



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 12:27–31

1 Corinthians

“The Exercise of the Gifts in Christ’s Body”

TRANSCRIPT

Well, I think it’s time for us to begin. Let’s again open with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we turn with thanksgiving to Thee. We thank Thee for the Word of God which is a lamp for our feet, a light for our path. We thank Thee that it has never disappointed us. We thank Thee for the provision of it. And we thank Thee that we may count upon the wisdom that is found in the Word of God to guide us in all of the experiences of life. And, of course, Lord, we thank Thee for the living Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee that he has accomplished an atoning work for us, which we desperately needed. He has died for our sins. He has secured for us an acceptance with Thee.

We thank Thee for the gift of righteousness, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of so many of the other blessings that have come to us through our Savior. We thank Thee, especially, that through the days of our lives, Thou hast promised to be with us constantly. And, Lord, we pray that as we continue to live in this life that Thou wilt continue to guide and direct us and enable us to understand even more fully what it means to have a savior God who has brought us to himself, brought us into the family of God, made provision for mediation for us, and given us a great high priest upon whom we can call at every moment of our lives.

We thank Thee for those who are gathered here. We thank Thee for their families. We pray Thy blessing upon them. Supply their needs. And we especially pray for the sick who have requested

the prayers of the members of the Chapel. We pray, Lord, that Thou wilt minister to them in a way that will bring glory to Thy name and relief to those who are suffering. Give healing as it should please Thee. We commit to Thee the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ and of this local body, Believers Chapel. We thank Thee for the years past. We ask, Lord, that Thou art be with us in the days of the future.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] Well, tonight, the Lord willing, we want to finish up 1 Corinthians, chapter 12. And our subject is exercising the spiritual gifts. And the text that we are going to read is really something of a repetition of parts of preceding parts of the chapter, but there are lots of things that even I know that I didn’t say when we looked at the gifts earlier, so there is much for us to reflect on.

Beginning with verse 27 through verse 31 for our Scripture reading for this evening, the apostle writes,

“Now you are the body of Christ and members individually.” Now, you will notice, of course, that he said something very similar above. He said for verse 12, “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many are one body so also is Christ. For by one spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free and have been all made to drink into one spirit.”

And so—now to say you are the body of Christ and members individually is something of a summary. And having said things about the gifts, he now goes over that again, but you’ll notice if you study these lists, four through eleven and then twenty-eight through thirty, that they’re not exactly the same. And so in verse 28 we read, “God has appointed these in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that, miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues, are all apostles.”

Now, to understand this most fully and correctly, you would have to know just a little fact of Greek. In Greek, as in English, you can let people know the kind of answer that you expect. So here we have notation in the Greek text to the effect that the apostle expects the negative answer. Now, we can say something like that, and let you know how we expect you to answer, too. We might say something like this. “All are not apostles, are they?” And you would know, “No, they are not.” Well, that’s what Paul is saying. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have the gifts of healings?” We would say, “All do not have the gifts of healings, do they?” Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts and yet I show you a more excellent way.

Pentecostals today like to speak of today as the third wave. And by that, they mean this is the third—the time of the third big outpouring of the Holy Spirit primarily in speaking in tongues and prophecy. What we might call the charismatic gifts. And so today is the third wave. The first wave in 1906 in Los Angeles on Azusa Street, the original wave. Then later in around 1960 another wave, another emphasis upon the charismatic gifts and then today, the third wave.

Now, we have said and we are talking about the things that have to do with this chapter that we need to distinguish some terms in our thinking. When we talk about the gift of the Spirit, we’re talking about the gift of the Spirit who has been given by Jesus Christ to us to permanently indwell us. That gift was given to the whole church and every member within the church. On the Day of Pentecost, he came. When you and I believe in Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit as a permanent indwelling. That’s the gift of the Spirit. That, of course, is occurred in harmony with the prophecies of the Old Testament, for we should have expected it, in the light of the Old Testament. And now on the Day of Pentecost, since that’s past, the Spirit has come. He indwells all believers in Christ. So the gift of the Spirit has been given.

