

**A Response to Piet Visser's
Revival Fellowship Europe Editorial: the gifts of the Spirit Editorial
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I was provided with a copy of the *Revival Fellowship Europe* monthly magazine for January 2009, and I was asked to comment (specifically) on the editorial prepared by pastor Piet Visser on the gifts of the Spirit that appeared therein. What Ps Visser presented doesn't stray from the standard Revivalist apologetic on the subject of "spiritual gifts", and as such was particularly simple to refute. I offer the following commentary as an informed corrective, one that conclusively demonstrates the *false* perspective that is currently promoted within the RF on the subject.

Ps Visser's article is presented, in full, in ***bolded italics***. My own commentary is appears beneath each section.

The Gifts of the Spirit

Our new life starts with Joh 3 / Joh 14 / Acts 1 en 2 / Joh 4. It is complete once we have received the Holy Spirit with... (Rom 8:9 etc) Together with all this we get a number of gifts (1Cor12). When we start using these gifts we will begin to display the (different aspects of the) fruit of this Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).

To begin with I believe it important to point out that Scripture assures us that the Christian life commences at the point when one places his or her faith in Jesus Christ, as a result of having believed the gospel (see, for example, Mark 1:15; John 1:12, 3:16, 5:24, 6:40, 14:1; Acts 10:43, 16:30 and 31; Romans 9:33, 10:4, 9, *etc*). But the first point which I would like to address is the *specific* claim made by Ps Visser that the various 'fruit' of the Spirit identified in Galatians 5 would become *evident* when people start to exercise the 'gifts' of the Spirit as outlined in 1 Corinthians 12. When we review Galatians 5 first-hand; however, we discover that the extended passage provides *no linkage whatsoever* to the notion that maturing spiritual 'fruit' are somehow dependant upon the exercise of the so-called 1 Corinthians 12 spiritual 'gifts'. To the contrary, the entire fifth chapter of Galatians deals with the "law of Christ"; the requirement to **love** others above ourselves. And it does this by contrasting the "works of the flesh" with the "fruit of the Spirit". The passage says *nothing* about supposed spiritual gifting, but *much* about the outworking of Christian ethics. In point of fact if there is *any* linkage at all between Galatians 5 and 1 Corinthians 12, it is to be found in the fact that Paul had to

correct certain of the Corinthian believers, those who were ‘super-abundant’ when it came to ‘spiritual gifts’, by pointing out *that love for others* was far more important than any complex of spiritual manifestations! As the situation in Corinth demonstrated very clearly, the exercising of spiritual gifts *did not* automatically lead to the displaying of the ‘fruit’ of the Spirit! Quite the *opposite*, in fact, seems to have been the case.

Let’s have a look at the gifts of the Spirit. There is a lot of confusion around regarding this subject, even to the misuse of some passages to discredit speaking in tongues. What is this passage of scripture getting at?

1Cor 12:1

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Obviously there was already confusion at the time of Paul about spiritual things (the word “gifts” is not in the original Greek). Verses 4-6 speak of the diversities, but the same God.

There certainly *is* considerable confusion regarding the nature, purpose and place of spiritual gifts in the Christian church, most often directly resulting from tendentious and idiosyncratic interpretations of what Paul sought to teach in 1 Corinthians. I am confident that I will clearly demonstrate that such is equally the case when it comes to the Revival Fellowship’s position on the matter.

Verse 7

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given A manifestation is something which can be seen by anybody who cares to look. A procession you can see go by on the street, is a manifestation. It has a beginning and an end and gives the onlookers an impression, a message.

The specific Greek term translated ‘manifestation of the Spirit’ in verse seven is the objective genitive phrase ἡ φανέρωσις τοῦ πνεύματος, and properly means “a public proclamation of the Spirit”, or “the operation which manifests the Spirit publicly”. Important for us to understand is that the emphasis is *not* on the ‘manifestation’ itself, per Ps Visser, but on its *public* nature. And the concept of such a manifestation being ‘public’ went beyond its simple outward appearance; it incorporated the fact of the ‘manifestation’ being a *corporate* reality.

Verses 8-10

Mentions a number of aspects of this manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit in the church.

