

*the purpose and duration*



*of spiritual gifts*

*by Edward Fudge*

# *The Purpose and Duration of Spiritual Gifts*

---

by Edward Fudge

*for Power Point program,  
go to [www.EdwardFudge.com/spiritualgifts.ppt](http://www.EdwardFudge.com/spiritualgifts.ppt)*

(website [www.EdwardFudge.com](http://www.EdwardFudge.com))  
*Copyrighted 2006 by Edward Fudge*

---

## *Approaching this subject*

**Many of us have encountered extremes in attitude regarding the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts.**

- \* Some have been self-promoting, proud, divisive.
- \* Some have shut the door to the Holy Spirit and pulled the welcome mat inside.
- \* One author addresses both errors in his metaphorical book title *Fire in the Fireplace*.
- \* We humans tend to react by going to opposite extremes.
- \* Instead of reacting from fear or ignorance, we need to understand the biblical world view, build on it and live out of it. When we see the “big picture” of biblical theology, we can learn to fit each element into its proper place. The result can be balanced understanding and constructive Christ-honoring conduct. Grasping this “big picture” also answers the questions implied by our lesson title (*purpose & duration*). Let us look first at the biblical “big picture” as it involves Christ, the church, our lives and the Holy Spirit and

his gifts.

## *Seeing the 'big picture'*

1. **The Christian church (Messianic community) always lives “between the times” -- during the interim beginning with Jesus’ death, resurrection, exaltation and Pentecost and ending with his final return. We experience the “Already” and the “Not Yet.” Towering over our “Now” always stands God’s great “Until.”**
  - A. In one Jewish expectation of the End, the Present Age would close and the Age to Come open. Where the two Ages met, the End would occur -- marked by resurrection, forgiveness of sins, the outpouring of God’s Spirit and messianic blessing and judgment. (*Visualize two circles that barely touch.*)
  - B. Instead, to everyone’s surprise, the Age to Come broke into the Present Age. The End has already begun -- marked by Jesus’ resurrection, forgiveness of sins, the outpouring of God’s Spirit and messianic blessing and judgment. In God’s own time, the Present Age will give way entirely to the Age to Come and the End will be consummated. (*Visualize two circles that partially overlap.*)
  - C. Because the “End” includes an interim, Christ’s people always experience an “Already” and a “Not Yet.” Our “Now” reality includes expectation “Until.”

Psalm 110:1 (“sit at right hand” . . . “make enemies footstool”)  
Daniel 7:13-14; Rev. 1 and Rev. 21 (“authority” . . . “judgment”)  
Acts 3:18-21 (“heaven receives” . . . “restoration of all things”)  
End “already” (1 Cor. 10:12) but “not yet” (1 Cor. 15:23-26)
  
2. **Jesus explained this interim to his followers and how he would provide for them by the Spirit during it (John 14).**
  - A. Jesus said that he was going away but he would come again (John 14:1-3).
  - B. During his bodily absence, both Jesus and the Father would take up residence in Jesus’ people on earth (John 14:18-23).
  - C. This happens through the *Parakletos*, the “Comforter” or “Advocate,” for the Holy Spirit is the personal, powerful Presence of God the Father and the Risen Christ during this interim (John 14:15-17).
  - D. Therefore we need not fear the Spirit or anything the Spirit does, for we know God as we have seen him in Jesus Christ (John 14:8-9).

**3. This biblical-theological “big picture” provides the key that reveals the purpose of spiritual gifts and therefore also their duration.**

A. The purpose of all spiritual gifts (grace-gifts) is directly and profoundly related to this “big picture” of the “between the times” interim in which Christians always live.

- (1) God’s determined end or goal (*telos*) is the full perfection or maturity (*teleios, teleion*) of every believer into the full likeness of Jesus Christ himself.
- (2) God is faithful and he will complete what he begins (1 Cor. 1:9; Phil. 1:6 [*epiteleio*], 9-10).
- (3) To this end, God gives spiritual gifts to equip his people to serve each other, to advance the whole body of Christ toward his goal.
- (4) Do we view all spiritual gifts, however “ordinary” or “spectacular,” in this apostolic and biblical light?

B. The duration of spiritual gifts is the time frame within which the church always lives.

- (1) It is the interim between Jesus’ departure in person and his return in person.
- (2) It is the period of overlap of the “Present Age” and the “Age to Come.”
- (3) It is the messianic era when God’s people experience the “Already” and the “Not Yet.”
- (4) It is the “Now” of the Christian church.
- (5) It is the time of the great “Until.”

