

A Look at 1 Corinthians 12-14

1 CORINTHIANS 12

1 Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.

12:1. spiritual *gifts*. The spiritual gifts are enumerated in Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, and 1 Corinthians 12:28.

2 Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.

3 Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and *that* no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another *divers* kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

12:10. *divers* kinds of tongues. The phrase “diversity of tongues” (KJV) or “different kinds of tongues” (NIV) effectively eliminates the idea of a “personal prayer language” as a spiritual gift. On the Day of Pentecost, the many languages represented in Jerusalem were understood. *Acts 2:8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?*

11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also *is* Christ.

13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

12:13. one Spirit. Prior to His departure from the earth, the Lord Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to await, "*the promise of the Father,*" a reference to God the Holy Spirit. *Acts 1:5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.* The coming of the Spirit would be for the purpose of comfort (John 16:7), teaching and prompting (John 14:26), and guide (John 16:13). Since the Day of Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit in fullness, every new believer is baptized into Christ at the moment of salvation. The word BAPTIZO means "to identify." This is a passive work on behalf of the believer by the Spirit. It is a perfect work of God.

14 For the body is not one member, but many.

15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

17 If the whole body *were* an eye, where *were* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *were* the smelling?

18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

19 And if they were all one member, where *were* the body?

20 But now *are they* many members, yet but one body.

21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

23 And those *members* of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely *parts* have more abundant comeliness.

24 For our comely *parts* have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that *part* which lacked:

25 That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another.

26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

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.

12:28. Several spiritual gifts are listed categorically as leadership gifts (apostles, prophets, teachers), spectacular gifts (miracles, healings), and administration gifts (helps, governments), and finally, a sign gift (tongues as per Isaiah 28:11). The gift listed last in Paul's particular order is the sign gift of tongues. Many in the Corinth church were elevating tongues to a primary gift, but they were wrong to do that. While it is true that every spiritual gift is important, like every member of the human body is important, honor is bestowed upon some more than others. When a spiritual gift is exalted beyond what is warranted, then that is of the flesh.

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?

31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

1 CORINTHIANS 13

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

13:1. of angels. This verse indicates there is an angelic language as well as human languages. Those who had the gift of tongues were able, on occasion, to speak this angelic language. By referring to the angels, the church is reminded that angels are interested in the affairs of men and in the affairs of men the angels are taught. Through the church and to the angles the wisdom of God is made manifest. *Ephesians 3:10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.* As angels look at the church, they are interested in the grace of God and the preaching of the gospel. *1 Peter 1:12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.* As interesting as that is, Paul makes the point that the ability to speak with the language of men, or with the language of angels, is without meaning if there is no love.

13:1. sounding brass. The *chalkos* of the ancient world consisted of two pieces of metal, an alloy of copper and tin, which a peddler would bang together to attract attention to his wares.

13:1. Tinkling cymbal. The tinkling *kumbalun* was a hallowed brass instrument that amplified sound. It was used by professional funeral mourners to make meaningless sounds emulating sorrow. These are fitting symbols of the believer who selfishly speaks in tongues, thereby calling attention to himself rather than glorifying God, or edifying His people.

2 And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

13:2. In addition to speaking gifts, there were communication gifts, such as prophecy; perception gifts, such as the ability to understand gospel mysteries; revelatory gifts, such as the gift of knowledge; and operational gifts, such as the gift of faith. However, without love, all of these sensational gifts were nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

4 Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Three Temporary Gifts

8 Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away.

13:8. Three spiritual gifts are said to be temporary: prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. The word translated “they shall fail” is *katargethesetai*, and means “to be (render) entirely idle (useless), literally or figuratively. The word for “cease” is *pauo*, which means “to stop, i.e., retrain, quit, desist, come to an end. The word translated “it shall vanish away” is, again, *katargethesetai* and means, “to be rendered entirely idle (useless)”. These three gifts were to cease, “when that which is perfect is come.” Today, there is no need for prophecy, for the next event on the prophetic calendar is the return of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:11; Hebrews 9:28) followed by a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Peter 3:13). There is no need for tongues for the gospel has gone into all the world (Colossians 1:6). There is no need for specialized knowledge, for all Bible doctrine is now found in a completed canon of Scripture (Revelation 22:18-19).

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

13:10. that which is perfect. The word “perfect” (*teleios*) is explained by the apostle James who wrote his epistle prior to Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth. *James 1:25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.* By AD 70 and the fall of Jerusalem, these three gifts ceased to function in the early church because “that which is perfect” had come, the completed canon of Scripture. Anticipating the abuses that would come from speaking in tongues in particular, God the Holy Spirit was wise to oversee its cessation.

The Evil of the Tongues Movement

- Speaking in tongues has caused much strife and division within the local church.
- Speaking in tongues has fostered spiritual inferiority and superiority.
- Speaking in tongues feeds on emotions.
- Speaking in tongues perverts the grace of God.
- Speaking in tongues obscures the presentation of the pure gospel.
- Speaking in tongues hinders a believer from growing in grace and knowledge of Christ.

