

## The List of Gifts

This is the longest of the lists of gifts that we have in Scripture. (The others are in 12:28, Ro.12:5-8, Eph.4:11, 1 Pe.4:10,11). It's also the first one chronologically.

The thing that stands out about this list is the fact that it is dominated by mostly visible gifts, which makes sense, since he is talking about the fact that the gifts are **manifestations** of the Spirit.

- 8 to one through the Spirit is given a message of wisdom  
and to another a message of knowledge according to the same spirit**
- 9 to a different one faith in the same spirit  
to another gifts of healing in the one spirit**
- 10 and to another workings of powers  
and to another prophecy  
and to another discernments of spirits  
to a different one foreign languages  
and to another interpretation of languages**

**11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.**

### The Prepositions

Before we look at each gift, I want to point out the variety of prepositions Paul uses here.

The **message of wisdom** comes **through** (*dia*) **the Spirit**

The **message of knowledge** comes **according to** (*kata*) **the Spirit**

**faith** and **gifts of healing** come **in** (*en*) **the Spirit**

\* So the Holy Spirit is the means or Agent *through* whom they come,

\* The Holy Spirit is the standard to which the gifts conform to, by which they are measured, and by whom they are distributed (Friberg and Thayer put this under norm, standard, reference or relation. But BAG says it's nothing but a synonym for *dia* here. See below)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *κατα*

Friberg

(1) to indicate standard or norm *in agreement with, corresponding to, in conformity with* (MT 9:29; 16:27; LU 1:38);

THAYER

II. With the accusative;

3. *it denotes reference, relation, proportion, of various sorts;*

c. *according to, agreeably to; in reference to agreement or conformity to a standard, in various ways*

*β* *in proportion to, according to the measure of:* Heb. 11:7; add, Rom. 8:28; 9:11; 11:5; 16:25f; 1 Cor. 12:8; 2 Cor. 13:10; Gal. 2:2; 3:29; Eph. 1:5,7,9,11,19; 3:7,11,16,20; Col. 1:11,29; Phil. 1:20; 3:21; 4:11,19; 2 Thess. 1:12; 2:9; 2 Tim. 1:8f; Heb. 2:4; 7:16; Titus 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3; 2 Pet. 3:15

BAG

II. With the acc. (so 391 times in NT)—

5. *of the norm, of similarity, homogeneity according to, in accordance with, in conformity with, corresponding to.*

a. to introduce the norm which governs someth.

—*ἡ* the norm of the law,

\* And the Holy Spirit is the realm in which the gifts operate.

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the norm according to which a judgment is rendered, or rewards or punishments are given  
of a standard of any other kind

Of. the norm is at the same time the reason, so that *in accordance with* and *because of* are merged

Ro 8:28. 16:26; 1 Ti 1:1; Tit 1:3. Eph 3:3.

Ro 2:7. 11:5. Cf. Eph 1:11; 2 Th 2:9; Hb 7:16.

by what shall I know this? (cf. Gen 15:8) Lk 1:18.—The mng. 'in accordance w.' can also disappear entirely, so that means simply *because of, as a result of, on the basis of* (Ael. Aristid. 46 p. 219 D.: Jos., Ant. 1, 259; 278). for any and every reason (1) Mt 19:3. Gal 2:2. Cf. Ro 2:5; 1 Cor 12:8 (—)

We don't want to press those too far, but they are worth noticing (otherwise the Lord would have just used *dia* each time)

From beginning to end every aspect of the operation of the gifts is of the Holy Spirit.

### Definitions

Let's try our best to define these gifts. You may find this a little frustrating, because Paul does not give any explanations as to what each gift is – he just mentions them.

We can get a broad idea as to the meaning, but we can't really say with certainty exactly what some of them are.

Some of these gifts are mentioned here and never again in the NT.

The vast number of disparate opinions about what most of these gifts are seems to me to be an indication that what was clear to Corinthians is not clear to us.

