interpretation of tongues.”

So, the nine spiritual gifts can be grouped in groups of three as the mind of Jesus, the hands of Jesus i.e. the power of Jesus, and the mouth of Jesus i.e. gifts of speech. Other people have gotten more exotic in their breakdown using Old Testament language of prophet, priest and king and grouped these nine gifts under that 3-fold Old Testament breakdown of prophet, priest and king. But I think the body of Jesus will serve as well.

There is one important classification that I do want to mention to you, again, before we look at the individual gifts. And that is a distinction between gifts that are permanent possessions and gifts that are given in a situation and then withdrawn. See, for a lot of folks who read 1 Cor. 12, I think they read it with a basic misunderstanding and that is that these gifts listed here, these nine gifts, however you classify them, these nine gifts are given to a person and then a person has them at their disposal to use whenever they want to use them. So, for example, if a person is given the gift of healing, then whenever someone comes up who is sick, that person can do the healing. It is a permanent gifting and the healer can just do the healing at will.

But I don't think that is the way it works. I think these gifts in 1 Cor. 12 are instead spontaneous. They are situationally given. So let me draw this distinction out for you between permanent possessions, gifts that can be used as we choose to use them and other gifts that are situational. They are given by the Holy Spirit in the moment as a situation arises and then they disappear.

Now, it is clear in the New Testament that some gifts are permanent. If you flip with me to Romans 12, you will see in Romans 12 that the apostle Paul says in verse 4, "Just as each one of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ, we who are many form one body and each member belongs to the others."

We have different gifts according to grace given us. We have these different gifts. Another translation says, "Having different gifts" i.e. possessing different gifts. And then Paul lists some of the gifts: prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, the gift of giving, leadership, mercy. These are gifts that will generally be given and they are possessions. They are things that one can do and keep on doing. Likewise, we see the gifts in Ephesians 4, which are sometimes called "offices." Paul describes them as gifts. In Ephesians 4 the apostle Paul says, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up." These gifts—apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher, are given to the church and they are not situational. If someone is an evangelist, pastor, prophet, teacher, they pretty well will function in that role all of the time. It is not like sometimes they are

a teacher and sometimes they are not able to teach. That gift is given and it is a possession. It is something that the person has. It is more permanent.

And Paul speaks in permanent language in 1 Tim. 4 when he tells Timothy not to neglect the gift that was in him or put in him through the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14). My point is that some spiritual gifts are permanent possessions, but others, these here listed in 1 Cor. 12, are more situational. They are given and then they are taken away.

I love John Wimber's analogy of a plumber going to a job and he looks in his tool box and sees his tool box is empty. So he says to the Lord, "O God, O God, O God, O God, I need a wrench." And he looks down and the wrench is there. He uses it to fix a pipe. Then he goes to the next pipe and he says, "O, I had a wrench on the last pipe, so I must have a wrench here" and he looks in his tool box and it is empty again. That's the way these 1 Cor. 12 gifts are. The gift of healing is given and you pray for a sick person and they get better. Then the next sick person walks up and you say, "Well, I healed the last sick person, so I am sure this will work" and you pray for that sick person and nothing happens.

You say, "Rich, how can you justify this reading of 1 Cor. 12 as situational? I mean I know that that is our experience, that sometimes we pray for one sick person and they get better and another we pray for and they don't. I know that is our experience. And sometimes we are able to distinguish between spirits and sometimes we are not. I know that is our experience, but how can you prove from the Bible that certain spiritual gifts are situational?"

Well, let me suggest a few ways that I would attempt to prove that. If gifts were given, you have a gift and that is your gift and that is all you are ever going to have, then why does Paul tell us on several occasions to pray for other spiritual gifts? I mean if it is really the case that you are a teacher and that is all you will ever be is a teacher, or you are just a merciful person and you are in the back room showing mercy, or administrating, but that's it, you won't have any of these other gifts, then why does Paul in other scriptures tell us to pray for different gifts in 1 Cor. 12 gifts to be operative in our lives?