There is wisdom evident, knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation. There are, mainly Pentecostal groups, who spend a lot of time

convincing people to search out which gift they have personally. Even we might sometimes hear the words: “This person has a marvellous healing ministry”. This is misleading, it is not that some people have one or two of these gifts and others might have one or two other ones. For example, one might say: “I have the gift of faith and you have the gift of tongues”, or some other combinations. Again, this is not what it says here.

This whole passage starts in verse 7 with: “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given” When people come to a meeting they are surrounded by the manifestations of the Spirit. They see in action: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation. This all works in the Body of Christ!

Given his opening statement it's quite clear that Ps Visser neither reads nor understands biblical Greek, himself. As he pointed out a little earlier in his editorial, one or other of the various Greek words for 'gift' is absent from our verse. The word which *is* present; however, points more towards the 'public manifestation' of the Spirit's impartations than it does to the impartations themselves. But in spite of this, Ps Visser curiously **conflates** the two distinct concepts into the one, "...*this manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit*". One must question why he has elected to do so. Next, Piet Visser renders what the Greek clearly calls "**words** of wisdom" and "**words** of knowledge" into just 'wisdom' and 'knowledge'. Λόγος σοφίας and λόγος γνώσεως implies a supernatural impartation of *very specific* 'wisdom' and 'knowledge'—the source being the Spirit himself—insights from the mind of the Spirit which are then to be expressed *verbally* to the congregation. They are, therefore, time-bound oracular pronouncements which seek to address *specific* situations as the Spirit directs. Consequently such cannot be limited as Ps Visser has sought to do into simply the 'wisdom' and 'knowledge' which is accrued via the passage of time and/or Bible study.

The manifestation of 'faith' (πίστις) that Paul had in mind in our passage also has its origin in the person of the Spirit, hence the fact of it being ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ πνεύματι. Consequently, this particular form of 'faith' is to be contrasted with the expression that is the continuing grace of each and every believer. Importantly our more specific 'faith' is also a time-bound occurrence, one which is provided to a particular Christian or Christians in order to accomplish a particular outcome or outcomes according to the will of God, the Spirit.

The subsequent two 'manifestations' are somewhat unique among the list, a fact clearly missed by Ps Visser, in that they consist of double plurals. We are first confronted by 'gifts' of 'healings' (χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων), and then by 'workings' of 'miracles' (ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων), both of which, yet again, are time-bound occurrences that

have their sources in the will of the Spirit in order to accomplish particular outcomes within the life of the Christian congregation.

Leaving aside the manifestation of ‘prophecy’ we will briefly consider what Ps Visser has labeled ‘discernment’, but which Paul specifically called “discerning/assessing the spirits” (διακρίσεις πνευμάτων). That ‘spirit’ appears in the plural form indicates that what is being ‘discerned’, or ‘judged’, or ‘assessed’ are outward manifestations that derive from spiritual *beings*. That the actual source of the ‘manifestation’ requires assessing indicates the potentiality for **deception** occurring within the congregation itself. In other words, the source of ‘spiritual’ manifestations shouldn’t automatically, or naively, be assumed to be always from God. I would strongly encourage members of the Revival Fellowship to reflect on the implications of this fact in their own corporate experience.

Finally, what are we to understand by the manifestations of ‘different species of tongues’ (ἑτέρω γένη γλωσσῶν) and the ‘interpretation of tongues’ (ἑρμηνεία γλωσσῶν)? We might begin by noting that these form a pair of ‘linked’ manifestations, the conjunction δὲ making this plain. In other words it is anticipated that the person who exercises the first ‘gift’ then immediately moves on to exercise the second, or complementary ‘gift’ (see 1 Corinthians 14:13). Next, Paul identifies that the source of the ‘tongue’ is the person’s *own* spirit and **not** the Holy Spirit ‘speaking’ through him or her (see 1 Corinthians 14:14). The practical outworking of this is such that the ‘tongue’ itself is communication *from* the person *to* God (i.e. Paul’s ‘thanksgiving’), and as such so too must the ‘interpretation’ also conform to communication in this, an ‘upwards’ direction. Curiously, however, in the RF the reverse seems to be the case: the ‘tongue’ is assumed to be *from* the Holy Spirit, and the ‘interpretation’ is universally presented as being a ‘downwards’ message *from* God *to* the congregation! Clearly this thorough misunderstanding runs **directly at odds** with what Paul presents in our passage! I suppose it would be best to let you, the reader, ponder the obvious implications of this very clear Revivalist error in your corporate practice. Perhaps your assemblies don’t operate as ‘decently’ and ‘in order’ as you would first presume?

