

CHURCH.

LESSON 35

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray and commit your group and this course on building Christ's Church to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIME]</i> HEBREWS 8 - 10
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Take turns and **share** (or **read** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Hebrews 8 to 10).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[KEY VERSES IN JOHN]</i> (15) JOHN 15:5
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Review two by two.

(15) John 15:5. I AM the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) <i>[CHURCH BUILDING MINISTRY]</i> SERVING ACCORDING TO SPIRITUAL GIFTS
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The following teachings are about the Holy Spirit.

Manual 2, lesson 21. The nature of the Holy Spirit, his work in people and his work in the Church.

Manual 2, supplement 9. The Holy Spirit sustains Christians amidst their sufferings.

Manual 4, lesson 45. The baptism with the Spirit, the filling with the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit.

Manual 7, lesson 35. The spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Manual 7, supplement 12. More spiritual gifts.

A. THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1. The nature of spiritual gifts.

(1) A special ability or function.

A spiritual gift (Greek: charisma) is a special ability (skill) or competence (function, office) that God gives by his grace and by sovereign determination (1 Peter 4:10; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6,11). It is *both the ordinary as well as extraordinary activity of the Holy Spirit in a Christian*. It is not the product of the Christian's skill or ingenuity. It is always *an expression of God's grace* expressed in a variety of forms through the stewardship of Christians.

(2) A manifestation of God's power and wisdom.

A spiritual gift is always a revelation (manifestation) of God's power, wisdom, knowledge, etc. (1 Corinthians 12:7) in a Christian and is expressed in a variety of (ordinary and official) services and takes shape in different workings (effects of God's power and wisdom).

(3) A measured gift.

A spiritual gift is always a measured gift; limited in extent "according to the measure of the gift Christ gives" (Ephesians 4:7). No one receives all the gifts (1 Corinthians 12:29-30) and no one receives everything a particular spiritual gift could possibly do within its specific area (Ephesians 4:7).

2. The different kinds of spiritual gifts.

Read Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 7:1,7; 12:7-10,28-30; 14:6,26; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:10-11.

(1) The spiritual gifts that are listed in the New Testament.

The New Testament lists about twenty-five different spiritual gifts (including offices as gifts). They are: prophecy *and prophets*, serving, teaching *and teachers*, encouraging, contributing to needs or giving, leadership, showing mercy, continence, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, workings of powers, discernments of spirits, kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues, *apostles*, helps, administrations, revelation, word of instruction, psalm, *evangelists, pastors, teachers* and speaking.

Note that some of these spiritual gifts are not merely *abilities* (skills, competence), but also *offices* (functions, appointed service). Apostles, prophets and teachers have received spiritual gifts, but the main point is not only that they have a *particular ability (skill)*, but that they also have a *particular office (authority, appointed service)*.

It is not true that the Church in the first period was governed by the Spirit apart from the church offices. The apostles functioned as elders (Acts 2:42 and 4:33 in A.D. 30, Acts 8:1 in A.D. 30-34, cf. 1 Peter 5:1 in A.D. 62-63) and as deacons (Acts 4:34-35 in A.D. 30) in the earliest church at Jerusalem. The offices as spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4:12 must exercise their services (tasks) under the leadership of the council of elders (cf. Acts 20:17,28 and 1 Peter 5:1-2).

These lists of the spiritual gifts include services or tasks, which are performed for the good of the Church. Some spiritual gifts are *ordinary and other spiritual gifts are extraordinary* in nature. All these services or tasks may be performed by means of a special gift (cf. teaching, Romans 12:7), but that is not at all necessary – all these services may also be performed without a special gift (cf. teaching, Matthew 28:20; Colossians 3:16). The point Paul makes is not that all these services or tasks require a special gift, but rather that there is a *great diversity* of services or tasks in the church!

(2) The lists of spiritual gifts are not exhaustive.

Some of these lists mention the same gifts, but none of these lists intend to be exhaustive. The letter to the Corinthians mentions the spiritual gifts common in that particular local congregation at that particular time, while the letter to the Romans mentions *the spiritual gifts that are important and should be given a place in the church*.