For example, in 1 Cor. 14 the apostle Paul says, "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy." And in 1 Cor. 14:5 he says, "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues." And later he says that if you do speak in tongues, pray for the gift of interpretation. So it is evident that we can pray for additional gifts and we are not locked into what we currently have. But beyond that, if you even look at the tense of the verb in the original, in the Greek, where Paul says in verse 7, "The manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" and in verse 8, "to one there is given through the Spirit, the message of wisdom" and in verse 11, "he gives them to each one." Those verbs are present tense verbs in the Greek. And the Greek present tense means that the Holy Spirit gives and keeps on giving. The verb tense is not "aorist" in which the action was completed in the past. The Holy Spirit gave this gift and that's it. In one moment you get the gift. No. This is an ongoing giving. The Lord continues to animate the body.

You say, "Rich, what's the point of all of this? Why do we care if something is permanent or something is situational?" For this reason, friends. This is such an

important concept. If you get the idea that spiritual gifts are situationally given according to a need, these 1 Cor. 12 gifts are not permanent possessions, because at any given time, God may want to use you to do one of these 1 Cor. 12 gifts. You see, most of us have functioned from a framework of “oh well, I am not a prophet. I have never had a prophecy in the past. That is not my spiritual gift. I am a teacher.” or “I am a servant.” or “I am an administrator. I have never been used to prophecy before so I won’t be used now.” or, “I am not a healer, so far as I know. I have never seen anyone get well. Of course, I haven’t really prayed for anyone to get well.” or “I have only prayed for two people, but they didn’t get well. So I know that I am not a healer.”

What I am saying to you is that if you get this idea that a gift from 1 Cor. 12 may be given to you spontaneously at any moment, you will go into meetings or into the world with an open expectancy that God may wish to use you to meet a need even though you have never been used that way in the past. I realize that you have never been used in the past to deliver a prophecy, but now we are in a meeting, in a small group, in a women’s group, and we are waiting on the Lord to speak, to give direction, to give insight, to give wisdom. You go into that time and you say, “You know, the Lord may want to use me. I am going to listen for God’s voice.” Or a sick person is present in a meeting or in your office or at your school. I realize you have never been used before, but you can have an open expectancy. Maybe the Lord will drop a tool in your tool box.

Seeing these gifts as situational, as spontaneously given, will create an expectancy in this whole church, an openness to the possibility that God may want to use us in ways that he has never used us before. Friends, this idea changed my life. Years ago I thought, “I know I teach and I know that God has given me leadership.” From the time I came to

Christ I began teaching and people began to respond to my leadership. Not that I was any big deal, but that is what the Lord was doing through me. I never thought that I could heal the sick and I never thought that I could prophecy and I never thought that I could cast out a demon.

But now, when I read 1 Cor. 12, it opens up fresh possibilities for me today. My whole world view, my whole paradigm shifted. My goodness, this need might call for me to be used. Not someone else who has this gift in their tool box, but me. And once you begin to expect that God may use you, at times he does. And when he does, that builds your bank of confidence that he may want to use you again in that area. And then again. And you begin to grow in your faith. Adopt this view. Any one of these gifts in 1 Cor. 12 can operate through you at any given time. And that view will change your life.

Let's dive into, then, the individual gifts. And we start in verse 8, "To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge." Traditionally, these gifts are called word of wisdom and word of knowledge which is an appropriate translation as well. They are translating the Greek word "logos," but "message" is really the way that we generally speak about the communication of information that is more than one word.

So, what are these gifts—the message of wisdom and the message of knowledge? Well, you know the traditional charismatic and Pentecostal understanding of these gifts is that they are spontaneous revelations from the Holy Spirit. The word of wisdom is a revelation in a moment of a wise solution for a problem. We are all stressed out about a problem, a crisis and someone gets immediate illumination from the Holy Spirit, gets up and speaks it to the group, this message of wisdom and it solves the crisis and solves the

problem. But it is an immediate revelation, a spontaneous revelation of wisdom given by the Holy Spirit. That is the word of wisdom according to the traditional Pentecostal and charismatic view.