In one sense, we live in the age of the Spirit, the Old Testament, the age of the Father, perhaps we could say. The time of our Lord and his incarnation, the age of the Son, his ministry prominent. And now the age of the Holy Spirit. Another term that we find in this chapter is the term

“gifts.” Now, the gifts are the spiritual gifts that are given to all of the members of the body of Christ. Now, we have sought to say, as we have expounded these, that these various gifts have been given by the Holy Spirit to us, and Paul is going to say some more about that. But the gifts of the Spirit are the spiritual gifts of the spirit designed to equip us for our particular place in the Church, the body of Jesus Christ.

And then also, we tried to distinguish the term “offices” from “gifts.” Offices is a term that refers to the officers who serve in the Church of Jesus Christ. We have three of them. We have elders. We have deacons. And then all of us are priests. We all serve in the office of priest. But some of us serve also as elders and some serve as deacons. And so we think it’s legitimate to use—and generally this is true of the Christian church—to speak of the office of elder or the office of deacon. The office of priest is something that is largely neglected, but, nevertheless, it is an office that we all have. So you have an office. You are priests of God, and that gives you access by virtue of what Christ has done on Cavalry’s cross. You have access, direct access, into the presence of the Lord. Many of you, I look around and know some of you so well. I know that you have used your office. You may not have thought of it as being your office, but you use your office every time you get down on your knees or every time you look to the Lord in prayer. You are exercising part of your office as priests. And then, of course, there are other functions of priesthood. We don’t have time to talk about them.

We asked the question last time, are there temporary gifts. And we said that there are temporary gifts. We have some of the spiritual gifts that are obviously, it seems to biblical students, temporary. The office of apostle. That is, as defined by the New Testament, those who are sent forth by the Lord Jesus Christ and who have seen him in his resurrection, like the Apostle Paul, like the twelve. So we have the principle of temporary gifts in apostleship. We also said the prophets were. And there may be more that could be said about these things, but right at the moment, we won’t say anything more about it.

So if we look at Christian history and look at the history from the standpoint of the philosophy of the history of salvation, you can see in the history of the Church that there was a certain time when it was characterized by charismatic gifts. And if you look at the church today down through the centuries, you will see that those gifts, as they existed in New Testament times, did not exist for centuries.

Benjamin B. Warfield, who was professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Seminary, one of the obviously greatest theologians in the Christian church of the 20th century, said with reference to the miracles and the charismatic gifts, “The fundamental error underlying the whole miracle thirst is the failure to distinguish between the epoch of creation of salvation (he means by that, the coming of our Lord, the cross, the sending forth of the apostles with the message of salvation) the epoch of the creation of salvation and that of its appropriation. If we believe that God is sovereign—and I say “if” because many people use that term. Yes, I believe in it, but upon careful questioning, it appears often we really don’t believe in the sovereignty of God, but we like the expression. It sounds good. Of course, I believe in the sovereignty of God. Do you believe that your decision to believe in Jesus Christ is the product of your free will? Well, yes, we might say—I won’t, but we might say. And if you do, you don’t believe in the sovereignty of God. You might think you do, but you really don’t. Your will is sovereign in your salvation at that point.

I’m not going to belabor that point. I mention it so often that I hope by the time they place me in the tomb, they will say with reference to him, he encouraged a large number of people to believe in the bondage of the will, as did Martin Luther before him.

So if we look at history and we note if there is a sovereign God, and we acknowledge he gave the gifts in the time of the apostles, and if we look at human history and we cannot find for centuries the giving of gifts like that, what do we conclude? What we would conclude, without even a Scripture text to support it, that is, specific scriptural text. The gifts are not being exercised today. Something like that. We would conclude, that God, since he is sovereign, has not given those gifts. In other words, He’s responsible for the cessation of the gifts.

So if we look then at history, we will see that, from the time of the apostolic age, basically perhaps those who were friends of the apostles and taught by them, but at least that early period of time, characterized by gifts that made known to the people of that day that the promises of the Old Testament had come to fruition in the work of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and the birth of the Church, that God had spoken. And now through the centuries, those gifts have now been given. We would say the gifts have ceased.

Warfield built his argument not merely upon the fact that there are no *{charismaton}* in the church today, but that there is no evidence of their existence subsequent to the apostolic age. Now, we have to—we have to qualify that because, after all, the Bible does tell us in James 5, for example, that if we call for the elders of the church and have the elders of the church pray over those who are sick, we may have hope of a healing taking place. And we all know that an individual may look to the Lord and pray and a healing may take place, within the sovereign will of God.

