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In God's perfect timing, it so happened that in [the Bible-reading plan](#) we are using, the topic of 'Spiritual Gifts' happened to be the subject of the teaching—immediately after one of our DTS trainees had quit over issues to do with this particular subject. The fact that I was able to preach was also a God-thing, because ordinarily Connie Taylor would be first in line to teach on this subject. But she had lost her voice, and so I was able to help her out, and take the opportunity to clarify my own convictions and understanding of the matter.

I want to emphasise this before I begin, that I do not claim to have the final word on this subject, and I want to honour all those with whom I disagree. I offer this to help you understand where I'm coming from, and perhaps to be assisted in your own understanding—and where you do disagree, please do me the honour of explaining with what you disagree and why! It's also worth pointing out that the text that follows is a considered expansion of the ideas contained in [the audio message](#), rather than an exact transcript — which might explain why this written piece comes more than a month after the preached sermon.

#1 The Importance of This Topic

"Concerning spiritual gifts, I do not want you to be uninformed." (1 Cor. 12:1)

Paul begins his discussion of the issue by highlighting the importance of the topic. This is vital because the question of spiritual gifts is often (perhaps always?) a controversial one, and so it's tempting to think that we'd be best avoiding the matter and just focussing on things on which we can all straightforwardly agree. But if it's controversial in our days, it was equally controversial in Paul's day—in fact, the reason that he raises the subject is that the Corinthians were [suffering the effects of disunity](#) caused at least in part by disagreements over spiritual gifts. This passage becomes especially meaningful when we put it into the historical context provided by [the Book of Acts](#).

To recap: Paul arrived in Corinth during his [second missionary journey](#), after having been driven out of Thessalonica and the Berea by persecution. In Corinth he met Priscilla and Aquilla, and was reconnected with Silas and Timothy (who had remained a little longer in Berea). Encouraged by a vision of Jesus, he remained in Corinth for a year and half in spite of persecution, before returning to his home church in Antioch. On the way back to Antioch Paul passed through Ephesus, where he was asked to remain longer but could only promise that he would return when he got the chance.

<http://peter.prescott.ws/blog/2015/01/on-spiritual-gifts/>

Priscilla and Aquilla however, who had travelled with him, remained in Ephesus. Apollos then arrives in Ephesus, and begins preaching *‘the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John’* (– we shall discuss this strange phase later). Priscilla and Aquilla meet Apollos, *‘explain to him the way of God more accurately’*, and when he feels stirred to move on to Achaia (the region where Corinth was) write a letter recommending him to the Corinthian church.

While Apollos is in Corinth, Paul at last arrives back in Ephesus. He meets twelve disciples (not the twelve disciples!) who had been baptised *‘into John’s baptism’*, but who *‘had not so much as heard of the Holy Spirit’*. Paul explains that John the Baptist’s own very message was that he came with a baptism of repentance to prepare people for the coming Christ, who would baptise them in the Holy Spirit. And he lays hands on them, and they experience that baptism, and begin speaking in tongues and prophesying.

Paul then continues ministering in Ephesus for another two years, experiencing what I can only describe as revival & reformation — even by Paul’s standards, his ministry in Ephesus was uniquely successful. Revival breaks out as all in the region hear and begin to fear the name of Jesus, and unusual miracles (in contrast to ‘the usual miracles’!?) take place; reformation begins as the strongholds of witchcraft are exposed and destroyed, and the industry of idol-manufacturing is challenged; and even Paul’s missionary vision is expanded as he begins to make plans to take the gospel to Rome.

Understanding this context helps give us some ideas about what the issues were that were dividing those Corinthians who said they were ‘of Apollos’ and those who said they were ‘of Paul’ — it must have been something to do with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It also helps us understand why Paul thought it so important to have a proper understanding of the issues to do with the Spirit — because he was at that moment enjoying the supernatural breakthrough that occurs when even a small group of believers begin to fully experience the power of the Holy Spirit.