The word of knowledge is distinguished slightly in the traditional charismatic or Pentecostal view by being the spontaneous revelation of information or of data, that would otherwise would not be known. This is the way, by the way, that Vineyard has historically taught the word of knowledge: when I get up here on the stage and I have this insight, this spontaneous burst of revelation, that someone in the audience has a particular problem, and I didn't know that beforehand, Vineyard has historically called that the word of knowledge or the message of knowledge.

Now, I don't believe we can be too dogmatic about these things in defining the gifts precisely, particularly these two gifts because they are not otherwise mentioned anywhere in the Bible in quite the same way. So, I don't know that we can be dogmatic about it, but I personally believe that the traditional charismatic and Pentecostal understanding of these gifts is, in fact, wrong. And even the Vineyard teaching that has gone on for some years is probably not accurate. It is probably not what Paul was getting at by these two gifts.

You see, the Bible already has a word for this immediate illumination of information, this immediate spontaneous revelation of information that previously wasn't known, but now is just brought to mind. The Bible word for that kind of gifting is prophecy. And Paul in fact calls that sort of operation, that revelation, prophecy just two chapters later in 1 Cor. 14.

Turn with me there. I want you to see this because we interpret scripture by scripture. You say, “How do I know what a verse means or what a phrase means?” Well, we read it in context, but then we want to not only read that verse in its immediate context of the verses around it and discover the purpose of what the author is saying, but we also want to read a verse in the larger context of the book that it was written in. And even a larger context of the rest of the Bible.

You know, where people get off in their doctrine is they pull a verse out of the Bible, they pull a verse out of context, and they interpret it in a certain way and fail to read that verse against the larger backdrop of the rest of the Bible. Many heresies have arisen that way because they have taken phrases out of context and given it a read which is possible, but is completely incongruent with the larger Bible teaching on the subject.

What is the larger Bible teaching on these sorts of immediate bursts of revelation in which someone knows something that they previously didn’t know and then they announce that? Well, look at 1 Cor. 14:24. The apostle Paul is speaking about when the Corinthian church gathered together. I am thinking about these home fellowships, these house churches and he says, “If an unbeliever or someone who doesn’t 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.”

The apostle Paul is describing a situation in which the church gets together, a non-Christian is there, and someone speaks a message spontaneously that just opens up this guy’s heart and discloses his or her secrets. That message just goes right to the heart of that person. They say, “My goodness, they were speaking right to me. This man, this

woman knew everything about me! Before I was wondering if God was real and how do I know that God really exists, now I walk in and someone says, ‘Is this your problem?’ And I was just sliced open.”

We have had that over and over again in the Vineyard. I have heard dozens and dozens of stories of non-believers walking into our meetings and hearing a prophecy or someone going over during the prayer time and ministering to the person and wham! This revelation came to the person ministering and the person was opened up and their reaction is surely God is in your midst. What is that gifting called? It is called prophecy. Someone is prophesying.

Now, throughout the scripture, this knowledge of secret information is always called prophecy. In John 4, you recall that Jesus is speaking to a woman at a well. She is evading God and running from God like some of you may be today. You find yourself here at church, but you have been running from God. You haven’t turned toward him and surrendered to him even though you believe that God exists. This woman believed that God existed, but she was on the run from God and Jesus speaks to her about some secret information in her life that she wanted to keep hidden.

He says, “Go call your husband.”

She says, “I have no husband.”