(3) Spiritual gifts that are not listed.

The implication of these different lists is that there are other spiritual gifts, which are not mentioned in these lists. For example, the creative and musical gifts (cf. Exodus 28:3; 31:1-6; 35:10,25,35; 36:1; Psalm 33:2-3; 45:1; 78:72).

Moreover, each of the spiritual gifts has a variety of different ways of expressing itself. For example, there are different kinds of teaching gifts, like the gift to teach by means of words, or illustrations, or dramatic performance and the gift to teach a different group of people like adults or children or the handicapped, etc. Each of these teaching gifts may or may not include certain extraordinary abilities. Each of these teaching gifts is limited in extent (Ephesians 4:7).

3. The receivers of the spiritual gifts.

Christians differ with respect to the question whether *each* and every Christian has received a spiritual gift or not.

(1) The word “each” sometimes has universal meaning.

The word “each one” (Greek: hekastos) often has the universal meaning of “each and every person that ever lived” (Romans 2:6) or “each and every Christian that ever lived” (Acts 2:38; Romans 12:3; 14:12). Some Christians believe therefore that the word “each” in 1 Corinthians 7:7, 12:7, 14:26 and 1 Peter 4:10 teaches that “each and every Christian” has received a spiritual gift.

(2) The word “each” sometimes has limited meaning.

The word “each” in the Bible does not always have the universal meaning of “each person that ever lived”. For example, “each hypocrite” (Luke 13:15), “each person in the crowd” (John 6:7), “each soldier” (John 19:23) and “each needy Christian” (Acts 4:35). Therefore other Christians conclude that the word “each” in 1 Corinthians 7:7, 12:7, 14:26 and 1 Peter 4:10 does not necessarily have universal meaning.

Moreover, when the Bible wants to stress “each single person without exception”, then it uses the phrase “each one” (Greek: eis hekastos or hen hekastos)(Acts 20:31; 1 Thessalonians 2:11). Thus, the word “each” in 1 Corinthians 7:7, 12:7, 14:26 and 1 Peter 4:10 can have the limited meaning of “*each and every Christian referred to in the context*”. (Compare the word “all” in Romans 5:17-19). The word “each” can therefore have the limited meaning of “each Christian in the Body of Christ to whom the Holy Spirit has given an extraordinary or ordinary ability or function or office (a spiritual gift)” (1 Corinthians 12:11,28-30). Thus it is not absolutely necessary to conclude that the Holy Spirit has given a spiritual gift to each and every Christian.

4. Grace and love are more important than the spiritual gifts.

(1) Grace is more than spiritual gifts.

Ephesians 4:7 says that “to each single one (Christian) (Greek: heni de hekasto)” grace (Greek: charis, not charisma = a spiritual gift) has been given as Christ apportioned it (Greek: kata metron téis dóreas). This means that God’s grace is much more than just a spiritual gift. Each Christian has received grace, but not necessarily each Christian has received a spiritual gift. Each single Christian has received a measure of the exceptional effects produced by God’s grace, which for example may be divine *skill* to lay the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10), divine *power* to work hard (1 Corinthians 15:10), *courage* in situations of weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9) or divine *abilities* in missionary work towards the Gentiles (Galatians 2:9). And many Christians receive a spiritual gift (a divine skill or competence) (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

(2) Love is more than spiritual gifts.

By comparing 1 Corinthians 12:31a with 31b, Paul points to the way of love is the highest way, that love is a more excellent way than the spiritual gifts. A Christian who strives to possess a spiritual gift, must strive after a spiritual gift

that builds up the church, for example prophecy (proclaiming the Word of God). *But every Christian without exception must exercise love!* The conclusion is that even if certain spiritual gifts are lacking in the church, love may never be lacking! While ordinary and extraordinary spiritual gifts (abilities/skills and competences/offices with authority) has been given to certain Christians, love as a gift of the Holy Spirit has been given to every Christian without exception (Romans 5:5; Titus 3:5-6)! That is why love is more than the spiritual gifts!

(3) To be spiritual is more than possessing a spiritual gift.