Piet Visser went on to assure his RF readers, via inference, that among all those who claim to be ‘Spirit-Filled’ only the Revivalists have *properly* understood in that *all* the gifts are available to *all* ‘true’ Christians. That he would seek to do so causes me to question whether or not he has ever read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31! But more on this shortly.

Verse 11

But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. Some translations have the word “he” with a capital letter, suggesting that God gives individuals their personal gift(s). This is not correct, everyone can choose to use these gifts as he wants!

Unfortunately for Piet Visser the Greek text states the *complete opposite* to what he would seek to defend! Verse 11 in Greek reads: πάντα δὲ ταῦτα ἐνεργεῖ τὸ ἐν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα διαιροῦν ἰδίᾳ ἐκάστῳ καθὼς βούλεται. The reason why ‘some’ English translations capitalize “he” (and *all* English translations make it plain that the ‘he’ is a reference to the Spirit) has to do with issues of grammar. Whilst one might be able to ‘reinterpret’ the *English* first person pronoun in the passage as a reference to the “every man” mentioned, and then due to the inherent ambiguity of the pronoun itself and the nature of English syntax, thereby presenting the impression that *each person* exercises whatever gifts *s/he* chooses to exercise; one simply *cannot* do this with the Greek text! In Greek each and every word is inflected according to its particular use within a particular clause. Consequently, individual referents can *always* be traced and identified due to inherent morphological characteristics which *don’t* change despite word-order. Therefore in verse 11 we note that it is the Holy Spirit who apportions the ‘gifts’ to “every man”, and then as the Holy Spirit, himself, wills! The logical conclusion that results is this: if the Spirit decides *not* to provide a certain person with a certain gift (say, ‘tongues’), then there is *nothing* that the person can do about it! Again we discover that the teaching of the Revival Fellowship is ***directly at odds*** with what the passage very clearly presents as being the case according to Paul’s Greek pen! Again, I think it best to let you, the reader, ponder the obvious implications of this ongoing Revivalist error.

Misleading use of some of these passages:

Verse 8, knowledge. This is not some mysterious knowledge of each other but knowledge of God and his plan and purpose for mankind. John 14:16 promised this knowledge through the receiving of the Holy Spirit.

Actually, John doesn’t promise the Spirit’s manifestation of ‘**word** of knowledge’ at all.

Verse 9, gift of healings. This is not a special gift given to some “healer”, but is something we can all receive. The “gift” is for the receiver, not some puffed up, human, “giver”.

The assertion is incorrect, and isn’t based on what the biblical text states, but on the idiosyncratic Revivalist ‘experience’. Interestingly, there are a number of ‘mainline’ Protestant denominations (such as the Anglican Church, for example) which experiences

a far higher rate of supernatural healings than is the norm within the various Revivalist groups.

Next, in verses 12-24 this passage goes on about the Body and how it functions. Sometimes we see “unhappy body parts”. Instead of being delighted that they are part of the Body, we sometimes see people who don’t agree with the way the oversight sees them. They might be seen to be an ear but they themselves think that they are an eye. The result of this is an ear which cannot hear properly. Or maybe they are obviously a nose but they think they are a foot. The result could well be a “drippy” nose which has no sense of smell anymore. Mostly, if this is not solved, it creates schisms, see verse 25.

Verses 12 through 24 have *nothing* to do with how the ‘oversight’ perceives a person, but *everything* to do with the fact that God (the Spirit) apportions and ‘gifts’ each and every believer so that s/he functions in a specific way (i.e. as an ‘eye’, ‘ear’ or ‘nose’) within the complete ‘body’ that is the Church. Paul’s use of the ‘body’ analogy itself *clearly* demonstrates the diversity of ‘gifting’ that leads to the ‘unity’ of ‘whole-of-body-life’. Piet Visser must necessarily ‘twist’ Paul’s analogy in an effort to allow for ‘eyes’ also being ‘ears’, and ‘hands’ also being ‘feet’.

Back to the subject. This next passage creates the most confusion, mainly because the translators put in some extra words. Let’s have a good look.