- Speaking in tongues distorts important passages of Scripture such as Romans 8:26 which says “the Spirit itself maketh intercession FOR [*not through*] us with moanings which cannot be uttered”. On what basis then are the moanings and utterances of those who speak in tongues said to be Spirit directed?
- Speaking in tongues, as practiced today, provides an entry into the world of the cult, and the occult, as the mind is suspended. Brigham Young spoke in tongues while saying a prayer, and Joseph Smith interpreted it saying Young was speaking the Adamic Language, the language of Adam. Those in the occult speak in tongues reflected in the lifestyle and dances of American Indians. Tongues are spoken by those in the Voodoo religion in Haiti.
- Speaking in tongues, as practiced today, is often a learned behavior. Singing pop star Katy Perry said, “Speaking in tongues is as normal to me as ‘Pass the salt’. My dad speaks in tongues and my mom interprets it. That’s their gift.” Miss Perry says she used to take part in glossolalia sessions—the muttering of speech-like syllables as a form of religious expression—from the age of eight.
- Speaking in tongues leads to a rejection of empirical Bible doctrine in favor of experience, rationalism, sensationalism, and emotionalism with an inordinate desire for an ecstatic experience. Paul faced the problem of emotionalism with the Corinthians. *2 Corinthians 6:11 O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. 12 Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels [emotional patterns].*

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity.

1 CORINTHIANS 14

1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but rather that ye may prophesy.

2 For he that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth *him*; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.

14:2. an *unknown* tongue. The word "*unknown*", used 11 times in this chapter, is in italics which means it is a word inserted by the translators. It should not have been inserted. The word for "*tongue*" is *glossa* and means language. There is no such thing as an *unknown* tongue. The miracle of the gift of tongues lay in the fact that those who had not known or studied a particular language were suddenly able to speak it in order to communicate the gospel.

Acts 2:5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. 6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. 7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? 8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? 9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, 10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

Tongues were given, not for ecstatic utterances, not for personal edification, not for personal pleasure, not to show off, but to speak in the language of the people about the wonderful works of God. As Isaiah had predicted, this was a warning sign to alert the Jews that God had placed them under judgment. *Isaiah 28:11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.*

With the purpose of tongues in mind, notice that Paul brings out a practical problem to consider. When the gift of tongues, or speaking in a language not previous learned, did not have an appropriate audience, then the result was negative. The person with the gift of tongues was not speaking unto men, but only unto God who knows all languages. And while that is not wrong, the person spiritually gifted with tongues was speaking mysteries to his human audience. Therefore, why speak in tongues, why speak in a foreign language that only God can understand? Why not prophesy and edify the congregation?

3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men *to* edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

4 He that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.

14:4. edifieth himself. Self-edification takes place when a spiritual gift, such as tongues, is used with animation and ecstatic emphasis, but to no avail for the congregation present because they do not know the language being spoken. Because Paul himself had been the recipient of the gift of tongues, he could understand the excited aspirations of others to want to be able to conduct evangelistic services in a language not previously studied. A person could learn as they spoke, but again, what good was that if the present audience did not understand what was being said?

5 I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater *is* he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

6 Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?

14:6. profit. There is no profit for a person to speak in a tongue, or language, that no one in the audience understands, even if the utterance is full of emotion with sound and fury. There is profit for the people of God in understanding. Therefore, the communicator in a church service must give to the people a coherent revelation, a word of knowledge, a word of prophecy, or a doctrine.

The Limitation of Tongues The First Illustration is Drawn from Music

7 And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?

14:7. pipe or harp. The pipe refers to a reed instrument, while the harp refers to a stringed instrument. Musical instruments are designed to produce beautiful melodies, not dissonance. In like manner, God the Holy Spirit gave the spiritual gift of tongues in order to disseminate the gospel, not so that individuals can engage in a cacophony of jumbled confusing sounds.

The Second Illustration is Drawn from the Military

8 For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?

14:8. Battle. In the ancient world, the sound of the trumpet communicated the commands of the military officer to the troops. A certain, or clean and precise, sound was needed for understanding. Without a clear sound, disaster would result, for the troops would not know to advance, retreat, or hold their position.

9 So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? For ye shall speak into the air.

14:9. by the tongue. Like the trumpet in battle, the tongue is the instrument of speech. Words uttered should be easy to understand, or else the person speaks only into the air. Those who practice speaking in tongues so that nothing is understood, and no one knows what is spoken, speak into the air, to their eternal shame.

The Third Illustration is Drawn from Philology

10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them *is* without signification.

14:10. many kinds of voices. The reference is to the many kinds of languages. There are an estimated 6,700 recognized languages in the world. Most of them are spoken by fewer than 1,000 people. None of them is without significance which is to say that none of them is without the faculty of communication.

11 Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh *shall be* a barbarian unto me.

14:11. barbarian. In historical context a barbarian was an outlander, a foreigner, someone who could not speak Greek or Latin. This was a term of derision.

12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue pray that he may interpret.