The possession of spiritual gifts (Greek: charismata) does not make a person more spiritual! The Christians in the congregation at Corinth possessed all the ordinary and extraordinary spiritual gifts, and yet they remained “unspiritual, carnal and immature” (1 Corinthians 1:7; 3:1). The characteristics of being genuinely “spiritual” are: spiritual maturity (1 Corinthians 3:1-4) and bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24). The most important principle in the first letter to the Corinthians is that every Christian ought to use everything he possesses or may use in a way that honours God (1 Corinthians 10:31), only do things that build others up (1 Corinthians 10:23) and give no offence to anyone (1 Corinthians 10:32).

5. The purpose of spiritual gifts.

The four distinct purposes of spiritual gifts are:

- to serve one another (1 Peter 4:10-11)
- to build up the Church (1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:12)
- to equip Christians for works of service (Ephesians 4:12)
- ultimately to glorify God in all things (1 Peter 4:11)!

B. SEEKING, RECEIVING, RECOGNISING AND ASSESSING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1. Seeking spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 14:1 Paul is instructing those believers to whom the Holy Spirit has given a spiritual gift in a sovereign way (1 Corinthians 12:11,28-30): “Follow the way of love and desire earnestly spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.”

What kind of spiritual gifts should these believers (who possess spiritual gifts) desire or seek?

Three issues were necessary in the congregation of Corinth: a change in their desire for particular spiritual gifts; a continual following after the way of love; and an emphasis on the edification of others instead of oneself.

(1) The members of the Corinthian church needed to change their desire.

In 1 Corinthians chapters 12 to 14, the apostle Paul combats the abuse of the spiritual gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues. The Corinthian congregation (1 Corinthians 12:27) valued the gift of speaking in tongues very highly, that is, it hoped that the gift of tongues would be given to it abundantly. That “desire” would have to be changed, because it was wrong to put the speaking of tongues above the other gifts.

The distinction between the spiritual gifts must be made in accordance with God’s standard and not the standard of the church of Corinth. Twice in his enumeration of the gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7-10 and 12:27-31), Paul gave the lowest place to the gift of tongues. And in 1 Corinthians 14:1-3,19 he assigns the highest place to prophecy (the speaking God’s Word in clear intelligible words). The Corinthians, to whom the Holy Spirit has given the gift of prophecy (that builds people up, encourages and comforts them), must eagerly desire to proclaim God’s words in clear intelligible words.

The context (1 Corinthians 12:28-30 and 14:1-3) forbids us to take 1 Corinthians 12:31 as an admonition aimed at stimulating the individual Corinthian Christians to earnestly desire the possession of spiritual gifts. The Corinthians to whom the Holy Spirit has given spiritual gifts in a sovereign way (1 Corinthians 12:11) must eagerly desire (Greek: zeloó) the spiritual gift of speaking in intelligible words (prophecy) rather than the spiritual gift of speaking in unintelligible words in tongues. The apostle Paul even points them to the way that surpasses the spiritual gifts: love and he commands Christians to continually pursue (Greek: diókó) (command in the continuous present tense) love (1 Corinthians 12:31b – 14:1a). His purpose is to point out that love surpasses all the spiritual gifts! Precisely love builds people up!

(2) The members of the Corinthian church must continually pursue the most excellent way.

The word “follow after” (Greek: diómete, 14:1) is much stronger than the word “desire earnestly” (Greek: zéloute, 12:31; 14:1) and both are a command in the continuous present tense. “To follow after” indicates *a never-ending action*, while “to desire earnestly” stresses the *intensity* rather than the continuity of the action. The audience that is addressed in 1 Corinthians 14 is the Christians to whom the Holy Spirit has given spiritual gifts. 1 Corinthians 13 speaks of love which all Christians must pursue at all times, while 1 Corinthians 14:2-3 speaks of prophecy and the gift of tongues *which some Christians possess*. Thus the conclusion may be warranted that “to follow after” is a commandment to the entire congregation, whereas “to desire earnestly” is a commandment to those church members who have received spiritual gifts. While all Christians must constantly follow after love, those Christians who possess spiritual gifts must

constantly desire earnestly to speak in intelligible words of prophecy rather than to speak in unintelligible words of tongues.