Paul didn't see fit to explain what he meant by these terms. Evidently, they all knew, and we don't need to know.

If someone who was not familiar with the terminology of Scripture observed 10 gifted people, and wrote down that list of gifts, it would be a pretty safe bet that the list would be very different from this one.

In fact, I doubt there would be any two that matched.

Why is the list of today's gifts seemingly so different from the list in 1 Co.12?

For that matter, why is the list in 1 Co.12 so different from the one in Ro.12, which was written by the same author on the same topic in a similar context?

Could it be that God is a God of such infinite variety and complexity and creativity that the list of gifts is different in every church in every different culture in every different place? (It seems from Acts 13:1 that not every church had prophets and teachers).

If so, it would make sense that when Paul was writing to a specific church, he would throw out a list of the gifts that were prevalent in that church, but he wouldn't institutionalize them for every church of all time.

### Wisdom & knowledge

Paul begins the list with a couple that would really get their attention. We know from earlier in the book that the Corinthians had an extremely high regard for both wisdom and knowledge.

These two terms are catchwords that were probably way overused in Corinth. We can tell that, because in these letters Paul is responding to questions they asked him as well as problems in the church, and he goes on and on about wisdom and knowledge.

In the Corinthian letters Paul uses the word "knowledge" 16 times, and in all his other epistles combined he uses it only 11 times.

In 1 Co. alone Paul uses the word "wisdom" 17 times, and in all his other epistles combined he uses it only 6 times.

So you can tell those two things are a very big issue in Corinth.

The Corinthians were evidently caught up and carried away with fascination over wisdom and knowledge. (As we will see in a moment, a message of wisdom has to do with oratorical skill, and knowledge had to do with doctrine and insight about Christian living).

And it became a problem. They were so enamored with wise and persuasive speech, and with Bible knowledge and cleverness, that they became more focused on the messenger than the message.

That's why some were saying, "I am of Paul" and others were saying "I am of Apollos." Paul and Apollos were preaching the exact same message. But they weren't focused on the message. They were caught up with the rhetoric and speaking skill, and Bible knowledge.

Against that background it's significant that Paul starts the list with those two things: **message (lit. word - *logos*) of wisdom (*sophias*)**

What is the gift of the word of wisdom? Some people have assumed it is direct revelation that God gives an individual in order to help make some tough decision.

That definition is completely arbitrary and not supported by Scripture at all, and it is rejected even by charismatic scholars.

If we want to understand what Paul means by the phrase, we need to back up and look earlier in the book when he used a very similar phrase. These same two words are used together in ch.2.

**1 Co.2:4 My word (*logos*) and my preaching were not with words (*logia*) of wisdom (*sophias*) and persuasion, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,**

The point is that is was plainly spoken – not with a lot of fancy rhetoric.

That verse appears in the midst of an extended discussion about wisdom. It's the section where Paul says the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom (1:25).

The point is that the power of God that is exercised through the Gospel is not a matter of human eloquence and cleverness, but of the supernatural power that comes through the simple message of Christ crucified and raised from the dead.

So the word of wisdom, in the context of this book, is related to speaking skill and eloquence. There is no way to know for sure what the gift was, since it is not defined. But if we are going to assume it's anything, this is our best bet.

The ability to speak eloquently and persuasively are spiritual gifts. Paul didn't use that approach in Corinth, because the Corinthians were overly enamored with that.

But it is something that is a good thing when used in the right way and the right context. Elsewhere Paul talked about trying to persuade men (2 Co.5:11).

If we want to press this further and make it more specific, we can note that this obviously wouldn't be human wisdom, but God's wisdom, which, in the discussion earlier, is wisdom regarding the Gospel.

God's wisdom is specifically the message of the cross. So perhaps this gift has to do with skillful rhetorical ability in articulating the Gospel.

### **word of knowledge**

The term "knowledge" is used repeatedly in ch.8 to refer to understanding details about Christian freedom.

People with knowledge are the ones who understand doctrinal issues related to Christian living.