So when a person speaks about the cessation of the spiritual gifts, he’s not saying that we, therefore, have no supernatural healings, no supernatural answers to prayer, but we don’t have what we had in the early stages of the age of the church as is found in the book of Acts. Those types of gifts, those mighty miracles that characterized that age, which were designed to let the Jewish people, as well as the Gentiles, know that God had now spoken through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a statement—I think I read this last time. I’m not sure. But it’s so good, I’ll read it again. This is a friend of Warfield. He said, “What Warfield built his argument upon, however, was not merely the fact that there are no *{charismaton}* in the church today, but that there is no evidence of their existence subsequent to the Apostolic Age.” This is neither irrelevant nor insignificant. If the *{charismata}* ceased, then they ceased by divine appointment. If we believe in the sovereignty of God, they ceased by divine appointment because only he can give them. And if they ceased, what does that tell us? He’s not giving them. And that argues against their permanence. The same force as the

destruction of the Temple—you remember about the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.—argues against the permanence of the Old Testament liturgy.

So when the veil of the Temple was rent in twain in 70 A.D.—at the death of Christ and in 70 A.D., the Temple was destroyed. That was God’s sovereign way of saying the Old Testament Mosaic Law has come to an end. And the same way with reference to the absence of the *{charismata}* down through the centuries.

Now, of course, I have to qualify all of this. This is the anniversary of the fiftieth year of Dr. Criswell’s pastorate at the First Baptist Church. He’s a great man. I wish that I had come to know him better than I do know him. And I appreciate all of the things that he has done that have been positive. And he’s done many of them. They’ve been honoring him this week, and they’ve said some unusual things about him. For example, he’s been compared to Moses. Just as Moses led the children of Israel out, he has led the First Baptist Church.

Now, it so happens, that I’m old enough to have been in the First Baptist Church when George Truett was the pastor. He was recognized as one of the greatest preachers in this country. And he was. He had a heart attack, and he came back, the whole city was there to hear him. And I went down there as a seminary student. I was just about a first-year student. And I watched the great preacher, who was, obviously, very ill but nevertheless, back in the pulpit for the first time after his heart attack. I can even tell you how he walked in the pulpit. I just watched him. And as I looked around, it’s the same old First Baptist Church that I see today when I go down there except a lot of buildings aren’t around and city blocks now belong to it. But anyway, I don’t take anything away from Dr. Criswell. He’s been a great man there at that church and in the Southern Baptist denomination.

He was called, in addition, to one like Moses. He was called a giant among us. He was. He was called a preacher’s preacher and the layman’s friend. I think that was true. Then we went on to further acclamation. Probably the greatest preacher in the history of the Christian church. Too bad, Chrysostom. Too bad, Calvin. Too bad, Luther. Too bad, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield,

Charles Haddon Spurgeon. [Laughter] How the absolute highlight of preaching has been reached in the past fifty years. Now, that’s not bad. I don’t mind that. I know the Baptists. They like to express things as fully as possible.

But then they said this about him. He’s a prophet. Now, that’s the one thing I have to disagree. I love Dr. Criswell. But prophet? No, he’s not a prophet. Well, we’ll talk about what a prophet was in a minute, but he’s not a prophet. And he himself, acknowledged that times in his past when he’s made serious errors. Prophets, as a rule, don’t make serious errors. I do know that, perhaps, he was not speaking as a prophet when he made these errors. He didn’t say, “I’m a prophet, and now I think segregation should be continued.” He didn’t say that. But, still, with all due respect to the great man, he may be all these other things, but he’s not a prophet.

Now, we come to the text. And in the first verse, verse 27, the apostle tells us again something about the character of the church. This is a summary statement which is the capstone of the argument of verse 12 through verse 26. “Now you are the body of Christ and members individually.”

Now, obviously, this text stresses the unity of the church of Jesus Christ. You are the body of Christ. Now, there are no articles in the original text, but this is a peculiar rule which, in this particular instance, does not require the article. In either one of these words, you are the body of Christ. It’s Apollonius’ Canon. You are the body of Christ. Unity stressed, but ownership and authority belong to our Lord. So when we read, “You are the body of Christ,” we should think of something like this, “You are the body that belongs to Christ,” or, “You are the body over which our Lord serves as head.” You know that the Apostle Paul in other places, more than once, says that the Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church; that is, he has authority over the church.