Moreover, we must distinguish between *the possession* of spiritual gifts and *giving utterance* to (using) spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 14:26-33). The commandment “to desire earnestly” (Greek: zéloute) does not refer to the acquiring of spiritual gifts, but rather to the giving utterance (use of) spiritual gifts in the church. The word “especially (better: rather)” (Greek: mallon de) (1 Corinthians 14:1) shows that there apparently is a difference in degree between the spiritual gifts. Some spiritual gifts are “the greater gifts” (Greek: ta charismata ta meizona) (1 Corinthians 12:31). The apostle Paul assigns the highest place to the gifts of speaking the words of God in intelligible words (prophecy: that which apostles, prophets and teachers do) (1 Corinthians 12:28), and thereby clearly indicates that the Corinthian church was wrong to assign the highest place to the speaking in unintelligible tongues.

- (3) The members of the Corinthian church must change the emphasis to building others up (instead of themselves).

1 Corinthians 14:12 literally says, “Since you are people who strive after (are zealots of) spirits (Greek: zélótai pneumatón) (sic! Not: “zealots of spiritual gifts”), strive that you may abound in the edification of the congregation”. It is not impossible that the Corinthians, who had just recently out of heathenism, attributed each spiritual gift to another (so-called “good”) spirit. Paul helped them to understand that the different spiritual gifts come from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4) and not from other spirits. While the Corinthians were striving after the abilities which certain spirits possessed or caused, Paul was speaking of striving after the abilities (competence, capability, skill) which only the Holy Spirit brings about. Paul assumes that the Corinthians had received the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:12) and that the Holy Spirit could give ordinary and extraordinary abilities to the human spirit. While the Corinthians were striving after possessing the gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues in order to edify themselves, the apostle admonished them to rather strive after spiritual gifts that edify others in the church! Paul spurs Christians who possess spiritual gifts on to abound in the spiritual gifts that edify the church.

The following context (1 Corinthians 14:13-19) shows that the Corinthians should regard the special gifts that proceed with regularity (prophecy that proclaims God’s words in intelligible words) as more important than the sudden outbursts of speaking in unintelligible tongues. Paul has in view, not what happened in the congregation at Corinth, but what ought to happen in the official meetings of the church at Corinth and in all other churches in the world (1 Corinthians 14:33).

2. Receiving spiritual gifts.

Who ultimately determines which spiritual gift Christians actually receive?

The Triune God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) gives spiritual gifts (abilities, capabilities, skills) to Christians in a sovereign and gracious way and appoints the special functions or offices that have authority in the Church (1 Corinthians 12:11,18,28; Ephesians 4:7; Hebrews 2:4; 1 Peter 4:10). He ultimately determines which spiritual gifts and functions (appointed services) he gives and to whom he gives them. The apostle Paul exhorts the Christians to whom spiritual gifts have been given to desire earnestly to use those spiritual gifts that build up the congregation, because they communicate God’s Word with intelligible words (1 Corinthians 14:12,19).

God arranges a specific place for each Christian in the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-18). Although he does not necessarily assign to each and every Christian their specific service, each and every Christian must serve (1 Peter 4:10-11)! And although he does not necessarily give each and every Christian a spiritual gift (competence/ability or function with authority/office), each and every Christian must love (1 Corinthians 13:1-13)!

3. Recognising spiritual gifts.

How do Christians discover whether God has given them a spiritual gift(s) and which gift that is? It does not matter whether the spiritual gift is ordinary (like teaching) or extraordinary (like gifts of healing) or a function/office (like evangelist, shepherd or teacher).

- (1) By studying the Bible and prayer.

Understand the biblical teaching about the spiritual gifts, their characteristics and functions.

- (2) By serving in the Body of Christ.

Get involved in different kinds of Christian services, like teaching the children, leading the youth, showing mercy to the helpless, encouraging people with problems, preaching the gospel, participating in a discipleship group, etc. If God has given you a spiritual gift, this will begin to be manifested as you serve others and build up the Body of Christ. God does not give spiritual gifts as an ornament to brag about, but as an ability to serve others, to build up the Body of Christ, to equip others for their work of service and to glorify God (not yourself)! A Christian who does not serve, can’t really discover whether God has given him a special spiritual gift or not.