## *God has placed this ‘key’ in every major discussion of spiritual gifts*

The common thread in the following contexts besides the topic of spiritual gifts (“grace-gifts,” *charismata*, is the usual word instead of “spiritual gifts” in most passages) is the theme running through all of the passages of God’s “goal” or “end” (*telos*) to which Christ’s people are called and toward which the Christian life is moving. When we reach that *telos* we will have come to a state of “maturity” or “perfection” (*teleios*). This goal/*telos*, of course, is the full likeness of Jesus himself. Each of the major passages on spiritual gifts includes the vision of the goal/*telos* toward which we are moving or the state of maturity/perfection/*teleios* which waits at the end of that journey. Of course all of this is in the context of the two overlapping Ages, the “already” and the “not yet”, the eschatological “until” created by the interim between Christ’s first and second Advents, the “End” that has begun but is not yet consummated.

### **1 Cor. 1:4-9.**

While we eagerly await Christ’s return, God has given us his grace and his grace-gifts to confirm us and to enrich us in all speech and knowledge. God will faithfully confirm us to the very End (*telos*).

The Corinthians had received God’s grace (*charis*), part of which was manifested in the giving of grace-gifts (*charismata*), including those involving “speech” (tongues, prophecy, teaching, encouragement) and “knowledge” (gift of knowledge, perhaps others). The presence of these gifts ensured that the Corinthians were not lacking anything as they waited for the revelation of Jesus at his Second Coming. The gifts were to sustain them, in other words, until Jesus returned. The gifts also confirmed (grounded, made firm) the believers at Corinth – and would continue to do so until Jesus came again, because God is faithful and his goal is to present believers to Jesus “blameless” at the End (*telos*) when he returns.

### **1 Peter 4:7, 10-11.**

During this interim as the End (*telos*) approaches, God distributes his grace by entrusting grace-gifts to his people to serve each other in word and deed, in God’s power and to his glory.

The “End” (*telos*) is near, Peter begins – and we think of the overlapping circles and the “big picture” discussed on outline pages 1-3. In this context, Peter speaks of our various grace-gifts (*grace-gifts*), signs of God’s abundant grace (*charis*) of which we are stewards for the common good. Whether one’s gift involves speaking or physical service, it originates from God, is exercised in God’s strength and results in God’s

glory. The larger context of 1 Peter is the maturation of believers into the likeness of Jesus, whom Peter urges his readers to imitate.

**Rom. 12:1-8.**

Throughout our Christian lives, we respond to God's mercy by giving ourselves to him, to be transformed into living showcases of God's perfect will (*thelema ... teleion*) for us. To move us toward that goal, God equips us with grace-gifts that differ from person to person.

Believers are called by God to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This transformation occurs progressively as believers demonstrate by testing and approving God's will for them. The goal is full compliance with God's wishes for his people – we know to be the likeness of Jesus himself. This goal, and the steps toward it, are described as the will of God that is “good” and “acceptable” and “perfect” (*teleios, teleion*). Paul goes on to say that because this is our agenda, we are to exercise our respective grace-gifts according as God gives to each person.

**Eph. 4:1-16.**

Christ, the victorious warrior-King, has conquered his enemies and now distributes gifts to his own people. Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors/teachers to equip all his people to perform their respective service, **until** his body is built up to full maturity (*andra teleion*) and resembles him in every way.

This passage is very direct regarding our theme. Christ ascended and gave gifts --- apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors/teachers. The purpose of these gifts (here *doreas* instead of *charismata*, but still signs of divine grace (*charis*, v. 7) is to equip all God's people for their respective ministries, toward the continuing building up of Christ's body, until we all together reach the state of full maturity (*teleion*). That state will be characterized by the fact that we all stand next to Jesus and are just as tall as he is (spiritually), “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”, and we all have complete and therefore unified knowledge.

**1 Cor. 12-13.**

Like our bodies, Christ's spiritual body has many inter-dependent members with unity in diversity serving the common good. One Spirit, Lord and God, but varieties of gifts/abilities, ministries/functions and effects/results. We all were baptized (by Jesus) in one Spirit into one body, and all drink of one Spirit. We exercise these gifts in love, **now** seeing dimly and knowing only partially, until the *A*perfect@ (*teleion*) comes and **then** we will see face to face and then we will know as fully as we now are known. So we live by faith (based on the Already), in hope (expecting the Not Yet) and in love (in the interim **Now**).