We don’t have any head in Believers Chapel. As a matter of fact, they don’t have any head at First Baptist Church. They may not know it quite as well as we ought to know it. Maybe we don’t know it any better. But Christ is the head of the church. Everybody serves under him. The elders serve under him. The deacons serve under him. You, who are priests, you serve under him. He is the



head of this church. And, therefore, the responsibility of our elders is to find the mind of the Lord in the decisions that come before them. So you are the body of Christ. You belong to him. You are one, but he is the owner and he has authority. He is called the head of the body of the church.

Now, he says something about us as a result of this. We are members individually. We are diverse. Look out over this audience. We are diverse, but at the same time, we are interrelated. We are members of the body of Christ, and we possess the life of Christ. That is, the eternal life that belongs to him flows within us. We are the sons of God, the children of God. So we are diverse, but we are interrelated. Various things may be special with each of us individually, but we are united in the body of Christ. That’s a remarkable thing, and we should not lose the benefit of it and the blessing of it because it suggests to us the fact that we have security in Christ. We are part of his body. The sense of the security that we have in Christ should constantly grip us as we go about living our particular life in our particular place doing the things that we feel led to do. It suggests responsibility, too, because he’s the head, and we’re members. So we’re responsible to the head just as our physical parts are responsible to the head of my particular body, so we’re responsible to the head of the body of Christ. And then, of course, at the same time, we are individuals.

Now, the individuality of each of us is an individuality that may be similar to people who are members of one family. They have a head, and they have a sense of responsibility and yet, at the same time, they have individuality. We look out and see children in the audience, and they are responsible to their head in their family. They have the sense of security in belonging to that family. They wouldn’t have it if they didn’t belong to a family. And then they are also individuals. Each one, ultimately, to grow up to do what God desires them to do, we hope. And I hope they hope. So that’s the character of the church. The body of Christ but the members individually, interrelated, united, but nevertheless, different.

Now, what do the members do? Well, verse 28 tells us something—as a matter of fact, verse 28 and the verse or two that follow. The types and functions of the member. Now, you notice that this is the second of the lists. If you turn up to verse 4, we read there are diversities of gifts, the same

spirit. The differences of ministries, the same Lord; diversities of activities, the same God; the manifestation of the Spirit is given each one for the profit of all. To one, is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit. Another, the word of knowledge, to another, faith by the same spirit, another gifts of healing by the same Spirit, and so on. Working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, different kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. So these are the gifts that have been given to the body.

Now, we have another list here. We read in verse 28, God has appointed these in the church, first apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers, and so on. Those lists don’t quite—they don’t completely correspond. As a matter of fact, there are other lists of the New Testament in which other things are stated which are not found in either of these lists. For example, in the Epistle of the Ephesians, Paul mentions the gift of evangelist. It’s not mentioned, either in 4 through 11 or mentioned here in 28 through 30. So this is not a list that gives us all of the information that we would like to have. We have to look at the other places in the New Testament, also.

And I think I mentioned to you there are four chapters that particularly have to do with the gifts. Two twelves, two fours: Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 that we’re looking at, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. A vast majority of the information is found in those four chapters, but not everything, even there.

Now, Paul tells us about the types and functions of the members of the church. First of all, we’re not surprised that he said that, “God has appointed those in the church first, apostles,” probably because, to him, that was the most important gift. Now, he—not because he was an apostle—but it was the most important gift because it so closely associated with the birth of the Church and its development.

Now, the New Testament tells us, that there are the twelve, of course, one lost, another to take his place, and then the Apostle Paul but the New Testament also calls some other men apostles. To make it very simple for you, some are called apostles of the churches. And I think that’s a good

distinction. These are apostles of Christ of whom he speaks here, but there are apostles of the church.

Well, what are apostles of the churches? Well, what are apostles of Christ? Apostles of Christ are those who have been sent forth from—by him, to do a particular task. *{apostello}*, the Greek word, means “to send forth.” So we should expect the other apostles to be sent forth, too. But they are sent forth, not by Christ preeminently, as the Twelve and Paul, but they are sent forth by churches to do specific tasks. We have reference to them in 2 Corinthians, chapter 8, in verse 23.

