

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES - Part 6: Desiring the Greater Gifts

Now these were the numbers of the divisions that were equipped for war, and came to David at Hebron to turn over the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of the LORD...of the sons of Issachar who had **understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do**, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their command. (1 Chr 12:23, 32 NKJV)

Spiritual Maturity...Knowing who you are, what you're here for,
and how life in the kingdom of God works!

Ten-Week Study on UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

- Week 1: Seeing "The Big Picture" **DONE**
- Week 2: God's Kingdom vs. The Culture **DONE**
- Week 3: The Fear of the Lord Is The Beginning of Wisdom **DONE**
- Week 4: God's Word Is the Plumb Line For Everything **DONE**
- Week 5: God's Heart For Seers **DONE**
- Week 6: Desiring the Greater Gifts **TODAY**
- Week 7: Old Testament vs. New Testament Prophets
- Week 8: Interpreting What You See
- Week 9: Applying What You've Interpreted
- Week 10: Walking In Discernment

Desiring the Greater Gifts

- **Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.** (1 Cor 12:1 NIV)
 - **John Mark Comer**, pastor of Bridgetown Church in downtown Portland, Oregon, is in the midst of an excellent series on the Holy Spirit. A couple weeks ago he made the point that the two words in the verse above are actually only one Greek word, *pneumatikos*. The most literal translation of this word is "**spirituals**." He says, "This verse is NOT really about spiritual gifts. The word *pneumatikos* ("spiritual" - used 23 times in the NT) and *charisma* (gifts - 54 times) are NEVER used together (side-by-side) in the bible. Not one time! These "spirituals" are the things that Jesus does, through obedient followers, empowered by the Holy Spirit. He points out that there are three lists of "spiritual gifts" in the NT, that they all have different functions, but are given by the same Holy Spirit:
 - **Romans 12** is a list of **gifts, talents, and abilities... Whatever God made you really good at.**
 - In his grace, God has given us different gifts (*pneumatikos*) for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to **prophecy**, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is **serving** others, serve them well. If you are a **teacher**, teach well. If your gift is to **encourage** others, be encouraging. If it is **giving**, give generously. If God has given you **leadership** ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing **kindness** to others, do it gladly. (Rom 12:6-8 NLT-SE)
 - **Ephesians 4** is a list of **types of leaders... Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.**
 - Now these are the gifts (*pneumatikos*) Christ gave to the church: the **apostles**, the **prophets**, the **evangelists**, and the **pastors** and **teachers**. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. (Eph 4:11-13 NLT-SE)

- **1 Corinthians 12** is a list of **spirituals**... *"the stuff the Spirit does."*

- Now there are varieties of gifts (*pneumatikos*), but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the **word of wisdom** through the Spirit, and to another the **word of knowledge** according to the same Spirit; to another **faith** by the same Spirit, and to another **gifts of healing** by the one Spirit, and to another the **effecting of miracles**, and to another **prophecy**, and to another the **distinguishing of spirits**, to another various kinds of **tongues**, and to another the **interpretation of tongues**. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (1 Cor 12:4–11 NAS95)
- **Holy Spirit** is the one who gives the ability to prophecy (either as a prophet or a seer) to believers and it is up to Him who gets what and when. Our part is whether or not we will **receive** the gift and **allow** the gift to work in and through our lives to **edify** (to build up, strengthen, to make more effective), or **exhort** (to stimulate, to encourage, to admonish) others.
- In order to understand these "**spirituals**," the things Holy Spirit does," we need to see them in the context of all that Paul was writing to the church in Corinth in 1 Cor. 12-14. I have purposefully "**slimmed down**" these three chapters so that we can really look at the whole section and get a feel for what Paul was trying to communicate to his disciples...

- **SPIRITUAL GIFTS** (1 Cor 12-14 NLT-SE)

• **Holy Spirit Gives Special Abilities** (1 Cor 12:1–11 NLT-SE)

- ¹ Now, dear brothers and sisters, regarding your question about the special abilities the Spirit gives us. I don't want you to misunderstand this...⁴ There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all...⁶ God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. ⁷ A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other: (1.) the ability to give wise advice, (2.) a message of special knowledge, (3.) great faith, (4.) the gift of healing (5.) the power to perform miracles, (6.) the ability to prophesy, (7.) the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit, (8.) the ability to speak in unknown languages, (9.) the ability to interpret what is being said...¹¹ It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

• **Every Part of the Body Has Value** (1 Cor 12:12–26 NLT-SE)

- ¹² The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ...¹⁵ If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body...¹⁸ But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it...²² In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary... So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. ²⁵ This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

• **We All have a Place in the Body** (1 Cor 12:27–31 NLT-SE)

- ²⁷ All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it. ²⁸ Here are some of the parts God has appointed for the church: first are apostles, second are prophets, third are teachers, then those who do miracles, those who have the gift of healing, those who can help others, those who have the gift of leadership, those who speak in unknown languages. ²⁹ Are we all apostles? Are we all prophets? Are we all teachers? Do we all have the power to do miracles? ³⁰ Do we all have the gift of healing? Do we all have the ability to speak in unknown languages? Do we all have the ability to interpret unknown languages? Of course not! ³¹ So you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts. But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all.