The **word of knowledge**, then, may have been something like a special ability to teach and explain Scripture in the area of Christian living.

These are both gifts you would expect a pastor to have. A pastor has to have some ability to understand doctrine, and

some ability to articulate that publicly.

But there are different mixes. Some guys are about 90% **message of knowledge** and 10% **message of wisdom**. They have incredible ability to do technical research in Scripture, and they mine out wonderful riches, but when they try to speak or write, most people can't understand a word they say.

Others are the other way around. There are pastors who are 90% message of wisdom and 10% message of knowledge. They do very little study, and aren't really very good at interpreting the Bible anyway.

Most of their stuff comes from books or from other pastors. They never do much study, they aren't all that accurate, but they have a golden tongue.

They can take those insights that have been mined out of Scripture by others and pass them along to us with such eloquence and power that those truths become imprinted on your heart.

Guys like that can move the soul and stir the heart and take a truth that would have been ho-hum if you got it from another source and energize your whole life with it in a way that you will never forget it.

We need both.

And we also need pastors who are more balanced. Everyone has a place.

In my case, I think I have a little more giftedness on the side of knowledge – ability to interpret Scripture and to gain insights.

The gift of the message of wisdom – oratorical skill, that's a gift the people who edit the sermons for radio wish I had.

So Paul starts right out with a couple of the most obvious, most coveted, most respected, most public, and most glamorous gifts.

Now look what comes next:

**9 to another faith by the same Spirit** He lists a gift that is completely invisible.

I read a number of commentaries that insisted this can't be the same kind of faith by which we are saved, because all Christians have that.

And it can't be the kind of faith we use to live the Christian life, because all Christians have that too. So it must be something different.

For the life of me I can't understand that reasoning. Why does the fact that we all have some faith mean some people can't be especially gifted with it?

Don't all Christians have some wisdom? Don't all Christians have Christ, who is **the power of God and the wisdom of God?** (1:24)

And isn't it true that all believers are **in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God?** (1:30)

Eph.1:7-8 **In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.**

And don't all Christians have some knowledge? **Didn't Paul say in 8:1 that** We know that we all possess knowledge?

Every Christian has the mind of Christ (2:16). Every Christian has some knowledge and some wisdom, and yet certain people are especially gifted in those things.

So why can't it be that though we all have faith, some people are especially gifted at trusting God? I don't see any reason to believe this is anything but plain old ordinary trust in God.

This gift sticks out in the list, both conceptually and structurally. Structurally, because the grammar and word usage are different for this gift.

Paul says, "to another" 8 times in this paragraph, and they are all identical except this one and the one for languages, which use a different word (instead of ἄλλω *allo* – another of the same kind, these two have ἑτέρω *hetero* - another of a different kind). The one for faith is a different word, which makes it stand out. (He also uses a bit of an unexpected preposition (*en*).

to one through the Spirit is given a message of wisdom  
and to another a message of knowledge according to the same spirit  
to a different one faith in the same spirit  
to another gifts of healing in the one spirit  
and to another workings of powers  
and to another prophecy  
and to another discernment of spirits  
to a different one foreign languages  
and to another interpretation of languages

It also stands out conceptually, since it is such an invisible thing, whereas the other two are highly visible.

Because of the grammar, I really think these first three go together. Paul is saying, "The Holy Spirit distributes individual gifts as His wills, to one He gives AMAZING ABILITY FOR BRILLIANT RHETORICAL SKILL!"

And all the Corinthians said, "AMEN!"

"And to another He gives THE WONDERFUL ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE PROFOUND KNOWLEDGE AND DEEP INSIGHTS into Scripture!"

And all the Corinthians said, "AMEN!"

"And to someone else over here, faith."

And it's all from the same Holy Spirit given for the common advantage.

Faith is so quiet. Nobody hands out "Truster of the Year" awards to people with faith.

People don't gather by the thousands to watch someone believe.

When people divide up around various leaders, they are always speakers. They were saying, "I am of Paul" and "I am of Apollos" but no one was saying, "I am of George, who just sits in the back of the church and really trusts God."