The “perfect” (*teleion*) in 1 Cor. 13:10 goes back to the End/Goal (*telos*) in chapter 1 of the same epistle, which stated that the gifts were given while we wait for Jesus’ revelation and that God will confirm us until that occurs and he presents us “blameless.” The prophecy, knowledge and tongues in chapter 13 match the “speech” and “knowledge” in chapter 1. The “then” in 13:12 fits with the waiting for Jesus in chapter 1 and also fits with the “until” in Eph. 4:13.



## *Some practice points*

1. **There is a purposeful relationship between the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5) and the gifts of the Spirit (Rom., 1 Cor., Eph., 1 Pet.).**

<u>Fruit</u>	<u>Gifts</u>
Christ-like character	Christ-like ministry
involve our being	involve our doing
developed	received
prepare for eternity	equip for this life
regulate use of gifts	manifest fruit

2. **Notice the Vocabulary: God's grace-gifts are intended to create joy!**

<i>Chara</i>	=	joy.
<i>Charis</i>	=	grace.
<i>Charisma</i>	=	grace-gift.
<i>Charismata</i>	=	grace-gifts (plural).

(Conclusion -- If joy is not the result, somebody is missing the program.)

3. **The various New Testament gift-lists are suggestive, not exhaustive.**
4. **Some questions help us identify our own grace-gifts.**
  - A. How do you instinctively react, respond to situations of need?
  - B. What do you sense is lacking in others that you can supply?
  - C. What do others expect from you based on past experience?
  - D. What do you do that blesses and brings joy to others?
  - E. What service do you perform for which others thank and praise God?

**5. How are we to exercise God's grace-gifts to accomplish their purpose?**

- A, 1 Cor. 12 B In humility and acceptance of God's sovereign will.
- B. 1 Cor. 13 B In love, defined in very practical and concrete terms. Unless it is exercised with love, no gift -- however glamorous, mysterious or heroic -- has any value. Remember, love (the Spirit's fruit) will outlast all grace-gifts.
- C. 1 Cor. 14 B In self-control. The loving use of grace-gifts involves self-control in view of their ultimate purpose -- serving and building up others to God's glory as we move toward Christ's return.

## *The duration of spiritual gifts fits their purpose*

1. **None of the New Testament teaching about the purpose of spiritual gifts pertains to the writing of Scripture or is unique to the apostolic ministry or the infant church.**
2. **Ongoing church history from the second century forward shows that spiritual gifts continue as the church awaits Christ=s return.**
  - A. Justin Martyr (b. 114). ADaily some (of you) are becoming disciples in the name of Christ and quitting the path of error; who are also receiving gifts . . . . For one receives the spirit of understanding, another of counsel, another of strength, another of healing, another of foreknowledge, another of teaching, and another of the fear of God.@ (*Dialogue With Trypho*, ANF, Vol. 1, chap. 39)
  - B. Irenaeus (b. 120). Bishop of Lyons, in France, pupil of Polycarp of Smyrna. AWherefore, also, those who are in truth His disciples, receiving grace from Him, do in His name perform (miracles) so as to promote the welfare of other men, according to the gift which each one has received from Him. For some do certainly and truly drive out devils, so that those who have thus been cleansed from evil spirits frequently both believe (in Christ) and join themselves to the church. Others have foreknowledge of things to come: they see visions and utter prophetic expressions. Others still, heal the sick by laying their hands upon them, and they are made whole. . . . And what shall I say more? It is not possible to name the number of the gifts which the church throughout the whole world has received from God, in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and which she exerts day by day for the benefit of the Gentiles . . . .@ (*Against Heresies*, Bk. II, Chap. 32)
  - C. Eusebius (b. 260-263). AWe hear many of the brethren in the church who have prophetic gifts, and who speak in all tongues through the Spirit, and who also bring to light the secret things of men for their benefit, and who expound the mysteries of God@ (*Ecclesiastical History*, [Bk. 5, chap 20?])
  - D. Athanasius (296-373) A[W]e ought not to doubt whether such marvels were wrought by the hand of a man. For it is . . . Jesus himself who saith to His disciples and to all who believe on Him, 'Heal the sick, cast out demons; freely ye have received, freely give.' Antony, at any rate, healed not by commanding, but by prayer and speaking the name of Christ. So that it was clear to all that it was not he himself who worked, but the Lord who showed mercy by his means and healed the sufferers@ (Vita S. Antoni, chapters 83-84)
  - E. Augustine (4<sup>th</sup> century). "It is sometimes objected that the miracles, which Christians claim to have occurred, no longer happen. One answer might be that they are no longer needed as they once were to help an unbelieving world to believe. . . . The truth is that even today miracles are being wrought in the name of Christ . . . . The fact that the canon of our Scriptures is definitely closed brings it about that the original miracles are everywhere repeated and are fixed in people's memory, whereas contemporary miracles ...