- (3) By evaluating your service (not just your aptitude).

A spiritual gift is an ability (competence) or office (function with authority) that provokes you to serve in the area of that spiritual gift. It expresses itself in the desire to serve in that area. Because spiritual gifts are inseparable from

serving, building and equipping others, the effect (influence) you have on other people is a good indication of your spiritual gift.

Ask yourself the questions:

- “How do other Christians evaluate my service?”
- “What do other people often ask me to do?”
- “What do they say that I can do well?”
- “What do they say that I did that benefited them?”

Then ask yourself the questions:

“How do I myself evaluate my service?”

“What do I enjoy doing?”

“What things do I do well?”

“What things do I do that serve, help, build and equip other people?”

4. Assessing spiritual gifts.

How should a Christian view himself in the congregation? Among Christians there exists differences which God in his sovereign providence and distributions of his grace allows to exist (Romans 12:3-6; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7,14-27). There are the following revelations (manifestations) of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7). They differ in:

- the kind of grace (Greek: *charis*)
- and the measure of grace God gives to Christians (Ephesians 4:7)
- the kind of spiritual gift (Greek: *charisma*) the Spirit gives (1 Corinthians 12:4), e.g. teaching
- the service (ministry) in the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 12:5), e.g. teaching children
- the workings (effects) of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:6). e.g. teaching by means of telling stories or making drawings

The will of God takes account of all these differences and the great diversity among Christians. He determines the direction of each one's life.

(1) Assessing spiritual gifts demands humility.

Romans 12:3 says, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” “Thinking of yourself more highly than you ought” is pride. Pride consists in coveting or exercising a prerogative (e.g. a spiritual gift) that does not belong to one. No one is immune to exaggerated self-esteem. A Christian who covets a spiritual gift or function in the congregation that is different than what God has graciously given to him, is engaged in wilful self-exaltation. This applies also to the desire to speak in unintelligible tongues.

“Thinking of oneself with sober judgement” is humility. Christians should not pretend to possess a spiritual gift they do not have. Christians should also not deny that God has graciously given to them or others a spiritual gift. Both over-self-esteem and false humility are wrong. Christians should evaluate themselves not by measuring themselves with their own yardstick, but with the measure of faith God has apportioned to each.

(2) Assessing spiritual gifts demands faith.

“The faith” in Romans 12:3 refers to faith in its ordinary subjective sense, namely, “to trust in” or “lay hold of” God and God's promises. However, with the words, “the measure of faith” does not refer to *the quantity of faith*, but rather of *the kind of faith*. Paul is thinking of the various possible ways in which Christians are a blessing to others and the Church by using their particular spiritual gift (ability or function) in association with their faith. The many different measures of faith reflect the many different ways in which faith is to be exercised in association with the great variety of spiritual gifts in the Church.

By God's sovereign grace, each Christian receives “a specific measure of faith”, that is, as a member of Christ's Body, he receives:

- a specific place in the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:18)
- possibly an ordinary or extraordinary spiritual gift (or function with authority) (1 Corinthians 12:11)
- a specific measure of faith by which and within the limits of which he should fulfil his service (ministry) (Romans 12:3).

Faith is not only needed when we become members of the Church. Faith is also needed to perform our different spiritual gifts (abilities or functions) and different services (ministries) as members of the Body of Christ. All spiritual gifts can only be exercised properly by faith in Christ as also only by love which God gives (1 Corinthians 13). Thus every spiritual gift is limited with respect to:

- the type of ability or function (office)
- the type of ministry where it is exercised
- and the faith with which it is exercised

C. CHARACTERISTICS OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

This sub-division is selective and only a short summary. See “More spiritual gifts” in manual 7, supplement 12.

1. Apostles.

(1) The apostles of Christ (Mark 3:13-19; Acts 1:21-22; 1 Corinthians 9:1; Revelation 21:14).