He says, “That’s right. What you are saying is true. But you have had five husbands before and the man you are living with right now is not your husband either.” Woman, I see that you have lived with six different guys. What is this woman’s response? She is cut open. She doesn’t say, “Sir, I perceive that you have the gift of word of knowledge.” She says, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet.” She was working out

of the framework of Old Testament teaching about what prophets were like. The backdrop for Paul's description of prophecy is formed by the Old Testament use of prophet and prophecy. In the Old Testament, prophets were people who, as are part of their gifting, could tell you things that no one could know except that they had revelation from God. Samuel was able to give information to Saul about his donkeys.

If Paul had meant to change the Old Testament usage of the word prophecy, he would have told us. I am using this differently than it has been used it before. But he doesn't do that. He just continues with the common usage of prophecy. Prophecy is the spontaneous burst of revelation.

But you know why else I object to the traditional charismatic and Pentecostal and even Vineyard usage of message of wisdom and message of knowledge to be this spontaneous burst of illumination? I think that it comes from a mind-set that Pentecostals and charismatics have had almost from the beginning. It is a mind-set that exalts the mystical, the apparently spiritual over against the intellectual, the rational, and the analytical.

Friends, in the history of the church, there has always been this tendency in the church to exalt a part of man's being and to undercut or to lower another part of man's being. This is all part of Greek dualism. So at times in the history of the church, you will see the intellect valued above everything and emotions are thrown out. Or you will see the spiritual component of a person exalted and the body devalued. Things dealing with the body like sex and sexuality and eating and just enjoying the creation are devalued.

But you know the Old Testament view of man is that man is not this dichotomous, being separated from his higher spirit and his lower body. The Old Testament view of

man is that man is a unity. We are animated bodies, alive bodies. The Old Testament is so clear about the value of the body as it speaks about eternity. It tells us that our bodies will be risen from the dead, not just our spirits over against the Greek view that what is going to happen in heaven is that we will just be disembodied souls like ghosts wandering around. You will be able to look through us. No. The Old Testament and then into the New Testament teaches that eternity will be inhabited by real bodied people, who have resurrected bodies with resurrected blood and resurrected flesh and resurrected bones.

And you see this dualistic view which says no, your body is bad and your sex is bad and eating is bad and enjoying a good book is bad. What you really should be doing is you should be praying and you should never be enjoying the nice day or enjoying your family. That is all Greek dualism. The Old Testament, the Hebraic view, the Jewish view which informed Paul's thinking was this is all good. Creation is all good. Life is good. It is not as if the only thing that you have valuable to do at work is to steal time from your employer so you can do a spiritual thing. You know, witness to other employees. Take time off to counsel people. No, it is all good. It is all in service to God. As long as you see it that way and you are offering it to God.

By the way, one of the modern proponents of a dualistic view of people is Watchman Nee which continually divides up man. It is a horribly unfortunate perspective in which parts of people are better than other parts. It is not biblical thinking. So get rid of it.

What does this all mean for a message of wisdom and a message of knowledge? What it means is this. I believe that the message of wisdom and the message of

knowledge is the use of intellectual gifts in service to God for the benefit of the church. All thinking is not great, but thinking that is submitted to God, that is informed by the scripture and by prayer and by the leading of the spirit, intellectual gifts have a place in the church. See, what I don't want to value here in the Vineyard, what is bad about some of Vineyard's approaches from time to time and particularly charismatic approaches from time to time, is the only issue is how exotic is your recent experience? How weird has it gotten? What heavenly realm have you entered now?

So what are we talking about by the message of wisdom? I think Paul is simply saying that wisdom acquired in the normal course of the Christian life, a life lived in a response to God and listening to God's word and submitting your mind to Christ, that that wisdom is a gift given to the church. It is not all kinds of wisdom that Paul is talking about. He is not talking about carnal wisdom or shrewdness, here is a way to cut corners and not be discovered, here is a way where you can cheat on your taxes or manipulate a situation so that you get your way with your husband or your wife. If you do this or that, it will manipulate them. That is not what he is talking about. He is talking about godly wisdom, wisdom that is from above to use the words of James. It has pure motives. It is not manipulative. It is not ambitious.