#2 The Foundational Truth: If Jesus is Lord, you have the Holy Spirit

“No-one can say Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3)

One of the big disagreements between Christians is over what it means to ‘receive the Holy Spirit’. Does it all happen (as Paul’s statement here in 1 Cor. 12:3 seems to clearly say) when you first believe in Jesus and confess him as Lord? Or is there a subsequent ‘receiving of the Holy Spirit’ that happens after your spirit is regenerated by repentant faith (as is suggested by Paul’s question in Acts to the Ephesian disciples)? I think it’s fair to call the first position ‘the Evangelical position’ (cf. UCCF Doctrinal Basis, and the second ‘the Pentecostal position’ (cf. Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Beliefs).

But maybe it’s better to think of these two not as contradictory ‘positions’ but as complementary ‘differences in emphasis’. Let me repeat: I don’t think it is contradictory to affirm both that whoever has believed in Jesus as the risen Lord has received the Holy Spirit, and that there is a need for a distinct overflowing experience of the power of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because when the disciples first encountered the resurrected Jesus, he said that they received the Holy Spirit; yet, subsequently he commanded them to wait and pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

There’s an illustration we sometimes use with a glass and (a jug of) water. The water represents the Holy Spirit, and the glass the believer. And the point is made that there’s a difference between the glass containing water and the glass being filled completely. *‘And how do you know when the glass is full? When it overflows!’* It occurs to me that a helpful development of the illustration might be to

use a selection of differently sized glasses to make the point that someone who has never experienced any 'overflow' might have a greater depth in the Spirit than someone who has.

On the subject of overflow, it's worth noting here that as well as the question of whether the 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' is the original indwelling or a distinct overwhelming, there is also the (distinct) question of whether such an overflowing must be demonstrated by speaking in tongues (this is classically also part of ['the Pentecostal position'](#)). Personally, I believe in the need of a distinct first-filling of the Spirit, but not in the idea that this must be evidenced by speaking in tongues—for, [as Paul says later in this passage](#), 'Do all speak in tongues?'

My personal experience is also a factor in my understanding: I grew up in a missionary family and so grew up with an understanding of the gospel and at multiple times in my childhood prayed a sinner's prayer confessing my sin and placing my trust in Jesus as Lord. But it was at age eighteen, a year after I'd been baptised, that I [encountered the overwhelming joy of the Holy Spirit](#) (without any speaking in tongues) after having been challenged by the call to surrender absolutely everything to Christ. Then in my second year of university, I again had [a dramatic experience of the power of the Holy Spirit](#), which again didn't involve any speaking in tongues, but this time included an incredible sense of the LOVE of God, and an explosively energetic impulse to missional activity — evangelistic bible studies, feeding the homeless, obedient putting-into-action of whatever idea seemed Spirit-inspired. Subsequently I sometimes tried speaking in tongues but it felt forced and false. Then the following year, I went on a mini-pilgrimage to Mt Sinai with my friend Jonny, and we were trying to fast and pray, but finding it a bit of a battle—until at dawn at the peak of Sinai, suddenly some Africans behind us broke into worship, and it was as if a dam broke in my spirit, and suddenly me and Jonny were singing Amazing Grace at the top of our lungs. And I've found myself speaking in tongues frequently and joyfully and profitably since then.

Whichever your emphasis, it's easy to be misunderstood. If you emphasise that all who have been born again have the Holy Spirit already living within them, then you risk cultivating a culture of complacency. If you emphasise that people need to seek after the baptism of the Holy Spirit's power, then you risk being accused of spiritual arrogance, and of condemning those that have not had such an experience. In declaring any biblical truth there is a risk of being misunderstood, and it takes time to teach [the full counsel of God](#).

#3 The Gifts are Trinitarian

"...one Spirit...many charismatic gifts; ...one Lord... many ministries; ...one God... many activities"

It's important to notice the way that before Paul hones in on the issue of the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, he starts by emphasising the Trinitarian unity ("one Spirit...one Lord...one God"—and note that for Paul, 'Lord' almost always means Christ Jesus the Son, and 'God' always means the Father) of the God from whom the gifts come.

The reason it's important to start here, is that we're so easily tempted to limit God and the work that He wants to do through us. Whatever gifts we think we have, we think we're limited to, and whatever gifts we've never experienced, we think we'll never be able to minister in. But here Paul emphasises that there's not a different 'spirit of prophecy', and another 'spirit of wisdom' (though [elsewhere](#) he's not afraid to use that sort of language) — there's one Holy Spirit. And there's not one 'lord of evangelism' and another 'lord of teaching' — there's one Jesus. And there's not one 'god of leadership' and another 'god of giving' — there's one God, the Father.