They were unique. The apostles of Christ had no successors. They were the eyewitnesses and ear-witnesses of Christ (Acts 1:22), the authors of the New Testament (2 Peter 3:1-2,15-16) and the founders of the world-wide historical Christian Church (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20).

(2) The apostles of the congregations (2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25).

They were delegates or representatives of local congregations that were sent out to accomplish a special task. The word may be applied to modern day missionaries that proclaim the gospel and plant new congregations and build up these congregations (Acts 14:14; Romans 16:7; Galatians 1:19).

2. Revelation, prophets and prophecy.

- “A revelation” (1 Corinthians 14:6,26) is a new disclosure or unveiling especially by means of visions (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:1; Revelation 1:1,10,12).
- “A prophecy” is the utterance or proclamation of things that God has already revealed. It is speaking or preaching under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10). This means that everything the Spirit of Christ spoke through the Old Testament prophets (1 Peter 1:10-12) and the New Testament apostles (John 15:13-15) and is now recorded in the Bible is the “spirit” or essence of biblical prophecy. It is used in three senses in the Bible.

(1) The Old Testament prophets proclaimed God’s Old Testament revelation.

These prophets were the instruments of new revelation and spoke the very words of God himself! They were the mouthpieces of God and all their words were God’s authoritative words. They were unique. This was a spiritual gift (a divine ability) or office (appointed function with authority) only during the Old Testament period (Matthew 11:13). The Old Testament prophets are the inspired spokesmen of God and their revelations are meant for all people in the world.

The Old Testament prophets have no successors! There are no longer prophets of this calibre, because God’s revelation of himself and his plan, which was begun through the Old Testament prophets, was completed in Jesus Christ (John 1:18; Hebrews 1:1-2) and in the witnessing of the apostles of Christ (John 16:13-15). Their revelations have been recorded in the Bible “The canon” or the list of 66 books of the Bible has long since been closed. No one may add more “words of God” or “Bible books” to the Bible (Revelation 22:18-19)!

(2) The New Testament prophets proclaimed God’s intentions in certain circumstances.

They were unique. This was a spiritual gift and office (appointed service, cf. Acts 15:32-33) only during the beginning period of the New Testament Church. As long as the recording of the New Testament had not yet been completed, they occasionally announced what God wanted the early Church to know or do under certain circumstances. Their prophecies were limited.

While the apostles of Christ possessed the gift of prophecy, these New Testament prophets were not apostles of Christ. While the apostles of Christ received revelations that were of fundamental importance to the whole Christian Church throughout the whole New Testament period (1 Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 1:11-12,16), the New Testament prophets received revelations that had no general or permanent significance (Acts 11:27-28; 13:1-4; 21:10-11). While the apostles of Christ proclaimed revelations that all Christians in the world from the first coming to the second coming of Christ had to know, believe or do, the New Testament prophets only proclaimed limited revelations that a limited group of Christians in the early Christian Church had to know, believe or do under certain circumstances.

The New Testament prophets spoke to people for their edification (strengthening), encouragement and comfort (1 Corinthians 14:3; Acts 15:30-32) or in order to warn them (1 Corinthians 14:8; Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-11). The word “prophecy” primarily refers to “edification, encouragement and comfort” (1 Corinthians 14:3) and not to “new revelations” (Acts 13:1-4). The contents of biblical prophecy is “the testimony of Jesus Christ” (He is the Author and the contents of prophecy) (Revelation 19:10)! This refers to everything Jesus Christ taught in the Old Testament (cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12) and in the New Testament (John 16:13-15).

The apostles of Christ were Christ’s instruments to reveal and record almost the whole New Testament (John 14:26; 16:13-15; 20:31). In contrast to this, only a few prophecies of the New Testament prophets have been recorded in the New Testament (Acts 11:28; 21:11). This proves that the New Testament prophets did not receive the same kind of revelations as the apostles of Christ. While the preaching and teaching of the apostles of Christ are unquestionable, infallible and authoritative for the doctrine and behaviour of Christians in every century between the first and second coming of Christ (Acts 2:42; 2 Timothy 1:13; Acts 16:4; Philippians 4:9), the utterances of the New Testament prophets had to be weighed and tested by other Christians (1 Corinthians 14:29-33)¹. The apostles of Christ possessed many

¹ All pronouncements and decisions including “ex cathedra” decisions of all popes during Church History must be evaluated in the light of the New Testament revelation in the Bible!

other qualities that gave them pre-eminence among all the spiritual gifts and offices. The apostles of Jesus Christ have no successors!