You see that wisdom in Acts 6. If you need a cross reference and want to jot it down in your notes, in Acts 6 there is a controversy, a crisis in the early church. The Greek Jews were complaining that their widows were being overlooked in the distribution of food and this could have caused a split in the church. The Greek Jews were upset with Hebraic Jews, Jews from Palestine. This message of wisdom is given in which they say, "Well, you pick some people from among you, Greek Jews, you pick

people and let them distribute the food.” It was so wise because there would be no suspicion if the people themselves picked their leaders. The job would be done. It relieved the apostles of having the burden of having to do it. The solution given, if you look at Acts 6, is so wise. But I don’t think it was a spontaneous burst of illumination. I think this was wisdom acquired in the course of life lived in response to God.

You can see the same gift in operation in Acts 15 when the church was in crisis again and the situation involved whether to have to circumcise Gentiles or not.

Now, I think when we are talking about the gift of knowledge, the message of knowledge, I think we are basically talking about teaching gifts, the use of the knowledge of the scriptures and the knowledge of doctrine and the mind of God in order to teach the Word accurately. You can look at Romans 15:14 for that.

My point, friends, is really very simple. I think the church is a place in which all the gifts given, intellectual gifts, gifts of reasoning, gifts of illumination, gifts of worship, all the of the gifts are respected and enjoyed. And it is when one gift is exalted above another and this whole framework of valuing the exotic over against valuing the more common works into the church that the church gets off. Now, what I am not saying is that if you are a teacher, don’t seek after illumination. Don’t go after prophecy. Don’t go after tongues or one of the other gifts. No. I want you to all stretch in all areas and not just be satisfied with what you have currently been operating in. Nevertheless, I want you all to know you have a place in this church and that this exaltation of one thing over the other is not biblical thinking. It comes from a Greek mind-set.

I want to turn our attention to the gift of faith, “...to another faith, by the same Spirit.” I think this gift stands at the fountainhead of the other more supernatural giftings

because it is really foundational for what follows—the gift of healing and miraculous powers and prophecy. The underlying gift that must be operative with these more supernatural giftings is the gift of faith. The fact is God gives gifts one way and gives gifts another way, but they are all from God. Yet, the underlying gift for healing and miracles and all that follows is the gift of faith.

You say, “What is the gift of faith?”

Well, I think we need to distinguish this gifting of faith from what I would call salvation faith on the one hand and fruit faith on the other. Salvation faith, saving faith, is the faith by which a person trusts in Christ and trusts that Christ’s death on the cross is enough to merit salvation to forgive our debts that we have rung up with God. So we have to distinguish this gift of faith from saving faith and also from fruit faith. Fruit faith is mentioned in Galatians 5—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and then some translations say faithfulness, but it is a character quality of fidelity, of trustworthiness.

Here we are talking about a gift of special faith. There are several ways that this gift of special faith works. The first way it works is that we could call it a contagious faith. This special faith is a faith that strengthens the faith of others. When other people are fearful and discouraged and hopeless, a person with this special faith sows faith in the hopeless and in the discouraged. You see it when Paul was on board of a storm-tossed ship in Acts 27 and the sailors are frightened and everyone is running around anxious. The apostle Paul says, “Take heart men, for I have faith in God that we will be saved.”

The effect of what Paul does is he encourages the sailors and their despair is lifted. I have seen this in operation where a believer is quite discouraged because of a

problem in their family, because of an illness, because of death. The believer is anxious and someone with this special gift of faith is able to impart encouragement and basically get the person to turn their eyes off their problem and turn their eyes upon Jesus. Special faith is a contagious faith.

Special faith is what I call a “mountain-moving” faith. Paul mentions that in 1 Cor. 13, “If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge and I have a faith that can move mountains...” Jesus, likewise, called this special faith a mountain-moving faith in Mark 11 when he says, “Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea’ and doesn’t doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.”