• **Spiritual Gifts Are Worthless Apart from Love** (1 Cor 13:1–13 NLT-SE)

- ¹ If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal...⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but

rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance...⁸ Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever!...¹³ Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

- **Prophecy Strengthens the Entire Church** (1 Cor 14:1–5 NLT-SE)

- ¹ Let love be your highest goal! But you should also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives—especially the ability to prophesy. ² For if you have the ability to speak in tongues, you will be talking only to God, since people won't be able to understand you...³ But one who prophesies strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them. ⁴ A person who speaks in tongues is strengthened personally, but one who speaks a word of prophecy strengthens the entire church. ⁵ I wish you could all speak in tongues, but even more I wish you could all prophesy. For prophecy is greater than speaking in tongues, unless someone interprets what you are saying so that the whole church will be strengthened.

- **Who are we Trying To Reach?** (1 Cor 14:19-25 NLT-SE)

- ¹⁹ In a church meeting I would rather speak five understandable words to help others than ten thousand words in an unknown language. ²² So you see that speaking in tongues is a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers...²⁴ If all of you are prophesying, and unbelievers...come into your meeting, they will be convicted of sin and judged by what you say. ²⁵ As they listen, their secret thoughts will be exposed, and they will fall to their knees and worship God, declaring, "God is truly here among you."

- **Order In Public Worship** (1 Cor 14:26–40 NLT-SE)

- ²⁶ Let's summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you...³⁶ Or do you think God's word originated with you Corinthians? Are you the only ones to whom it was given? ³⁷ If you claim to be a prophet or think you are spiritual, you should recognize that what I am saying is a command from the Lord himself. ³⁸ But if you do not recognize this, you yourself will not be recognized. ³⁹ So, my dear brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and don't forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ But be sure that everything is done properly and in order.

- **One Phrase:** Right smack dab in the middle of all these instructions on the gifts of the Spirit, Paul makes this statement...**"Eagerly desire the greater gifts."** What does *that* mean? What *are* the greater gifts? And **how can these greater gifts help us to Understand the Times?**

- What Are The Greater Gifts?

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD...is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. (Is 61:1–3 NIV)

- **"The Gifts"** (lit. "Spirituals", Gr. *pneumatikos*)...These are the things that Jesus does, through obedient followers, empowered by the Holy Spirit.
 - Eagerly desire the **greater gifts**.
 - But **eagerly desire the greater gifts**. And now I will show you the most excellent way. (1 Cor 12:31 NIV)
 - So you should **earnestly desire the most helpful gifts**. But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all. (1 Cor 12:31 NLT-SE)
 - The question is, **"What are the greater gifts?"**
 - Here are some Possibilities:

- Greatest **Status... *Word of Knowledge & Word of Wisdom***? After all, these are number one and two on the list. This would follow the pattern Paul emphasized in 1 Cor. 12:27-30.
- Most **Impact... *Prophecy***?
 - For after his encouragement to love, Paul says that they "should also desire the **special abilities** the Spirit gives—especially the ability to prophesy." (1 Cor. 14: 1).
 - You would have to put **prophecy** under the heading of "greater gifts," if not the greatest, or the "greater of the great." Why? The reason Paul gives for desiring to prophesy comes in verse 1 Cor. 14:3 is that the "one who prophesies strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them." Paul adds, "**one who speaks a word of prophecy strengthens the entire church.**" (v. 4). Apparently, the measure of a gift, a *charisma*, is measured by its ability to build up the body of Christ. And nothing can have a greater impact than prophecy in that regard. ~ Dr. J. Rodman Williams
- Highest **Value... *Prophecy & Tongues***?
 - Some believe that, because Paul spends so much time in the chapters above talking about prophecy, these must be the "greater gifts."
 - **Tongues with interpretation** would be talking with God. God speaking to others through us would be **prophecy**. Can you think of a better combination. You can see why some would think this combination is what Paul was referring to as the "greater gifts."
- So, if they are not greater in **status, impact, or value**, what's so **GREAT** about them?
- These are ***the gifts that Jesus would employ***...were He in the room.

When You Walk Into The Room

Bryan and Katie Torwalt ~ 2013

Verse 1:

When You walk into the room, everything changes
 Darkness starts to tremble at the light that you bring
 When You walk into the room, every heart starts burning
 And nothing matters more than just to sit here at Your feet and worship You

Verse 2:

When You walk into the room, sickness starts to vanish
 Every hopeless situation, ceases to exist
 When You walk into the room, The dead begin to rise
 Cause there is resurrection life in all You do

- It seems clear that the greater gifts really are **the gifts that are "most helpful"** in any given circumstance.
- When **things were getting rough for John the Baptist**, he sent his disciples to Jesus to see if he might have missed something concerning Jesus' life and ministry...

John the Baptist, who was in prison, heard about all the things the Messiah was doing. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the Messiah we've been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?" Jesus told them, "Go back to John and **tell him what you have heard and seen**— the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor. (Matt 11:2–5 NLT-SE)
- Jesus said to the disciples, **"I will build my church."**

Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (*which means 'rock'*), and upon this rock **I will build my church**, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. (Matt 16:15–18 NLT-SE)
- **Jesus is still building His church!**