Now within the Trinity there is not only unity but also distinction, and it's also important to see that Paul introduces an interesting Trinitarian differentiation between the charismatic gifts released by the Holy Spirit, the ministries released by the Lord Jesus, and the activities released by God the

Father. That this Trinitarian parallelism is not merely an on-the-fly rhetorical flourish but an actual systematic framework in Paul's theology is demonstrated by its consistent appearance in the other places where Paul refers to God-given gifts.

When Paul continues [in this passage](#) to focus on the charismatic gifts it is indeed the "Spirit" who he says is "distributing" the gifts "as He wills". And if we flick forward in our Bibles to [Ephesians 4](#), where Paul speaks of the ministry gifts, it is Christ "who descended... who also ascended far above the heavens" who gives "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers" as gifts to the church "to equip the saints for the work of ministry". And in [Romans 12](#), where Paul gives a diverse list of activities ranging from the specifically supernatural ("prophecy") to the more wide-ranging ("acts of mercy"), it is "God" who has assigned a measure of faith to each person that they can bless the body of Christ in some particular way.

Because my understanding of what Paul is saying is slightly different to what you may have heard elsewhere, I'll repeat. There are the charismatic gifts—the Holy Spirit gives these different supernatural tools to help us bring the Kingdom of God into specific situations. There are various ministries — Jesus gives specific people as gifts to the church to "equip the saints for the work of ministry" (note that the people are the ministry gifts, not the anointings!). And there are all manner of godly activities — and like a good father, God gives each of us faith (confidence!) that we can do particular things, and encourages and releases us to do whatever good we are motivated to do.

The charismatic gifts are supernatural, sovereignly given by the Spirit according to his will. And that means that no matter how much we may have used those gifts in the past, we don't *have* those gifts to produce on demand — but what we do have is the Holy Spirit, who is good and kind and generous and longs "to give to each one individually, as [indeed!] he wills".

Now, if we repeatedly ask the Spirit for these supernatural gifts, and by stepping out in faith give Him opportunity to let us use them, then we will begin to grow in God-given confidence that we are able to be used in supernatural ways in the course of various activities to the benefit of others in the church. This, I think, is what Paul is implying when he lists something like 'prophecy' both among the 1 Corinthians 12 charismatic gifts, and the Romans 12 activities. And finally, as we become more experienced in, say, the activity of prophecy, we will begin to be able to equip others in that ministry, thus acting in the role of 'a prophet' to them.

I probably need to repeat this too, because again I am going against the grain of conventional thinking on the topic. The ministry gifts are not supernatural anointings given to some elite few so that they can do those things while the rest of us sit quietly watching from the pews. The ministries are things that all of us are commissioned and commanded to do, and as we gain experience in doing them we will find that we are able to equip others to do likewise—and thus we ourselves will become 'gifts' to those around us.

#4 A Closer Look at the Holy Spirit Gifts

So finally we reach the 'spiritual gifts', which Pentecostal preachers like to divide neatly up into three categories: gifts of revelation, gifts of power, and gifts of utterance. And before we dive in it's always fun to note the symmetry between the nine named charismatic gifts, and the nine named [fruits of the Spirit](#). And we can't forget the fact that the dove (by which [the Holy Spirit is represented](#)) has nine primary wing-feathers—cue easy preaching point that to soar in the Spirit we need both gifts and fruit.

The Revelation Gifts

Word of Knowledge: a supernatural impartation of knowledge that could not otherwise be had.

Eg. Jesus' knowledge of the Samaritan woman's unhappy relationship history in [John 4:16-19](#); Elisha's knowledge of Gehazi's greedily deceptive attempt to squeeze some profit out of Naaman in [2 Kings 5](#).

Word of Wisdom: a supernatural impartation of wisdom to respond to a complex situation.
eg. Solomon's command in [1 Kings 3](#) to cut the baby in half, which reveals the truth of who the baby's mother really is; Jesus's own question in [Matthew 21:23-27](#) in response to the question of where his authority came from.