You say what is the nature of a mountain that we would need mountain moving faith? A mountain is any obstacle that cannot be moved by unassisted human efforts. It is any obstacle that can’t be overcome by your works and your own reason and your own efforts, or the efforts of all people put together, an obstacle which can only be moved by the hand of God.

We all have been under a mountain at one time or another in our life. A mountain of debt, a mountain, in your case, may be an illness that the doctors cannot heal. They may alleviate some of the symptoms, they may prolong your life, but they cannot heal the illness. A mountain can be an immovable problem in your marriage that you have tried to talk out and counsel out and argue out, but it is not moving. When you have a mountain in your life, to get rid of that mountain and throw it into the sea, we need this gift of special faith.

And it is a gift. It is not a matter of simply declaring something to be the case and it is done. It is not just a matter of positive thinking or auto suggestion in which you talk yourself into believing something will occur when inside you feel like it won't. This special faith is a gift that banishes your doubts.

I believe it is a gift that is received in prayer. As you pray and you direct your mind and your heart away from your problem and onto God, more and more your heart believes, as you get a picture of God, how big he is, how wise he is, how competent he is that God is able to move this mountain out of your life. Special faith says God is able. I know this is a mountain, but God is able. He who spoke the world into existence is able to throw this mountain into the sea. He who created the stars and knows all of us by name, who knows the number of hairs on our head, he is able to deal with this.

I believe that special faith is acquired in prayer as we get to know and rest in our God and as we also discover God's mind. As you lift something to the Lord more and more, the Lord will reveal his mind regarding an issue. Here is my purpose. Here is my desire, here is my will. Once you discover the mind of God, you can have perfect confidence that God will do what he is revealing to you.

I recall when we were building this building and had a major mountain in our way of not being able to obtain a loan, I recall many of us praying and having a confidence that God had spoken to us about building this building. He said it and so we were able to cast that burden away. God accomplished it. And on numerous individual occasions in my life, when I reflected back on what God has said to me, when I have discovered his purpose, I was able to move forward and clear mountains out of the way. The gift of

faith is a gift that is received in prayer as we gain an appreciation for who God is and we gain a knowledge of what God's will is.

But the gift of faith doesn't turn us loose in the universe to run things. The gift of faith doesn't allow us to write our own ticket with God and tell God what we want here and what we want there. God is still God. And we have no claim on him for things that he has not promised us in his word. Some have taught that we have a claim on posterity or a claim on perfect health. We have no claim on those things. We see in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ that perfect life does not mean perfect prosperity. The Son of Man had no place to lay his head. If we have a nice warm bed, we are doing better than Jesus and he had perfect faith by the way.

So Paul says, "To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom and knowledge by means of the same Spirit to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing..." and I am not going to go through that. I have taught on healing on several occasions through this series. Notice the plural, however. He calls it gifts of healing. I think healing is given in various ways because illnesses and problems are so varied. We need various gifts to heal various problems. Some of the healing that is necessary is inner healing and so you might be regularly gifted to minister to people's inner person, to their emotions, to their heart, to their memories. Some of us might be given gifts to minister to people's physical ailments. Sometimes we have special faith for one kind of illness over against another kind. I have watched this in the church, that different individuals are more regularly used in one kind of healing or another. There are gifts of healing because the problems that afflict men and women are so varied.

And there are gifts of miracles. To another, gifts of miraculous powers. Literally, he says this is also plural. It doesn't really pick it up in the NIV. Literally, it is workings of miracles. Here we see these workings of miracles plural in both cases. Workings of miracles, the NIV leaves out the word workings. But I think by and large, Paul is talking about works of power that are other than healings. There are so many works of power that you see in the Bible, the supernatural protection for God's people, like Paul picking up a poisonous snake that bites him and he is not affected or Peter's supernatural deliverance from prison. It is a miracle.