seldom become known. [Augustine then cites specific examples, naming individuals involved.] . . . It is a simple fact that, that there is no lack of miracles even in our day. And the God who works the miracles we read of in the Scripture uses any means and manner He chooses. The only trouble is that these modern miracles are not so well known as the earlier ones . . . ." ("The City of God," Book 22, chap. 8)

- F. Scottish Reformers (16<sup>th</sup> century). Robert Bruce. Leader in Scottish Reformation. One of his biographers, Robert Fleming, wrote in 1671: "He did prophetically speak of many things which afterwards came to pass, yea, which I had attested by sober, and grave Christians, who were familiar with him. Various persons distracted [insane], and of those who were passed all hope of recovery in the falling sickness [epilepsy], were brought to Mr. Bruce and after prayer by him in their behalf were fully recovered . . ." (Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Voice of God*, p. 76).
- G. Samuel Rutherford (17<sup>th</sup> century). Scottish theologian and prominent delegate to Westminster Assembly which composed Westminster Confession of Faith in London from 1643-1646. He wrote: "There is a revelation of some particular men, who have foretold things to come even since the ceasing of the Canon of the word, as John Husse, Wickeliefe, Luther, have foretold things to come, and they certainly fell out . . . [d]iverse Holy and mortified preachers in England have done the like." (A *Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist* . . . )
- H. John Wesley (18<sup>th</sup> century). "Wesley was not an advocate of sensationalism in preaching. But on one occasion, he interrupted his own sermon and shouted, 'Lord, is Saul also among the prophets? Is James Watson here? If he be, show Thy power!' And James Watson dropped to the floor and began to cry loudly for God's mercy!" (Warren Wiersbe, *Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching and Preachers*, Moody Press 1984, p. 247)
- I. Charles Spurgeon (19<sup>th</sup> century). "At a Monday evening prayer meeting, Charles Spurgeon suddenly interrupted his sermon, pointed in a certain direction, and said, 'Young man, those gloves you are wearing have not been paid for; you have stolen them from your employer!' After the meeting a young man came to the vestry and begged to see Spurgeon. Pale and trembling, the young man confessed that he had stolen the gloves he was wearing! He promised never to steal again and begged Spurgeon not to expose him to his employer." (W. Wiersbe, *Ibid.*, p. 219)
- J. Barton W. Stone (19<sup>th</sup> century). "That time [when 'the perfect' of 1 Corinthians 13] has never yet come; nor can we expect it in this state of mortality" (*Christian Messenger*, August 1835, page 179).
- K. Modern (20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries). Examples abound. See books by Charles Hummel, Jack Deere, *Against the Tide* (biography of Watchman Nee), regular news reports of Wycliffe Bible Translators, Gospel for Asia, numerous others.

## *For further study*

**PRIMARY SOURCE:** The Holy Bible.

**SECONDARY SOURCES:**

Cullmann, Oscar, *Christ and Time* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). SCM Press Ltd.: London, 1967.

Deere, Jack. *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*. Zondervan Publishing: Grand Rapids, Mich., 1993.

Deere, Jack. *Surprised by the Voice of God*. Zondervan Publishing: Grand Rapids, Mich., 1996.

Fudge, Edward William, *The Sound of His Voice: Discovering the Secrets of God's Guidance* (Enlarged reprint of *Beyond the Sacred Page*). Leafwood Press, 2002.

Grudem, Wayne. *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. Crossway Books: Wheaton, Ill., 2000.

Harper, Michael C. *Prophecy: A Gift for the Body of Christ*. Green & Co.: Lowestoft, England, 1964.

Hummel, Charles E. *Fire in the Fireplace: Charismatic Renewal in the Nineties*. InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, Ill., 1993.

Kydd, Ronald A. N., *Charismatic Gifts in the Early Church*. Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody Mass., 1984.

Smith, Chuck. *Charisma vs. Charismania*. Harvest House Publishers: Eugene, Ore., 1983.

Swete, Henry Barclay. *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church*. Reprinted by Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, Mich., 1966.

Swete, Henry Barclay. *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*. Reprinted by Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, Mich., 1964.

White, John. *When the Spirit Comes With Power: Signs & Wonders Among God's People*. InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, Ill., 1988.