As a matter of fact, the New Testament also calls some people apostles. In the New Testament, Paul does too, who are false apostles. In 2 Corinthians, chapter 11 in verse 5, verse 13, and verse 20, he talks about the apostles who are special apostles. Now, it’s possible that he’s referring to the Jerusalem apostles. The commentators differ on it a little bit. But, in one case, it seems that he’s definitely not. And so the super-apostle is really what he calls them. He’s talking about false apostles who claim to be apostles, but they really are not. It’s also in 2 Corinthians 12:11. In fact, he calls some of those apostles false apostles, apostles of Satan.

Now, called by Christ, the founder of the churches, the apostles have carried out their ministry of building up the church of Jesus Christ. In addition, they were also largely the authors of the New Testament. Not entirely, but largely. One of their great tasks was to go out and preach, preach the gospel—Paul, particularly, to the Gentiles; Peter over to the Jews—to build up the churches—to create churches, build up the churches, evangelize, and then write letters and other works inclusive of the book of Revelation, the epistles, which now have come to be by the mind of the spirit and the church, uniting to become the canon, the Word of God, for us. And so we have twenty-seven books of the New Testament that are divine revelation, the product largely of the apostles or those associated with them. So apostles, extremely important, very authoritative. The apostle claimed authority for himself when he went from church to church because they had the mind of Christ with reference to those early days.

Second, prophets. Church prophets, men of inspired utterance for special situations. We have them referred to in the New Testament. Of course, we have a person like Agabus. He’s called a prophet, but we also have them referred to under just the name prophet. In Ephesians chapter 2 in verse 20, we read concerning the foundation of the church, “Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” Notice he doesn’t say prophets and apostles, but apostles and prophets.

And then in chapter 3 in verse 5, he makes a reference again to them. He talks about the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets. Now, when known clearly, that is a New Testament brand of prophet because he talks about now revealed, not known in Old Testament times but now. Those two verses have to do with prophets in New Testament times. In the Epistle to the Thessalonians, in the last part of the chapter—I’m not sure if I can find this immediately—but the apostle tells them what they are to do with reference to the words that come to them from prophets. “Don’t quench the Spirit.” Verse 20 of 1 Thessalonians 5: “Do not despise prophesies.” So prophesies were taking place. They were inspired utterances. So far as we know, like the prophets of the Old Testament, when they spoke, the Word of God as the Lord’s prophet, they didn’t give false prophesies. They came from God and they were inspired of God.

Why should we have prophets? Well, because of course, we didn’t have the Bible—the early church didn’t have the Bible itself, in its completion, for a lengthy period of time. At least, the major part of it was only completed near the end of the 1st century. But then the whole twenty-seven books did not receive final confirmation from the church until near the end of the 4th century.

So it was useful to have someone in the body of Christ—some ones, some people in the body of Christ who could speak to specific situations, could be counted upon to give reliable, new revelation.

Now, we don’t have that today, in my opinion. We don’t have anybody who is a prophet, and that includes Dr. Criswell. Now, there are people, however, who use a term loosely. They will say, concerning a certain preacher who is very dynamic and forceful—that’s when I was young. I was

dynamic and forceful. I was a prophet then. [Laughter] But I’m giving the same messages today, and I’m not a prophet. Because usually when people say of a person, he’s a prophet, they mean he’s really speaking fervently and probably has to change his clothes after every message given in the south in the summertime because he’s perspired his clothes out. I used to do that. You wouldn’t believe it. I know you wouldn’t believe it. I used to preach in schoolhouses here in the city of Dallas when we just had churches beginning. And I would change my clothes at the end of the morning message because they didn’t have air conditioning. They did have great big fans around. They didn’t have air-conditioning, and so I would come out in a new outfit that evening. Not because I had a lot of clothes, but I had to.

Prophet. Now, the church prophets were for special situations. Agabus was one of them. We read, for example, just one place, Acts chapter 11. There are two places where he is referred to specifically. Acts chapter 11 in verse 28, we read these words, “And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch, then one of them named Agabus stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.” That’s what you should expect. He was a New Testament prophet, and so he spoke with reference to the future, and it came to pass.