14 For if I pray in an *unknown* tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.

15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

16 Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?

17 For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.

18 I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:

14:18. Paul spoke many tongues or languages. He spoke Greek, Hebrew, Latin and Aramaic. He might have spoken other languages too and yet he does not glory in this ability, natural and supernatural, nor does he demand that others speak in tongues. He de-emphasizes its importance.

19 Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that *by my voice* I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an *unknown* tongue.

14:19. understanding. The church is the place for doctrinal teaching to take place. Therefore, there must be understanding. The mind must be used.

20 Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

21 In the law it is written, With *men of* other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.

14:21. it is written. The apostle Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah to make the theological argument that the manifestation of Gentiles preaching the gospel, is a sign of God's divine judgment upon the nation Israel. *Isaiah 28:11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.* Unbelieving Jews refused to believe that God would use the harsh sounding language of the Gentiles, which included Aramaic, Chaldean, Latin, and Greek, to replace the poetic Hebrew language in disseminating the gospel.

22 Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying *serveth* not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.

14:22. tongues are for a sign. Paul taught that the ability of Gentiles to proclaim the gospel was a sign of divine discipline upon Israel, and signaled the approaching military judgment that would finally take place in AD 70 with the fall of Jerusalem by Roman forces. The judgment that Isaiah warned would happen to the Jews in the southern kingdom of Judah, at the hands of the Babylonians (in 586 BC), became a sign to another generation of similar judgment. The Jews that did not believe the gospel could remember the sign given by the prophet Isaiah. Meanwhile, the church could enjoy and benefit by the spiritual gift of prophesying or telling forth the good things of God.

The Fourth Illustration is a Church with Only One Gift: Tongues

23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those that are* unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?

14:23. Paul is concerned that when the church meets for worship, there be structure and order lest people accuse Christians of being mad. Therefore, divine regulations are placed on the use of spiritual gifts, especially the gifts of tongues and prophecy.

24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or *one* unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all:

25 And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on *his* face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

26 How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

Regulation of Speaking in Tongues

27 If any man speak in an *unknown* tongue, *let it be* by two, or at the most *by* three, and *that* by course; and let one interpret.

14:27.

Rule 1. Only two, and at the most three, people are to speak in tongues or a foreign language in a service.

Rule 2. Those who speak in tongues, or a foreign language, must do so in an orderly manner and not all at once.

Rule 3. If a person is to speak in a tongue, or foreign language, someone else must be present to interpret.

28 But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.

14:28.

Rule 4. If there is no one to interpret the person speaking in tongues, which refers to a foreign language not previously known, then that person must keep silent in the church. Permission is granted to speak to himself and to God, who is omniscient and understands every tongue.

Special Note.

A person who speaks in tongues, meaning a language, may “speak” to himself and to God for this is authorized. The problem is that people engage in ecstatic utterances that cannot be said to

be “speech”, either in self-talk or in prayer. The noise that is being made is not “speech” but guttural sounds, much like that of an infant or an animal. Nowhere in Scripture is such noise authorized. In fact, such sounds are associated with the occult. *Isaiah 8:19 And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? For the living to the dead?*

29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

14:28.

Rule 5. A judgment is to be made on the exercising of spiritual gifts. A person who is willful, unruly, or indecent must be stopped from being an exhibitionist. Surely the apostle would never have tolerated a laughing revival, being slain in the spirit, or barking like a dog.

30 If *any thing* be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.

14:30.

Rule 6. Humility is to be present, and preferring others before self.

31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.

14:31.

Rule 7. A common purpose must be maintained by all, and that is for the church to learn and to be comforted. Selfish verbal expressions in public, manifested in gibberish, and then ascribed to be a heavenly language, does not help the church to learn, nor is anyone comforted by such an unruly display of behavior.

32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

14:32.

Rule 8. A person who speaks in tongues must be able to control their behavior just like those who prophesy. The reason for self-control is this: God is not the *author* of confusion and unseemly behavior. The idea that speaking in tongues is an experience that overwhelms a person so the individual has no control over the experience, is contrary to sound doctrine, and bonified Christian experience.

33 For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

14:34.

Rule 9. Women are not to speak in tongues in the churches. They are to keep silent.

35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

36 What? Came the word of God out from you? Or came it unto you only?

37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

14:37.

Rule 10. Let those who speak in tongues, and those who prophesy submit to the apostolic regulations, and so be obedient to the commandments of the Lord.

38 But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.

14:38. Five functions were authorized in the worship service: psalms, the singing of hymns; doctrine, the teaching of the Word of God; tongues, as a means of evangelizing the lost; revelation, the exercising of the gift of prophecy in order to clarify the will of God, and; interpretation, the ability to interpret, or translate the foreign languages spoken. If a person violated the use and regulation of these gifts, and still thought himself spiritual, then there was only one recourse left, "let him be ignorant."

39 Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.

40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

14:40.

Rule 11. Everything, including speaking in tongues and prophesying, is to be done in a decent and orderly manner. Chaos and openness is not to characterize the worship service.