Discerning of Spirits: a supernatural impartation of discernment as to what spirit is at work in a given situation, thus allowing the believer to know what course of action to take.
eg. Paul discerns the spiritual nastiness of Elymas in [Acts 13](#); Micaiah in [1 Kings 22](#) vividly recounts a vision exposing a 'lying spirit' at work; and Jesus demonstrates this gift in various ways — in [healing a demonised child](#), in [rebuking Peter's Satanic denial of the necessity of the cross](#), in [discerning the spirit of self-promoting pride puffing up his disciples](#).

The Power Gifts

Gift of Faith: an impartation of faith which, when activated, releases supernatural power. This is what Jesus was talking about in [Mark 11:23-24](#), when he explains the power of the prayer of faith. Examples include the [Roman centurion's faith](#) which so impressed Jesus, and the faith of the haemorrhaging woman in [Mark 5](#).

Working of Miracles: a demonstration of supernatural power.
Eg. Jesus turning the [water into wine](#), Jesus (and, briefly, Peter!) [walking on water](#), and Jesus directing Peter to [a coin found in a fish's mouth](#).

Gifts of Healing: includes all sorts of healing — social, spiritual, emotional, as well as physical. That healing includes the spiritual and not just the physical is evidenced by the way Jesus brings up the issue of forgiveness with regard to the [paralysed man in Mark 2](#); conversely, in [John 5](#) it seems that this paralyzed man experienced physical but not spiritual healing. And in [his command to the healed leper](#) to offer the appropriate sacrifices "as a public testimony that you have been cleansed" (NLT), Jesus demonstrates the importance of the social implications of healing.

The Utterance Gifts

Tongues: Spirit-empowered unintelligible speech.
There are three aspects to note here: first, speaking in tongues seems to be a common result of receiving the infilling baptism of the Holy Spirit (even if I have argued that it is not neither a definite nor a necessary proof). We see this repeatedly in the book of Acts (eg. [ch.2:4](#); [10:46](#); [19:6](#)). I would suggest that it makes sense to include other visible manifestations of the overwhelming presence of the Holy Spirit in the same category: eg. laughter (cf. [Psalm 126:2](#)), falling to the ground (cf. [Acts 9:4](#)), *et cetera*.

Second, speaking in tongues is sometimes understood by others present as being an actual human language known to them although it is unknown to the speaker — this is what happens in [Acts 2](#), and if you spend enough time with Pentecostal Christians you will eventually hear testimonies of it occasionally happening still.

Third, speaking in tongues offers a way of praying when you don't know what to say. This seems to be what Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 14:2 — "one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit." — and in Romans 8:26 — "we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for

us with groanings too deep for words". Even Jesus [sometimes needed to do this](#). The gifted ability to pray beyond one's intellectual capacity means that "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself" (1 Cor. 14:4), and explains why Paul said "I want you all to speak in tongues" (1 Cor. 14:5).

Prophecy: Spirit-empowered intelligible speech.

This could be in the context of congregational worship (eg. [2 Chronicles 20](#)), although this is not necessary (eg. Elijah's word to Ahab 1 Kings 17:1, Zechariah's prophecy about his son John the Baptist Luke 1:67ff., Jesus' prophecy to his disciples on the Mount of Olives Mk. 13).

Now, people sometimes 'despise [modern-day] prophecy' because i. they think that believing in prophecy is equivalent to adding to Scripture, and ii. they are afraid that it will lead to manipulation, or at least confusion.

In response to the first, I would clarify that I am a 'Supernatural Continuationist' but a 'Scriptural Cessationist'. Certainly, the writing of the Scriptures has ceased (Rev. 22:18-19). But Scripture encourages us to "eagerly desire to prophesy" (1 Cor. 14:1) — and if you hold to a theology that says that this Scriptural word no longer applies then do you not ["nullify the word of God by your tradition"](#)?

In response to the second concern, it must be emphasised that nowhere among the spiritual gifts is there listed a 'word of command'. Even if something is an authentic word of wisdom, it's not necessarily meant to be obeyed — remember Solomon's word about cutting the prostitute's baby in half! Having received the Holy Spirit means we are no longer under law but now have a dynamic personal freedom to work out how best to live in step with the Spirit in a complex world — if that applies to the biblical law then it must also apply to any other prophecies. On the other hand, a real word of prophecy should ring true in a way that helps us know how to apply God's timeless principles in our rapidly changing world.