Now, in a Charismatic moment today, we have lots of people claiming to be prophets. And they’re giving out words of knowledge and words of wisdom, but they don’t even claim to be infallible. In fact, one of the leaders in the movement of John Wimber, just says has made a extensive study and claims that the prophets of the New Testament gave both fallible and infallible information. That makes it a little difficult, of course, for the common man to know what we are to look forward to. But anyway, prophets, I believe, were men who spoke infallibly the Word of God. We do not have that today, in my opinion.

Third, he says, teachers. Now, we all know about teachers. We have reference to them of course, in Acts chapter 13 in verse 1. In other places, Paul refers to himself as a teacher of the Word.

I’m going to be speaking down at Salado next weekend, not this coming weekend, and one of the passages that I will be looking at is the passage in 1 Timothy chapter 4 in which the apostle says,

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.”

These are individuals who claim to be prophets but are not prophets. You can always test the word of a prophet today by the simple question, “Did what he say would come to pass come to pass?” If it didn’t, he’s not a prophet. They speak without any fallibility.

Teachers now, this is the third of the trio. You’ll notice first, second, third, but after them, there’s no fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth. These three are brought together, it seems, as if they were a trio for the primary Christian ministry of the Word of God.

What did they do particularly, the preachers? Well, they did, I think—the teachers—precisely what Paul, a teacher, did. I meant to refer to 1 Timothy 4 and refer to Paul’s statement there in 1 Timothy 2 and so on, in which he talks about himself as a teacher of the Word.

What did the teachers of the Word do? Well, the teachers of the Word—one of the fundamental things they did, aside from teaching the revelation that they did have that might apply to New Testament times, letters from Paul, perhaps, or something like that— what they did primarily, was to turn to the Scriptures of the Old Testament and show to the people who were in the audience how the prophecies of the Old Testament had been fulfilled in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, you can see that plainly if you read Stephen’s sermon in Acts. Read Paul’s messages in Acts. One of the fundamental things that they did was to turn to the Old Testament and point out how in the life of Jesus of Nazareth the things the prophets and psalmists spoke about came to pass in the ministry of our Lord. That was the primary thing that the teachers did.

Teachers, of course, were necessary because they didn’t have books such as you and I have. It was very difficult even to get a manuscript of something that had been written by one of the prophets. Those were kept in special places. You couldn’t carry a Bible home. Think of the privilege you have. And think of what you ought to be doing with that Bible that you carry around when you have that. Those individuals didn’t have the Word of God with them, so it was a blessing from the Lord to give them prophets and teachers who could teach the Word. And they were specifically interested in the fulfillment of those prophecies to stir up their faith in the Word of God and the progress of divine salvation.

I would imagine that the fewness of those books maybe encouraged some who were false teachers to seek to disturb the saints and draw away disciples after themselves as Paul talks about. But at any rate, the gift of teaching was important, very important, because of the lack of books that enhanced the teachers’ work. That would be a temptation, too, wouldn’t it? Suppose there were only a half a dozen books about New Testament teaching, and they were all in my library. I would become pretty important, wouldn’t I? I would say I’d been studying the books, and this is what they say, and you would be dependent on me. Lots of people would crowd in who had been born again and want to hear some information. Johnson’s got the books. He’s a teacher. So the gift of teaching was very important.

Now, there are other gifts that are mentioned here, and we’re going to be talking about them a little later on in our studies. But Paul goes on to say, he talks about miracles, generally performed in attestation of the apostolic message. For example, in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 in verse 12, we read these words:

“Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.”

The things that Paul did were designed to send him forth and as one who was truly the Lord’s emissary. And then in Hebrews chapter 2 in verse 4, the passage we looked at when we were studying Hebrews not too long ago, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says in chapter 2 in verse 4. He speaks about how we should neglect so great a salvation. It began to be spoken by the Lord. It was confirmed to us by those who heard him, the apostles. God also bearing witness, both with signs of wonders with various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his own will. So miracles to attest the apostolic message as the apostle went out through the world, both to Jews, as we shall see, in speaking tongues and other miracles as well.