(3) The gift of prophecy is proclaiming in a Holy Spirit inspired way that which the apostles of Christ had already previously revealed in their preaching and teaching.

This is the general meaning of the word “prophecy”. “To prophesy” (Romans 12:7) is the special ability or function to proclaim (preach) the biblical truths in order to edify, encourage and comfort particular Christians (1 Corinthians 14:3; Acts 15:32), or to edify the Church as the Body of Christ by equipping the members for various works of service (Ephesians 4:12). Christians with this spiritual gift openly proclaim or preach God’s previously revealed (and recorded) words in the Bible in an inspired, persuasive and convincing way. They speak with intelligible words (1 Corinthians 14:8) and with power (Acts 6:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:5).

“To prophecy” may include revealing people’s thoughts, motives, attitudes, words and deeds that were hidden before. The Holy Spirit uses the preaching, teaching, sharing or counselling of Christians with the gift of prophecy to reveal hidden issues in the listener, to call him to repentance or to change some issue in his life. The effect of this kind of prophesying is that the sin of the listener is irrefutably exposed (1 Corinthians 14:24-25). The exposure of sin may be public in the midst of the congregation (Acts 5:3-4) or it may be private within the soul of the listener only (Acts 2:37; cf. John 16:8)!

3. Teachers and teaching.

(1) The function (jurisdiction, licence, authority) to be a teacher or the special ability (competence, skill) to teach.

“Teacher” is an *extraordinary competence* (ability) (Romans 12:7) or an *ordinary licence* (function, office, appointed service) in the Church (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 1:11). Teachers communicate the truth of the Bible especially to Christians. They are among the ordinary offices or officers in the New Testament Church. While the prophets received their message by revelation from God’s Spirit (also from the Bible), the teachers derived their knowledge from the study of the Old Testament Scriptures, the teachings of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the apostles, thus, the 66 books of the Bible. The office of teacher was open to everyone’s ambition, and the requirement of a special spiritual gift of teaching for the teacher is not mentioned (James 3:1). The office of a teacher is based on a *calling* rather than on a special spiritual gift.

Some Christians receive the special office of teacher or shepherd-teacher (Ephesians 4:11), but are cautioned to remember that *the office* of teacher in the Church is a great responsibility (James 3:1). Other Christians receive a spiritual gift (ability) of teaching (Romans 12:7). But *all Christians* (with or without the spiritual gift of teaching) are called to perform the function or task of teaching one another (Matthew 28:20; Colossians 3:16).

(2) Tasks of teachers in the Church.

Read Ezra 7:10.

- The first task of teachers is *to study* the Bible in detail in order to validate the truth, to dig out the facts and to gather and systematise the biblical truth (Acts 17:11).
- The second task of teachers is *to practise* what they teach. They set an example of living out the truth (Matthew 23:2-4; Romans 2:21; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7-8).
- The third task of teachers is *to teach* the truth of the Bible with authority and without loss of meaning or the original intention, in order to make the truth understandable and practical (Mark 1:22; Acts 8:30-31; 20:20,27; 2 Timothy 2:15). Teaching is directed to new Christians in order to make them disciples that obey Christ’s commands. And teaching is directed to Christians that are teachable, faithful and able to later teach others (Matthew 28:20; Luke 6:40; 2 Timothy 2:2).

(3) Place of teachers in the Church.

The ministries of prophets (preachers) and teachers are the two most important ministries under the apostles of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11). Because both the apostles of Christ and the New Testament prophets only had a task to perform in the early period of the New Testament Church:

- the office (appointed service) of teacher (1 Timothy 5:17)
- the ordinary function or task of teaching (Colossians 3:16)
- and the spiritual gift of teaching (Ephesians 4:11)

should have a very high priority in the Christian Church worldwide. Nothing builds Christians up more than the truth in the Bible!