It's interesting to consider [Acts 21](#), and Paul's response to prophetic advice. Here Paul has set himself to return to Jerusalem. But he keeps having Spirit-filled believers discourage him on this journey. First some disciples tell him "through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem". Then Agabus, one of the few New Testament characters who is actually described as a prophet, comes and enacts a prophecy about how Paul will be arrested when he gets to Jerusalem — and those with Paul respond by telling him not to go to Jerusalem. But Paul chooses to ignore the prophetic word (although [it does come to pass](#), vindicating its authenticity), having [already](#) "resolved through the Spirit to go to Jerusalem".

Interpretation of Tongues: supernatural interpretation of an otherwise unintelligible message from God.

This gift is typically classified as a gift of utterance, as Paul is focused on the context of congregational worship where the gift allows an utterance in tongues to be converted into a prophecy. But throughout the Bible we see that it's not just congregational words in unknown languages that need interpretation. So, in my opinion, it is helpful to think of the gift of interpretation more broadly, for there are numerous things that would be unintelligible to us without the help of the Holy Spirit: eg. dreams ([Genesis 40:8](#), [Daniel 2:36](#)), the signs of the times ([Matt. 16:3](#)), and even Scripture! ([2 Cor. 3](#), cf. [Ps. 119:18](#)).

'...As the Holy Spirit wills...'

Paul concludes his list of these charismatic gifts by saying that the Holy Spirit gives these gifts "to each one individually as he wills" ([12:11](#)). I used to read this fatalistically — taking it to mean that since it is up to the Holy Spirit's will who receives which charismatic gifts, there's nothing much we can do to actively use any of the gifts which we've not been given. But I have come to understand it

in a much more dynamic way — to see it a statement that the Holy Spirit does indeed will for each one of us individually to use these various gifts, and since that is his will we need to respond with desire, expectation and faith, and be willing to risk stepping out into situations where we need his miraculous gifts to help us! I would argue that this latter reading is supported by Paul’s exhortation in 1 Cor. 14:1 to “eagerly desire spiritual gifts”.

#5 Some Personal Testimonies of these Gifts

Now let’s have a few stories to try and demonstrate what some of these things look like in action.

The Prophetic Word that brought us full-time into YWAM

I have told [the story before](#) of how the key event that caused us to commit long-term to work with YWAM was a [prophetic word](#) from Bella, a Rwandese lady that we were working with while on our DTS outreach. Previously that afternoon myself and Taryn had been talking about what we should do after the DTS finished. Three different people had suggested that we could stay on with YWAM in Harpenden, but there were four reasons that we discussed that stood as obstacles to this. Anyway, that evening Bella told us that ‘God is calling you to be missionaries’ and combined that with a completely accurate [word of knowledge](#) about the things we were struggling with—she named every single one of our four reasons against joining YWAM. (And she can’t have been listening outside our door while Taryn and I had our conversation, for she didn’t speak English, and so her word to us had to be translated from Kinyarwanda).

The Girl Next Door With Chronic Back Pain

When we first moved to Arbury to start the Revival & Reformation DTS, we knocked on our neighbour’s doors and introduced ourselves—and invited them to join us for a bible study that evening. This became a weekly thing: we started off going through the [Simple Christianity](#) course before beginning going through Mark’s Gospel. The topic for our third session was Prayer, and Haley (one of our DTS trainees) taught about how Prayer is more than just talking to God; rather, it’s a two-way conversation *with* God. We ended with a time of application, and split into threes to try and practise hearing God’s voice, specifically asking for words of knowledge, words of wisdom and simple prophetic words of encouragement for each other.

I was in a group with [Abigail](#), who had suffered from chronic back pain for several years in spite of only being a teenager. Anyway, two things came into my mind as I was praying for her: one was a [bible verse](#) that came with the sense that it was an encouragement that she was a gifted writer; the second was just a name, ‘Patricia’. I shared these, and they both turned out to be relevant — she was actually planning on studying writing at university, and Patricia was the name of a friend of hers who had been particularly in her thoughts. She then prayed for me, and had the words ‘new life’ and ‘family’ — and she was astonished when I told her that those words were very prophetic, because we’d just discovered Taryn was pregnant!