27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. 28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? 30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

In the verses 29-30 the words “are” “have” and “do” are added, necessitating the adding of a question mark at the end of each mentioned aspect. In the original transcripts this is not a number of questions but a number of statements.

It should read: “In the Church there are apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues, all apostles, all prophets, all teachers, all workers of miracles, all (have) the gifts of healing, all speak with tongues, all interpret”.

Yet again Piet Visser clearly demonstrated that he not only doesn’t understand biblical *Greek*, but that he is also profoundly ignorant when it comes to the issue of *linguistics* in a more general sense. Put simply, languages *don’t* enjoy a ‘one-to-one’ verbal correspondence, not even within related groups of languages such as English and French, for example. In other words, the way an English sentence is structured is *not* the way that

a Greek sentence, or a Hebrew sentence, or a Swahili sentence is structured. Syntax differs, morphology differs, and individual vocables also differ. Consequently, when Bible translators render English equivalents to the underpinning Greek texts, they must do so in ways that *accurately transfers* the meanings of those *original* Greek texts.

In the King James Version of verses 27 through 30 (in common with *all* English and other language translations since), the questions themselves are phrased in order to elicit negative answers: “Are *all* apostles? **No!** Are *all* prophets? **No!** Are *all* teachers? **No!** Are *all* workers of miracles? **No!** Have *all* the gifts of healing? **No!** Do *all* speak with tongues? **No!** Do *all* interpret? **No!**”

The reason for this **universal** translation practice has to do with the fact that *each* and *every* question in the original Greek text is prefaced by the standard Greek particle of negation: **μή** πάντες ἀπόστολοι; **μή** πάντες προφήται; **μή** πάντες διδάσκαλοι; **μή** πάντες δυνάμεις; **μή** πάντες χαρίσματα ἔχουσιν ἰαμάτων; **μή** πάντες γλώσσαις λαλοῦσιν; **μή** πάντες διερμηνεύουσιν. Put most simply, *any* question that is prefaced with the Greek particle of negation **μή** *must* induce a negative answer! Contrary to Ps Visser’s naïve statement that ‘extra’ words have been added in order to ‘change’ the meaning from ‘black’ to ‘white’, the text says what it says. Not all are apostles! Not all are prophets! Not all are teachers! Not all work miracles! Not all have the gifts of healings! *Not all speak in tongues!* And not all interpret tongues!

The whole of the passage is a description of the great manifestation of the Spirit working in the body of Christ. The last puzzle: verse 31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way. Does this mean that some gifts are not important, like some would suggest?

In the Greek interlinear Bible it is like this: “Be emulous of but the gifts, better ” So, we have to be increasing (better) our being emulous(!) It is not talking about better or lesser gifts, it is talking about our “striving” to get better use out of what God has made available for us.

Summing up: The whole of 1Cor. 12 tells us about what God has made available for us, his church, Spirit filled people. What we see here is that all these gifts are available for everyone of us. It is not so that for a complete “body” there need to be nine people present, each with a different gift, or three, each with three different gifts. All nine of these gifts are potentially present in each of us, we just need to become “better” at using them. 1Co 1:7 So that ye come behind in no gift; (while) waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:

I teach biblical Greek to university students. A student with as little as *three* months experience learning the Greek language would be perfectly capable of thoroughly refuting the absolute nonsense that Piet Visser has presented as if it were ‘fact’ in his editorial on the subject of ‘spiritual gifts’. Ps Visser clearly lacks the personal familiarity necessary to be attempting to make sweeping judgments concerning what the Greek text of 1 Corinthians 12 does, or does *not* state, and then in spite of his owning a Greek interlinear! That not a single English translation supports his opinions should be sufficient for his views to be *dismissed* out-of-hand! That Ps Visser has sought to present ‘black’ as if it was ‘white’ should give his readers cause for concern: the Bible has much to say about those who *wrest* Scripture and who misrepresent its teachings to others!

In summary, there isn’t a *single* redeeming feature in the entire editorial on the subject of ‘spiritual gifts’; Ps Visser has ‘*mis-translated*’, ‘*mis-interpreted*’ and ‘*mis-construed*’ absolutely each and every point that he has considered. The implications, then, are plain. Ps Piet Visser is a *false* teacher who has sought to create support for a *false* doctrine and in doing so has thoroughly *wrested* Scripture to his (eventual) destruction.