4. Evangelists.

“Evangelist” is an *extraordinary competence* (ability) (Acts 11:24) or *ordinary licence* (function, office, appointed service) (Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5) in the Church. Evangelists proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to unbelievers so effectively that people are being saved and the number of Christians in the Church is increased. While

some Christians are called to be evangelists (2 Timothy 4:5) and some receive the spiritual gift of evangelism, all Christians are called to participate in evangelism (sowing and reaping) (Matthew 10:32-33; John 4:37).

5. Shepherds.

“Shepherd” is an *extraordinary competence* (ability) (Ephesians 4:11) or *ordinary licence* (function, office, appointed service) (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4) in the Church. Shepherds feed, protect, care and guide Christians towards spiritual growth and well-being. They search for the lost and bring back the strays. They especially show concern and loving care to the small, the weak and the needy. While some Christians are called and appointed to be shepherds and some receive the spiritual gift of shepherding, *all Christians* are called to participate in caring for one another (1 Corinthians 12:24-26).

D. USING SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO BUILD UP THE CHURCH

1. The spiritual gifts and the ministries of the Church.

How should a Christian use his spiritual gift for the common good of all other Christians?

(1) Christians need one another's service.

Each member of the Body of Christ must serve the other members. And each member needs the service of the other members. Serving one another with the ordinary or extraordinary gift(s) of the Holy Spirit is therefore another expression of loving one another! As the hand cannot do without the foot and the foot without the eye, so each member cannot do without the other's service gift. The service or spiritual gift of each member complements that of another. In this way, the Church of Christ is being built up in the best way.

(2) The spiritual gift of teaching as an example.

Let us use the spiritual gift of teaching as an example. All Christians, whether they have the spiritual gift of teaching or not, should be involved in the ordinary ministry of teaching one another. All Christians must be involved in making disciples by teaching others to obey everything Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:19-20)! All Christians must let the Word of God dwell richly in their own hearts and teach one another in all wisdom (Colossians 3:16)! While all Christians should teach, only some Christians have received *the spiritual gift of teaching* (1 Corinthians 12:29).

Those who have received the spiritual gift of teaching have the responsibility to use their gift to do three things:

- They should serve other Christians by teaching them.
- They should be an example for other Christians how to teach.
- If possible, they should equip or train other Christians how to teach.

In the same way, Christians should use the other spiritual gifts they have received to serve with their spiritual gift, to be an example in their special ministry and if possible, to equip other Christians in the area of their spiritual gift.

(3) The spiritual gift of showing mercy as an example.

All Christians should be involved in the ministry of showing mercy. They are called to be a Good Samaritan and help people in need (Luke 10:37). While all Christians should show mercy, only some Christians have received *the spiritual gift of showing mercy* (Romans 12:8). These Christians should serve others by showing mercy, are an example of showing mercy and if possible, equip others how to show mercy.

2. The gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit.

The possession and use of spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit is not a proof of being especially *spiritual or mature*. The Corinthian church possessed all the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 1:7). Yet they were not spiritual or mature, but rather worldly and mere infants in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)! The exercise of the spiritual gifts without love for other Christians is alas possible, yet absolutely useless in God's eyes (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

The real proof of living by the Spirit, being filled with the Spirit and being led by the Spirit is not the use of the gifts of the Spirit, but the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit in your life (Galatians 5:22-23). Even though specific spiritual gifts may be lacking in your personal life or in your congregation, the fruit of the Spirit, especially love, may never be lacking!

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	<i>[REACTIONS]</i> PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD
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Take turns in the group to pray short to God in response to what you have learned today.
Or divide the group into two's or three's and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples and build Christ's Church.
2. Preach, teach or study the teaching of "Serving according to spiritual gifts" together with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time with God from half a chapter of Hebrews 11 – 13 each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. Daily review the last 5 memorised verses from John.
5. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. John 16. Make use of the five steps method.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on building Christ's Church. Include your notes on personal time with God, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.