Hannah (another girl on our DTS) had been talking to Abigail the week before, and so knew of her struggle with back pain, and seeing Abigail’s faith rise as a result of these supernaturally accurate words, decided to ask if we could pray for healing for her. First we asked how bad the pain was on a scale of one to ten, and then our group gathered around her and prayed a few simple prayers for physical healing. We asked again how the pain was — it had improved slightly but still remained. So we prayed again. We ended up praying three or four times — each time the situation improved, and by the end the pain had completely gone and her younger brother’s jaw was dropping at the range of mobility in her back that Abigail suddenly had.

So in this situation you see simple [prophecy](#) and [words of knowledge](#) inspired a [gift of faith](#) which released a physical [healing](#).

Faith for Finance for a YWAM Cambridge House

I have shared [this story in full previously](#), so I won't recount it all again (but click the link if you've not heard it), but in short it goes like this:

We'd been thinking about how great it would be to live in a revival-focused community house in Cambridge, and I was praying the subsequent morning and felt God give me a nudge to ask him for £100 that very day as a sign that God was in this vision. I did and that very day discovered that we'd been given not one hundred but one thousand pounds. So the activated gift of faith released a miracle.

Later, I felt God gift me another gift of faith for a thousand gifts of £1000 to allow us to buy a £1 million property. This was inspired by [Revelation 5:11](#)'s thousand 1000s. I began to share this, which led to slightly more than a dozen spontaneous £1000 gifts (ie. some more miracles)— an impressive release of finance, but not nearly enough to buy the property. Which leaves me wondering about the nature of the word about the thousand £1000s: does it remain a still-to-be-fulfilled prophecy? or was it partially accurate but not entirely?

Discerning the Spirit of Unforgiveness & Deliverance

A friend of ours was around for dinner at our DTS house in Cambridge, and complaining about his house-mates. I challenged him about his apparent unforgiveness, explaining that we aim to have a culture of 'Unoffendable Hearts', based on the fact that [even when Jesus was on the cross he still chose to forgive](#) — meaning that we can never have a valid excuse for not forgiving. This would be the discerning of spirits, helped by the fact that as a team we had a practice of being especially sensitive to this issue.

My gentle challenge was met with an expression of rage and the declaration that 'I can't forgive!' and our friend got up and stormed round the house. A few minutes later he returned and said he was willing to pray through the issue, but asked that we do so privately. So the two of us found a room where we could pray just the two of us, and I encouraged him to explicitly declare his forgiveness of his housemates and anyone else he was aware of holding grudges against. He began to do so, but upon coming to a particular person with whom he'd had a difficult relationship said 'I can't forgive this person'. I encouraged him that he needed to, and God would give him the necessary strength.

Suddenly he fell down shaking, and began shouting in a strange voice, 'I won't come out of him'. This I took to be a demonic manifestation, and so began saying in a loud voice that the blood of Jesus had delivered him from the power of the enemy, and so whatever unclean spirit was demonising him had to leave. After a few minutes he stopped shaking and screaming, and began to gently laugh, asking 'What just happened?'

I think I would classify deliverance as a particularly dramatic sort of (inner) healing.

#6 Unity in the Body needs a Culture of Honour

Paul goes on from his list of charismatic gifts to highlight the importance of honouring all of those within the body of Christ:

*20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 23 And those members of the body which we think to be less **honourable**, on these we bestow greater **honour**; and our*

*unpresentable parts have greater modesty, 24 but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater **honour** to that part which lacks it, 25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is **honoured**, all the members rejoice with it.*

If we are to sustain an atmosphere where the supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit is at work, then we must learn to honour those with whom we disagree (for this of all theological subjects will stir up heated debate), we must learn to honour those who offend us (because sometimes the Holy Spirit will even deliberately offend our minds to reach our hearts), and to even honour those who dishonour us.