We have time to look at Paul and Elymas in Acts chapter 13, verse 6 through verse 12—in fact, I think maybe we do. I’ll just read those verses. We have here, Paul and Elymas as an illustration of the miracles. Acts, chapter 13 in verse 6:

“Now when they had gone through the island of Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus (the son of Joshua) who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the Word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, ‘O full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness’—oh, how would you like an apostle to say that of you? That wouldn’t be—that wouldn’t be very, very nice. I would already be trembling—“and you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.’ And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed”—well, he knew that Paul had something—“He believed when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” Notice that, At the teaching of the Lord.



“Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.”

Gifts of healing, Paul mentions in verse 28. God remember, is {Jehovah Raffa}, Jehovah, the Lord that heals. {Jehovah Raffa}. Incidentally, no collections were taken up then at healing meetings.

Authentication of the new age took place with those gifts of healings. In Romans, chapter 15 in verse 18 and 19, we have a text that bears on this, too, because there the apostle writes,

“For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient. (Notice) in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.”

Miracles. Gifts of healing. Now, there are many people today who claim the gift of healing. We have so much of this in the general public Christian life. It’s a—in my opinion, it’s a disgrace to the work of the Lord. I have in my notes some things that illustrate the point. In September of 1950—I have a copy of the newspaper report that was given of this—Oral Roberts, a young evangelist of the time, who claimed that he had been given the power to heal many sick and crippled persons, had a revival in Amarillo. On September the 10th of 1950, fifty people were injured, two critically, when his huge tent collapsed in the thunderstorm. Three nights before, during a small windstorm, the tent came loose at one corner, and one man died of a heart attack as he rushed to get outside. The lesson to draw from that is that it is unsafe to go to healing services.

In St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1954 a heated controversy arose again with Oral Roberts. He was holding meetings there, and he was challenged by the churches of Christ. Now, the churches of Christ ran an ad in the paper every day. One thousand dollars for an acceptable evidence of one case of miraculous divine healing of cancer, tuberculosis, withered limbs, or paralysis. Certified testimony

of three reputable physicians, members of the Pinellas Medical Society will be accepted as sufficient evidence. The one thousand dollars went unchallenged.

At the turn of the century, in 1900 A.D., the Massachusetts Medical Society, which I think, is still in existence because I have a letter to them from a friend of mine written in 1950, fifty years later. They posted bond with the First National Bank of Boston—as you know, is one of the big banks of the U.S.—offering the sum of ten thousand dollars for medical proof of an organic healing through Christian Science. The offer was never taken up.

When I was preaching in the 1950s in those buildings I told you about where it was hot in the summertime, we had a man named Frank Ebill. He was a student at seminary. He and Stan Toussaint and a couple of others were the quartet in our services. And many of you know Stan. Well, that subject came up, and I told him about this Massachusetts Medical Society thing, and so he wrote them a letter. Not—I didn’t think he would do it—but he wrote them. He wanted to check up on me, I guess.

But anyway he got an answer. The secretary, Robert W. Buck replied. I have the letter at home, but I copied it out. “I regret that we do not have ten thousand dollars available to anyone who can produce medical proof of healing accomplished by Christian Science.” Now, this was fifty years later, so obviously, he doesn’t know about the possibility of what was done fifty years before. He said, “I may add that this would be a silly offer to make since healing occurs not infrequently as the result of, one, no treatment at all; two, medical treatment; three, anything you please. As a matter of fact, people get well in spite of treatment just about as often as they do because of it.” That’s what the doctor wrote. The secretary of the Massachusetts Medical Society. That’s what he wrote. Well, the facts are, he’s right. He really is right. I just don’t want to be in that other fifty percent that needs help.

Gifts of healing. There’s no such thing taking place today. There are no—not healing, gifts of healing. Healers going around who heal individuals. They just do not exist. They could easily make

themselves known if they would just perform a few healings for a crowd and not miss. We don’t have that.

Helps. The practical assistance that we have for one another in the church of Jesus Christ. This is a great gift. The gift of helps. Believers Chapel or any other church could not exist if we did not have people in this congregation who have the gift of helps. They do so many things without anyone patting them on the back or thinking they’re great for doing it. A person who ushers, hands out a bulletin, greets somebody. It would be nice if we had more people doing that. I think I told you about the letter I received from the man from Canada who walked in our congregation, came down the hall. Nobody spoke to him. Walked in the meeting, nobody spoke to him. He got up, walked out. Nobody spoke to him. Left, got in his car and finally, he spoke with someone because he had known me some years ago and said, “Where’s Dr. Johnson?” He said, “I was given a quick answer,” and the person got in the car and drove off.