You know, I think these works of power are particularly evident during times of persecution or difficulty because so many of the works of power in the Bible involve God's special protection and special provision for his people in times of crisis and trouble. I have heard about miraculous powers most often in persecuted places. I have heard marvelous stories of God's miraculous protection and provision coming out of Rwanda and Botswana in Africa. I met a man last summer who is a preacher who lived through the whole Rwandan massacre of a million or two Rwandans. He has a series of stories of how God protected him and his family during that horrible massacre of one tribe by another.

Workings of miracles are everything else other than healings: the multiplication of food, the works of power over nature, the stilling of storms, peter walking on water. Frankly, I think that these things will increase as the time for Christ's return draws near. Because you see workings of power are called the powers of the age to come and as the age to come draws near, we are going to see more of these powers. We will also see a rise of counterfeit powers. But as the age to come draws near, as the end draws near, we

are going to see more of these miracles. You can expect to see an increase in your life time and in the life time in the church.

The last gift that I am going to cover today is the gift of distinguishing between spirits and in a few weeks I will cover prophecy and tongues. He says, “To another the distinguishing between spirits.” Again, it is plural. Literally, it is “judging through.” Distinguishing between spirits means is to pierce through what is outward to get to the inner reality, to discern, to get to the root of the problem. It works together with revelation and with healing where you are able to see the inner being, the inner nature of a thing.

Jesus had total sensitivity to people’s inner natures. He could cut through the pretense and the masquerade and see right in. So, for example, he could see into Peter’s spirit when he first met Simon Peter and he saw his real nature which was Peter, a Rock. He would be transformed. He could see into Nathaniel’s inner nature and saw that he was a man without guile. He was an honest man and a man with integrity. It is an ability to discern the human spirit and also to discern the demonic spirit and it works together with prophecy and with healing.

You know, we can work outwardly and the same kind of situation may have two different roots. You see in Mark 7 there is a deaf mute and Jesus just heals him but in Mark 9 he encounters another deaf mute and he casts a spirit off of him. It is the same problem, but a different root. It takes a distinguishing or discerning of spirits, the ability to recognize that behind the problem is another problem, whether it is a demonic spirit or there is no demonic spirit here, this is just a mental health or physical health problem.

In Luke 13 we see a woman who is crippled, but she is crippled by a spirit. You may think that everyone who is crippled just has a physical problem, but that is not always the case. Sometimes the gift of discerning of spirits is necessary to bring about healing. You can pray and pray and pray for a crippled person, but then the Lord may give this gift of being able to cut through and see that the problem is a spirit. And I have had that experience of praying for people and getting a revelation, even in some cases, actually seeing a demonic spirit on them and the problem was not just a physical problem, but that it was a spirit creating the problem.

A fellow here in the church told me recently that he was working down at our food pantry, lifting boxes all day. His back was aching at the end of the day and he assumed that he over-stressed his back. That would be a natural consequence of doing that. So he was praying for himself. You can pray for yourself, by the way and the Lord gave him a picture in his mind's eye of a spirit on his back. I don't know how that sounds to you, it may sound weird. It certainly would have to me ten years ago, except I have seen these things now on a number of occasions. But the Lord basically gave him the insight, the gift of discerning of spirits in that moment to show him that the problem was not physical, but a spiritual problem, a demonic problem. So he put his hand behind himself and ordered that spirit off. He said, "Leave now in Jesus' name." He said his back was instantly healed, no more problems.

This gift is particularly useful in counseling. I would encourage you that if you are a counselor to pray that God would use you in this giftings of being able to pierce through the outward to get to the root of a problem. Because otherwise you will be using hand tools banging your head into the walls for years sometimes until you see what is

underneath. Likewise, pray for this gift when you are praying about being used in healing because often there is a root that you are not getting at. We'll look at the gifts of prophecy tongues next week. Let's pray.

Rich Nathan

December 2 and 3, 1995

God's Empowering Presence Series

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

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