It's a gift that gets so little press, and so little attention, and yet who is going to argue that in Christianity faith is a minor thing? Paul is challenging their thinking regarding what makes a gift important.

What makes someone important is not how showy their gift is, or how acclaimed or appreciated it is by the body. What makes a gift important is whether or not it plays an important role in ministering to the common advantage of the Body.

And if it's the same Holy Spirit distributing the gifts all for that purpose, it stands to reason every gift is equally critical for the common advantage, whether it be fabulous rhetorical ability or just a solid trust in God.

"But is faith really a **public manifestation** of the power of the Holy Spirit?" I think most likely this gift refers not just to the ability to trust God in general, but primarily in the context of the Church. Some people have a special ability to trust God when everyone around them is falling to pieces.

Some crisis comes. Maybe the church is facing persecution, or maybe their building burned down, or maybe they are just having a financial crunch, or maybe their pastor died...

And while a lot of people are flying off the handle and don't know what to do, and are in a panic – there are some who are able to not only keep their head and remain calm, but to remain genuinely optimistic and joyful.

And you can tell by being around them that they really, genuinely are excited about tomorrow, because they have such a controlling confidence in the goodness of God.

That can be a profoundly public ministry, even though the faith itself is invisible. The effect faith has on a person is visible.

So the first three are very common gifts:

- The ability to eloquently communicate the Gospel
- The ability to communicate doctrine
- A special ability to trust God

The remaining six in this list are most likely gifts that include miraculous elements.

### **to another gifts of healings by that one Spirit**

The double plural stands out, and there are two possible explanations:

1. It may mean there are a variety of different gifts of healings, so that gifts of healings is not a single gift, but a family of related gifts, or
2. It may mean the gifts of healing is not a static, routine gift like, say, teaching, but rather that it is occasional.

Instead of it being an ongoing ability to heal anyone at any time, it seems to point to various healing events, so that each individual healing is an event.

Not only is this gift never mentioned again, but this word is never used anywhere else in the Bible (although the verb form is common in the Gospels for Jesus' healings).

Peter and John healed the cripple in Acts 4

In Acts 5 all the sick who were brought to the Apostles were healed (which, by the way, gives insight into how rare this gift was. If there were lots of people all over the place with the gift of healing, why would people all bring their sick to the Apostles. As we will see later, miracles are signs of an Apostle)

In Acts 8 Philip performed such miraculous healings that Simon the Sorcerer wanted to buy his power from him.

Paul healed a cripple in Acts 14

And in ch.28 Paul was survived a snake bite and then healed the father of one of the officials on Malta.

But after the end of Acts, the next reference to a person being healed is the beast in Rev.13.

All through the Epistles, there are numerous references to people being sick and in desperate need of healing, and it was reported that the people were gravely concerned. And that was true even of people who were in the company of the Apostles.

And when Timothy had frequent illness and stomach problems, Paul didn't tell him to just call someone in the church with the gift of healing. He gave him a very natural, medicinal remedy (1 Ti.5:23)

I believe this is primarily a miraculous gift, although I don't think we can rule out the possibility that it included both miraculous healing and natural healing. Just as the gift of teaching is simply an enhanced ability to teach, so perhaps those like Dr. Luke, who were especially skilled at medicine, may be said to be gifted in the area of healing.

I doubt the people at that time made quite as sharp a distinction between healing through natural means and supernatural means as we do, but there is little doubt that the primary focus of this gift was on miraculous healing.

And which ever way you take this gift, there can be absolutely no question that the next gift is miraculous:

### **10 to another miraculous powers**

This brings up the question of whether the miraculous gifts are still in operation, which is really the major point of disagreement between Charismatics and non-Charismatics.

But I really don't want to get bogged down in that discussion quite yet. The question of the purpose and role and frequency of miracles is a very important subject, and we should devote at least an entire class to that.