Now, we have—we have need, in our church of individuals who will take it upon themselves just to do something as simple as that, which will mean a blessing to so many people and to build up our church. Helps—an expression of Christian love.

Administrations, verse 28. That’s a very interesting word. That comes from the word from which we get cybernetics, which is the science of communication and control theory. And today you hear a lot about cyberspace. I didn’t even know what that was. Cyberspace. C-Y-B-E-R space. It has to do with the computing world. Cyberspace, the control of space. The related word to this, the noun, {*kubernetes*}, is a word that refers to the pilot of a ship, a steersman. That ought to be a gift for elders, shouldn’t it? The gift of administration, the person who is steering the ship. And the elders are individuals like that who can give us guidance, can pilot the ship of Believers Chapel in such a way that we’re able to do the Lord’s work better.

Then in verse 29 through verse 31, some guidance for the Corinthians. “May one person have more than one gift?” The Bible doesn’t say that’s not possible. You may have more than one gift. “Does one person—can one person have all the gifts.” No. Paul makes that point here. He says,

“Are all apostles? All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have the gifts of healing, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?”

This is counsel for the curious who ask these questions. Can I have all the gifts? Can I have more than one? Well, F. F. Bruce says it would be preposterous for all to have one in the same gift as for all the parts of the body to perform one in the same function. Suppose I walked with my arm, my leg, well—I don’t want to get into that. That’s ridiculous. It’s preposterous on the face of it, isn’t it? If we all have one in the same gift, what would this be if everybody had the gift of teaching? Who would be taught? If everybody had the gift of teaching, we would never, never had certainty about anything, would we? Teachers. One’s teaching this, another one’s teaching that, and all teaching at the same time. This is the place for teachers. Seminary’s bad enough, but to have everybody with the gift of teaching.

Now, Paul concludes with a word of exhortation by saying in verse 31—oh, by the way, I should have said this. When he says, “All are not apostles, are they?” We can agree with that easily. “All are not prophets, are they?” We can agree with that. “All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles. All do not have the gifts of healing, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they?”

Now, there are entire denominations that have as one of their key doctrines that the proof of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is that we speak in tongues. And if we have not spoken in tongues, we do not have the gift of the Holy Spirit. That text refutes that idea. All do not speak with tongues, do they? And yet he is referring to believers. So the gift of tongues is not the sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Fortunately, some of the charismatics have come to understand that now. But that had been, in the past, one of their great doctrines.

Paul says, verse 31, “Earnestly desire the best gifts or the better gifts.” We should say, the higher gifts, perhaps. “And yet I show you a more excellent way.” Does Paul mean a substitute for the gifts? No. Substitute for the gifts. Don’t pay any attention to the gifts, just this way? No. Because,

what about the apostles and the prophets and the teachers? They’re all necessary. He’s not referring to a substitute for the gifts. No substitute for apostles or for teachers. No.

What he means is love is the way par excellence. This is the thing that we should make preeminent, the way of Christian love, a greater pastime than seeking gifts. It’s nice to know what your gift is. But the greatest pastime is to pursue Christian love. As he will say in chapter 14, verse 1, pursue love and desire spiritual gifts. To pursue love is indispensable. To desire spiritual gifts is desirable. Gifts do not make us better Christians, but love, Christian love does. We can be a great teacher of the Word of God, very accurate, very informed, very clear, but not be a very good Christian man. The illustrations are as numerous as almost preachers, teachers. But Paul says “Earnestly desire the best gifts, but there is a more excellent way, Christian love.” By Christian love and through the exercise of it and the gift of it, the work of the Holy Spirit in us producing that, we do become better believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, our time is up. We’re going to have to stop. Next time, we will start chapter 13 and a discussion of this more excellent way, about which the apostle speaks. We’ve not finished with the gifts, though, because in chapter 14—and actually in 13 too—but in chapter 14 they come up again. In fact, these three chapters deal with that topic. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the marvelous way in which the Apostle has given us directions that we believe come from Thee. We thank Thee for the inspired Word of God, the revelation given us by the apostles of Jesus Christ. Enable us, Lord, to be subject to Thy Word and especially enable us to truly pursue that more excellent way of Christian love.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.