On that note, let me explicitly and specifically say again how much I appreciate the ministry of my former minister Ian Hamilton, whose understanding of the question of spiritual gifts is slightly different from mine, him being a cessationist (and apparently Britain's foremost cessationist spokesman) when it comes to things like tongues and prophecy. But even though we may disagree about the external manifestations one might expect today with the work of the Holy Spirit, I have been very blessed by his well-read and sincere passion for the Holy Spirit to work internally. (And I realise that in this essay I haven't seriously engaged at all with anything he has said on this subject — but I wanted to positively set forth my own convictions before worrying about a detailed apologetic wrangling over the interpretation of all the relevant verses.)

#7 What Does 'Orderly Worship' Look Like?

In the preached message, I concluded on the previous point, but seeing as I have no time limit here, I'm going to expand this little essay here to include this final question of what then our worship should look like — because this is where the rubber hits the road! There are three things that I want to mention to give us a framework for appreciating different varieties of gathered Christian worship.

Participation & Edification

"Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification." (1 Corinthians 14:26)

Paul seems to envisage here a culture of maximum participation within the church, in which everyone comes ready to contribute in the power of the Spirit. Psalms, teachings, tongues, revelations, interpretations — anything seems to go. If that was all he said, then one would be forced to strongly criticise the majority of modern church meetings, which include nothing like the described degree of participation.

However, Paul immediately follows this description of everybody being involved with the command that "all things be done for edification". And this gives us our first tension, because while in some situations (a prayer meeting, for example) higher participation does result in greater edification, in other situations it does not. If I wanted to learn how better to understand the teaching of the Bible, I would rather come and listen to an extended exposition from someone who had thoughtfully and prayerfully considered the passage, than from whichever several people present felt most enthusiastic about spontaneously sharing something.

Which is not to say that I don't think participation is important for learning—small group discussion can be as or more helpful than sermons. Nor am I against spontaneous speeches! But what I am saying is that how we proceed towards edification differs depending on the desired goal.

Appropriate Order & Liberty

Paul's whole discussion in 1 Corinthians 14 of tongues and prophecy is building towards his concluding comment that "[everything must be done decently and in order](#)". But while it is easy in the abstract to acknowledge the merits of 'order', the fact is that our ideas of what constitutes proper order are always highly influenced by our different cultures. A Rwandan Pentecostal and a Scottish Presbyterian, for example, can have somewhat different expectations of what an orderly prayer meeting should involve.

Added to the problem of cultural differences is the unavoidable fact that life is messy. As it says in [Proverbs](#), "without oxen a stable stays clean, but you need a strong ox for the harvest". In many ways a cemetery is a much more orderly place than a crèche — but we don't want to be so obsessed with 'order' that we lose the liberty necessary for life to survive and, better, thrive. For all of the problems that glossalalia was causing in the Corinthian congregation, Paul insists that we must not "forbid to speak in tongues".

Authority & Responsibility

While the Bible does give us a glimpse, in Revelation 4-5, of what culture-transcending heavenly worship looks like, I am not interested in working out the perfect formula to reproduce exactly that sort of meeting every time that we gather together as Christians. Every situation and context is different, and that variety of differences is something to be treasured. The [liturgical Anglican church](#) I go to on Sunday mornings has quite a different blend of order, liberty, and participation from [the little house church gathering](#) that follows Sunday lunch in my house. And this in turn is different from the non-stop free-flowing four-hour session of simple prophetic worship that Taryn and I have been asked to be involved with at the monthly [Heavenly Exchange](#).

My understanding is that in every Christian gathering it is the appointed leaders who have the authority to make decisions about how to balance these different tensions so as to most fruitfully cultivate an atmosphere of spiritual life. That is not to say that they can't be challenged if they are doing something wrong or advised on how they might do something better. But it does mean that I don't need to try and align everything that goes on with my own particular personal preferences, because ultimately it is their responsibility to answer to God for what happens (or isn't allowed to happen!). As [James warns](#), "We who teach will be judged more strictly".

And on that note, I will finish by again repeating what I said at the beginning: that I do not claim to have the final word on this subject, and I want to honour all those with whom I disagree. I offer this to help you understand where I'm coming from, and perhaps to be assisted in your own understanding—and where you do disagree, please do me the honour of explaining with what you disagree and why!