And so we will do that a little later in this series. But for now, our main concern is to understand this list of gifts.

This is one of the signs of an Apostle. In 2 Cor.12:12, where Paul is proving he is an Apostle, he says, **The things that mark an apostle-- signs, wonders and miracles-- were done among you with great perseverance.**

The third term (*dunamis*) is the same term used to describe this gift.

One question we face is if miraculous healings are covered in the last gift, what kinds of miracles are left, since most miracles performed by people other than Christ have to do with healing?

When Jesus gave miraculous power to the Apostles, it is all related to healing Mt.10:6-8 **Go to the lost sheep of Israel. 7 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.**

There is no account of Christ ever giving them the ability to do nature miracles, such as, multiplying loaves and fishes, stilling a storm, etc.

So perhaps the gift of miracles refers to casting out demons and raising the dead.

Another possibility is that it refers to negative miracles.

Rev.11:3-6 **And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." 4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. 6 These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.**

When I was in college, I was sitting in class while a professor read that passage, and when he finished v.6 the girl next to me leaned over and said, "That's the gift of plagues."

That's one I haven't seen on any spiritual gift inventories.

Perhaps the gift of miraculous powers would be a better description.

The Apostles also had the power to do negative miracles.

In Acts 13:11 Paul made Elymus blind, and in Acts 5, at Peter's word two people dropped dead.

All we can say for sure is it was some kind of miraculous ability. And it is also a double plural, so we have the same two options as with healing – either there are a variety of miracle gifts, or the gift of miracles is something that comes only at specific times.

### **to another prophecy**

This is the only gift that appears in all four major lists (here, v.28, Eph.4 and Ro.12) and receives considerable treatment in ch.14.

The prophets fulfilled a very important role in laying the foundation for the Church. They were second only to the Apostles themselves. Those two groups were the revealers of the New Testament.

Eph.2:19,20 **you are...members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with**



## **Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.**

**Eph.3:4-5 you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.**

**Eph. 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,**

What is prophecy?

There are a few passages describing things prophets did. For example, 1 Cor.14:3 **But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.**

However, we shouldn't take that as a definition of prophecy.

Just because prophets do that doesn't mean everyone who does that is a prophet. (Just like you could say all pastors are leaders, but that doesn't mean all leaders are pastors or that leadership is the definition of pastoring).

The only passage I know of that defines prophecy is Rev. 19:10 **At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."**

John was tempted to worship the angel as the source of the prophecy he was receiving, and the angel said, "No – prophecy is testimony that comes out of Jesus' mouth."

Regarding our discussion last week about a person having more than one of these abilities, we know that John was both an Apostle and a Prophet, because Revelation is a prophecy.

**Rev. 1:3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy**

**Rev.10:10,11 I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. 11 Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."**

Recently Wayne Grudem has suggested a novel definition of prophecy: He says "prophecy in ordinary New Testament churches was not equal to Scripture in authority, but was simply a very human—and sometimes partially mistaken—report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone's mind."

In other words, prophecy consists of "telling something God has spontaneously brought to mind." And the prophet's report of that thought is fallible and subject to errors.

That view seems to betray a misunderstanding of providence. Every thought that comes into your mind does so under the providential control of God. God will even providentially allow erroneous, incorrect, sinful thoughts to come into your mind.

So just because God has allowed a thought to come into your mind, that doesn't mean that thought is prophetic – otherwise every human being would be a prophet..

Grudem also says prophecy depended on a revelation from the Holy Spirit, but the prophet could either understand it imperfectly or report it inaccurately, or both.

Bruce Yocum, author of a widely used charismatic book on prophecy, says the same thing: "Prophecy can be impure – our own thoughts or ideas can get mixed into the message we receive – whether we receive the words directly or only receive a sense of the message."

If that's the case, what is the difference between that and any Christian who is offering any idea?

I believe there are two categories of speech: inspired and uninspired. The test for inspired speech is that it is infallible and attested by miracles (often the miracles of being able to announce the near future with 100% accuracy – that's the test in Dt.18:21-23).

Grudem wants to add a third category: Speech that is inspired yet fallible. If such a category exists, what would be the difference between that and uninspired speech?

What is the difference between fallible inspired speech and fallible uninspired speech?

Besides, even Grudem would agree that the NT gift of prophecy is what is referred to in Joel 2:28 (Systematic Theology p.1017)

**I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions**

Scripture is clear this was fulfilled when the Spirit came in Acts 2:16,17.

So the NT prophecy is the same as the OT prophecy (If Joel had meant something other than what the word meant when he wrote it, he would have had to indicate that, or no one would know).

“But what about Agabus? Didn't he make a mistake?”

Acts 21:10-11

**After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"**

**30 The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. 31 While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32 He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.**

**33 The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. 34 Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. 35 When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. 36 The crowd that followed kept shouting, "Away with him!"**

Those who argue for fallible prophecy say he didn't get it quite right, because it was the Romans who bound Paul and took him by force against the will of the Jews.

But Scripture often speaks of a person doing an action if he is responsible for it being done. For example, in Acts 3:15 it says the Jews killed Jesus.

In fact, even after this event, when Paul is recounting this event, here's how he describes what happened: **I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans.** (Acts 28:17)

Prophecy that is not accurate is false prophecy – OT or NT.

And if you look at the prophecy of the book of Revelation, you are hard pressed to call that uninspired.

Rev 22:7-21 **"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."**

**10 Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near.**

**18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.**

**19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.**

The prophets were revealers of Scripture.

**Eph.3:5 speaks of the Gospel which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit**

Prophecy is the miraculous speaking of the words of God verbatim in direct revelation. The subject matter may be the past, present or future. The issue is not the time, but the fact that the person is acting as a mouthpiece for God.

Prophecies are word-for-word announcements of what God is saying (even to the point where God is referred to in the first person – Acts 13:1,2).

**Acts 13:1-2 Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was {there} prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."**

Prophecy in a broader sense can involve knowing things that couldn't naturally be known

**Luke 22:64 They blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophecy! Who hit you?"**

**Luke 7:39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is-- that she is a sinner."**

**John 4:18-19 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." 19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet.**

This kind of thing is often call “word of knowledge” or “a word from the Lord” but a more biblical term for it would be prophecy.

Some commentators and many modern churches for some reason think of this as being a kind of ecstatic *mania*. But the examples we have in the NT of prophets prophesying couldn't be more lucid and calm:

**Acts 21:11 Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"**

**Acts 13:2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."**

**to another distinguishing between spirits,**

Testing the spirits does not mean evaluating a true prophet to see if he is in error. It means evaluating a prophet to see if he is from God or not.

**I Jn.4:1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.**

There was a problem with the churches accepting false prophets.

**Rev. 2:20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.**

There is absolutely no reason to assume this is a miraculous, revelatory kind of gift, or that it is based on a subjective feeling or “holy hunch.”

Scripture teaches just the opposite.

Heb.5:14 **But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish** (same word) **good from evil.**

Discernment is not a mystical feeling. It is a mark of spiritual maturity, and comes through constant training. Those who live their lives based on feelings and hunches instead of wisdom are demonstrating they *lack* discernment.

This is one of those gifts that is like faith – we are all to strive to improve in it, but there are some to whom it seems to come a lot easier.

This is such a crucial gift. False prophets have success because they are subtle.

A couple weeks ago I met with a couple and their pastor and talked with them about Scripture for several hours.

I came away thinking they had a solid understanding of Scripture. I have kept in contact through email since then, and I began to become more and more concerned. A couple things he said triggered some vague memories of a cult I once encountered when I was in high school.

So I did some research and found that the things this guy was saying sounded OK, but the words had different meaning – meaning that was the heretical teaching of this cult (The Local Church – Witness Lee. They reject the Trinity).

I was glad I was finally able to discern that, but perhaps someone with the gift of discernment would have picked up on the some clues much earlier.